

Europeanising European Public Spheres



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Abstract

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO Committee, provides a brief overview of the academic debates on Europeanisation as well as contestation and politicisation of the EU and European integration. Against this background, it focuses on the European public sphere(s), in particular those based on the media and parliaments. The study further discusses current reform proposals aiming to Europeanise the European elections and concludes with recommendations on increasing the legitimacy of the European Union.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
LIST OF TABLES	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
Introduction	7
Europeanisation, Politicisation and Democratic Legitimacy	7
The European Public Sphere(s)	8
Europeanisation of the European Elections?	9
The Spitzenkandidaten Process and the Introduction of Transnational Lists	9
Recommendations (Selection)	11
1. INTRODUCTION	13
2. THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEANISATION	17
2.1. The Problem of Defining Europeanisation	17
2.2. Vertical Mechanisms of Europeanisation	19
2.2.1. Goodness of Fit	20
2.2.2. Political Opportunity Structure and Regulatory Competition	20
2.3. Horizontal Mechanisms and Soft Framing	21
2.4. Europeanisation of Politics – A Politicisation of the EU?	22
2.4.1. Europeanisation as Growing Saliency and Contestation	22
2.4.2. Europeanisation and Politicisation	27
3. THE (EUROPEAN) PUBLIC SPHERE	31
3.1. What Is the Public Sphere?	31
3.2. Who Ought to Participate in the Public Sphere?	32
3.2.1. Liberal Representative Democracy	32
3.2.2. Participatory Democracy	34
3.2.3. Deliberative /Discursive democracy	35
3.2.4. Functions of the Public Sphere	36
3.3. Is There a European Public Sphere?	37
3.4. The Media as Infrastructure and Embodiment of the (European) Public Sphere	38
3.4.1. (Pan-)European Media	39
3.4.2. Europeanisation of National Media	41
3.4.3. A Spiral of Euroscepticism? The Impact of Europeanised Media Coverage	44
3.4.4. Europeanised Media Coverage of the Covid-19 Pandemic	47

3.5.	Parliaments as Europeanised Public Spheres	49
3.6.	Relationship Between Strong and Weak Publics: Media Coverage of Parliaments in EU Affairs	53
3.6.1.	National Parliaments In The Media	54
3.6.2.	News Coverage of the European Parliament	55
3.6.3.	Interparliamentary Cooperation in the Media	58
3.7.	The cultural European public sphere	59
4.	EUROPEANISATION OF THE EP ELECTORAL PROCESS – FROM SECOND- TO FIRST-ORDER ELECTIONS?	61
4.1.	The Established Wisdom: Second-Order Elections	61
4.2.	Bringing Europe Back In: EU Issue Voting	64
4.3.	Party Signals and European Election Manifestos	68
5.	THE EP ELECTION 2019: EUROPEANISED CAMPAIGNS?	71
5.1.	Parliament Proposals on Electoral Reform	71
5.2.	Implementation of Parliament Proposals within the Member States	73
5.2.1.	Ballot papers	74
5.2.2.	Visibility of the European Parties on Campaign Material	79
5.3.	Finally a European Election?	81
5.4.	The 2019 Campaign in the Media	84
5.5.	#EP2019 - A Campaign fought on Social Media	88
6.	RISE AND FALL OF THE SPITZENKANDIDATEN	95
6.1.	Dimensions of Evaluation	96
6.1.1.	Effects on Voter Turnout	96
6.1.2.	Personalisation of European Elections	98
6.1.3.	Strengthening the Electoral Connection	101
6.1.4.	Europeanisation of EP Campaigns and Politics	101
6.2.	The Fall of the Spitzenkandidaten in 2019	102
7.	EUROPEANISING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S ELECTIONS THROUGH TRANS-NATIONAL LISTS?	106
7.1.	Electoral Engineering and the Construction of Party Lists	106
7.2.	A Failed Attempt	109
7.3.	Open Lists and the Intra-Party Dimension	110
8.	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	112
	REFERENCES	121

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRE	Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
COSAC	Conférence des Organes Parlementaires Spécialisés dans les Affaires de l'Union des Parlements de l'Union Européenne
CWP	Commission (annual) Work Programme
EC	European Community
EP	European Parliament
EPP	(Group of the) European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
ESM	Early Warning Mechanism
ESS	European Election Study
EU	European Union
Greens/EFA	The Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	European United Left - Nordic Green Left
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
PES	Party of European Socialists
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
SOE	Second-Order-Election
TEU	Treaty of the European Union

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The European Political Space	65
Figure 2 Relative Shares of Campaign Messages According to the Main Dimension by Member State	82
Figure 3: Party with largest number of campaign posts on Facebook per member state	89
Figure 4: Sources for Political News	92
Figure 5: Share of respondents using Facebook as a source for political news 2018/19	93
Figure 6: Party with most user engagement on Facebook in each member state	94
Figure 7: Turnout at EP Elections 1979 - 2019	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Comparison Findings on Legal Provisions re. European Party Names and/or Logos on Ballot	76
Table 2: Parties on Whose Campaign Posters the European Party or EPG Logo Could Be Identified	80
Table 3: Top 25 National Parties in Terms of Amount Spent on Political Facebook Advertisements	90
Table 4: Correct Identification of <i>Spitzenkandidaten</i> Supporting European Parties	99

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For a long time, the European project drew its legitimacy from its capacity to solve problems effectively, and the process of integration was largely accompanied by what Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold termed the 'permissive consensus': despite earlier periods of increasing contestation, European integration was generally based on a broad consensus across the political mainstream on its desirability, and citizens permitted their political representatives to pursue this course without much interference.

Over time, however, the twin processes of increasing European integration and growing Europeanisation of the member states have gone hand in hand with a decrease in public support for the European Union (EU) and a growing politicisation of the integration project. The alleged consensus gave way to something that Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks labelled a "constraining dissensus": European integration has become a far more salient, controversial and contested issue, and political parties and issue entrepreneurs try to mobilise and exploit related concerns for their electoral benefit. The key diagnosis presented by eminent scholars such as Simon Hix was that EU politics had for decades pretended that 'real' politics did not exist in Brussels and thereby refused to address pivotal and salient political differences, political debates, and divergent political concepts within a wider and deeper Europe.

Against this background, the aim of the study is two-fold. The first aim is to provide an overview of the related academic debates on Europeanisation, the contestation and politicisation of the EU and EU integration as well as on the European public sphere. The second aim of the study is to present and discuss current reform proposals specifically aimed at a Europeanisation of the elections to the European Parliament (Parliament).

Europeanisation, Politicisation and Democratic Legitimacy

Within political science, Europeanisation is most frequently conceptualised as a top-down or horizontal process through which EU rules and procedures, but also norms, ideas and routines impact domestic institutions and policies. A second, very broad, field deals with Europeanisation from a different perspective, namely with the question of how the EU and European integration affect political culture, citizens' identities and political attitudes in terms of opposition and support. Here, recent debates focus on two related issues, namely growing contestation and politicisation of the EU. Both are intimately connected with the topic of the European public sphere, which, in turn, directly touches upon questions regarding the Europeanisation of mass media or parliamentary communication.

Growing contestation and politicisation are certainly to some extent due to a growing sense of political alienation among EU citizens. This is at least partly based on difficulties in understanding, let alone participating in, remote decision-making at the EU level, and a feeling of helplessness vis-à-vis far-reaching political decisions that affect their daily lives but that they have little voice in or vote on. Citizens are (more or less) familiar with political parties, political competition and government formation at the domestic level(s), while EU decision-making processes are highly complex and difficult to understand, European political parties and groups in Parliament are mostly unknown, elections do not have a recognisable effect on government formation and familiar left-right politics appear

displaced by technocratic decision-making. In other words, the EU lacks the familiar structures and institutions that provide input legitimacy.

For some commentators, politicisation has an inherently negative connotation, namely that the EU has failed to successfully isolate issues from public debate and contestation in order to achieve better policy outcomes. From this perspective, increasing politicisation of European integration constrains national leaders from agreeing on the compromises needed to solve urgent policy problems for fear of domestic backlash, especially as Eurosceptic parties and actors aim to mobilise national publics against the EU and further integration. Increasing successes of Eurosceptic parties, in turn, could lead to growing Euroscepticism within the EU institutions, hampering the EU decision-making process or, in the worst case, even threatening the EU itself.

Others, by contrast, welcome politicisation as a desirable development and have proposed a number of mechanisms aimed at injecting a healthy dose of politicisation by openly addressing political conflict in the EU and utilising ideological and political conflicts to increase the visibility, transparency, and legitimacy of policy-making at the EU level. Here, politicisation is supposed to insert elements of drama, and thus to increase public awareness and interest in EU politics with the aim of reinforcing the connection between the EU and its citizens.

The European Public Sphere(s)

Transparency, openness and politicisation are also intimately related to the notion of the European public sphere as an arena for EU-wide public discourse. The definition of and the functions ascribed to the public sphere differ according to the democratic theories they are based on, yet there is a basic consensus that it should, first, provide citizens with the necessary information to, second, enable them to scrutinise actions of political actors to hold them accountable, third, provide citizens and groups with the opportunity of discussing important political questions and making their voices heard by policy makers and, fourth, foster the development of a sense of belonging to a common (European) community.

Most commentators agree that a unified and truly European public sphere would require a common language, a shared identity and, most importantly, a common infrastructure, i.e. European media - and that neither of these vital elements are seen as fully present or likely to fully develop in the EU within the near future. As a result, the academic debate has turned to the notion of national, but Europeanised and connected, public spheres, and to national media and parliaments as two important arenas for public debate.

With regard to the media the literature presents a mixed picture. While we have undoubtedly witnessed a remarkable growth in European and transnational media over the last three decades, they continue to attract mainly elite audiences, while the reach among the broader European public remains very modest. At the same time, we do observe a growing Europeanisation of the national media. Important EU issues or events get fairly broad coverage, both in terms of vertical and, albeit limited, horizontal Europeanisation. Yet the specific media logic according to which 'the only good news are bad news' also often results in a focus on 'strategic reporting' and thus on personalised conflicts or battles between a small number of, mainly executive, political actors - even by media with a more pro-European editorial line. On the one hand, this commercial logic that favours sensationalism, a personalisation of politics as well as an emphasis on national interests to make EU politics more salient for the readers, can foster a politicisation of EU politics. On the other hand, it also increases the risk of a 'spiral of Euroscepticism' driven by both the supply and demand of negative news about the EU.

Parliament as well as the national parliaments, in turn, often struggle to draw the attention of the media despite their increased efforts to communicate EU issues to their citizens. The media report regularly, albeit selectively, on plenary debates on EU issues but, overall, parliamentary actors tend to play a minor role in EU news compared to executive domestic or EU actors. Indeed, Parliament even has to compete with national parliaments for media attention, and often finds itself on the losing side. Recognisability seems to play an important role here. Outside of European elections, national parliaments' EU activities seem to be more relevant for the media than those of Parliament, not least because journalists still seem to find it difficult to cover a Parliament that is so different to the national parliaments their readers are familiar with.

Europeanisation of the European Elections?

The Europeanisation of European elections has been analysed with two main approaches, the second-order election model and the EU issue voting model. Generally, comparative reviews of these models most frequently find that European elections are still somewhat 'second-order', while there is also evidence for some degree of EU issue voting. Focusing on the timeline from the first European elections in 1979 to the most recent iteration in 2019, the usual consensus is that European elections have gradually become more European. However, this development appears far from a common, linear trend. Essentially, as shown for the 2009 and 2014 elections, common crises which produce common (or at least similar) political problems and campaign issues appear to push for increasing Europeanisation. The lack thereof, as in 2019, often allows for a re-nationalisation of political campaigns (top-down) and of the determinants of vote choice (bottom-up).

Indeed, the 2019 European elections were, according to the campaign material collected by the European Election Monitoring Centre, overall characterised by a 'low-intensity campaign'; in a majority of the member states the campaign was barely perceptible. A common trend across Europe was the continued dominance of domestic over European issues. On average, around two thirds of the campaign content focused on distinctively national politics or blended domestic and European affairs; only around a fifth of the campaign appeals centred on Europe or purely European topics and perspectives. Moreover, even where EU issues were relevant for the campaign, they were very often formulated as a simple binary choice for or against (more) EU integration.

As our analysis shows, the proposals made by Parliament regarding the harmonisation of national electoral rules also had little impact, as most were not implemented by the member states for the 2019 elections. This is the case for most proposals that aim at a harmonisation of national electoral rules and organisation, but also for the proposals to increase the visibility of European political parties in the campaign. Very few member states followed Parliament's proposals to make the names and logos of European parties visible on national ballot papers. Equally, only a small fraction of the national parties made their affiliation to European political parties visible during the electoral campaign.

The Spitzenkandidaten Process and the Introduction of Transnational Lists

Within the debates on how to increase the 'Europeanness' of European elections, and thereby the democratic legitimacy of the EU, two key proposals have gained most prominence, namely the so-called Spitzenkandidaten (lead candidate) model and the introduction of transnational lists.

The aim of the Spitzenkandidaten model was to engineer an open contest for the Commission Presidency. Publicly visible, rival candidates were considered to be suitable vehicles to better aggregate and present the political programs of the European parties, to focus political attention

towards the levels of EU politics, and to inject a dose of politicisation into the election contests. The introduction of lead candidates also represented an attempt to strip EU politics of its bureaucratic, distant, and impersonal reputation, but instead to foster the links of European politicians with the European electorate(s) and to improve the perception of political accountability, competence, and leadership.

A key problem of the lead-candidate process, however, is its weak formal institutionalisation in the Treaty on European Union. The formal basis of the Spitzenkandidaten model remains rather opaque and only vaguely links the selection of the Commission President to the results of the preceding European elections. By merely stating the Council should 'take into account' the outcome of the elections, the lead-candidate process continues to be non-binding and open to strategic exploitation and manipulation.

With vague institutional 'rules' that were open to interference by self-interested actors, Parliament-led 'revolution' of 2014 was effectively terminated by a Council-led 'counter-revolution' in 2019. The European elections of 2014 were successful by installing the Spitzenkandidat nominated by the largest parliamentary group as the Commission President. After the 2019 elections, however, Parliament failed to clearly and unambiguously support and defend the lead-candidate process with a clear majority, which ultimately enabled actors from the intergovernmental sphere to intervene and prevent the selection of EPP candidate Manfred Weber, but also of PES candidate Frans Timmermans. The casual abandonment of the Spitzenkandidaten process after the election likely frustrated integrationist voters and reinforced the view of Eurosceptics that the EU is an undemocratic system. The damage done will be difficult to recover from, and it is challenging to imagine how voters in future European elections could be motivated to believe in the lead-candidate model and how they could be convinced that their political preference and electoral choice do have a real impact on the selection of key personnel at the European level.

In more empirical terms, our study clearly shows the limited success of the lead-candidate process after its second iteration: its introduction did not boost electoral turnout, and the Spitzenkandidaten, who had little name recognition in larger segments of the European publics, failed to successfully communicate the European policies they stood for. Likewise, there is almost no empirical evidence that the lead-candidate process strengthened the electoral connection within the EU or brought about a general trend towards the Europeanisation of political communication, electoral campaigns, and political behaviour.

The European parties invested significant resources into advertising the lead-candidate system and promoting individual Spitzenkandidaten. Yet there is ample evidence that these efforts merely helped to connect with voter groups that were young, well-informed, and resolutely integrationist. So as to politicise European elections, the process was most effective among those voters that were already involved and politically aware but failed to impact those strata of the European publics which were alienated from EU politics.

In summary, the idea of the lead-candidate system was celebrated as a meaningful step so as to not only dramatise, politicise and Europeanise the election of the Parliament, but also to directly tie the selection of the Commission top executive to a Europe-wide popular vote. While the empirical reality, by contrast, has been sobering, it also needs to be kept in mind that it takes time for the effects of institutional reforms to materialise, especially if they aim at changing behaviour. Yet to be successful, further iterations of the Spitzenkandidaten process would require at the very least unified, cross-party support in Parliament for the procedure and the outcome, and ideally an institutional formalisation in the Treaty.

The common label ‘transnational lists’, in turn, refers to numerous vague ideas and specific proposals that aim to construct an additional constituency featuring lists of candidates selected not by national, but by transnational actors. What different proposals have in common is that they see the introduction of transnational lists as a further and crucial stepping-stone in the endeavours to turn European elections from second- into first-order contests. On the voter side, the provision of a pool of transnational candidates is expected to focus voter attention upon a diverse group of transnational candidates, the specific policies they stand for, and the European political parties that have fielded them. On the party side, the introduction of transnational lists aims at strengthening the European parties vis-à-vis the national parties, enabling them to formulate coherent positions and to effectively side-line currently dominant national aspects of campaigning, candidate selection, and vote choice.

The most prominent proposal has been put forward by the ‘Duff report’, named after the British MEP, Liberal Democrat, and federalist Andrew Duff. It suggested that ‘each elector would be enabled to cast one vote for the EU-wide list in addition to their vote for the national or regional list’. Supporters of this proposal attempted to use the British withdrawal from the EU by constructing a transnational constituency based on a share of the seats previously held by British MEPs. Although the initiative suggested a very limited pool of only 27 transnationally elected MEPs, it did not win majority support in Parliament.

So far, we therefore do not have similar experiences to draw on regarding the introduction of transnational lists. In our view, however, most related reform proposals are too limited in scope. In light of the continued second-order nature of European elections, we are sceptical whether voters, who frequently fail to notice or to recall the lead candidates and the policies they are supposed to stand for, would be able to connect with a small pool of transnationally fielded candidates. Moreover, limited measures would introduce additional complexity without sufficient benefits, likely further alienate some voter segments, and reinforce the reputation of the EU as an enormously complicated and unnecessary complex political system. A very small pool of candidates might even prove counterproductive, because it makes Parliament vulnerable to accusations of violating the character of a genuine, representative parliament, of creating different groups of representatives within a patchwork institution that lacks clear-cut features of a representative body, and of, to put it bluntly, symbolic politics and window-dressing. To achieve some impact at all on voter information and to foster electoral linkages among voters and their representatives, we believe that any promising reform proposal would need to establish a much more sizeable pool of transnational candidates which covers, ideally, at least half of all MEPs.

Recommendations (Selection)

We strongly recommend focusing on institutional reform proposals which result in a simpler institutional setup of the EU’s political system.

Despite the limited success for far, we do believe that the Spitzenkandidaten system – in some form – is worth saving. Yet it can no longer be at the disposal of the political actors involved but must be based on a legal and binding formalisation of the process through which the selection of the Commission President is linked to the election result in Parliament. One option would be a constitutional provision that the lead candidate of the largest political group of Parliament will, quasi automatically, be appointed Commission President. The other, in our view better, option would be for Parliament to elect the Commission President out of the pool of lead candidates.

We also support the introduction of transnational lists for a sizable transnational constituency covering at least half of the MEPs as a means of Europeanising the European elections. It must be ensured,

however, that a transnational constituency does not provide incentives for the European political parties to focus their campaigns predominantly, let alone solely, on a few member states with the largest number of voters, which would be fatal for the legitimacy of Parliament. One option here would be to base the transnational constituency on a single EU-wide district, but to field separate transnational lists in each of the member states or even in cross-border constituencies. As a result, the European political parties would campaign with different transnational lists in the different EU sub-districts.

We encourage Parliament to pursue its proposals for amendments to the European Elections Act with renewed vigour and to push for a harmonised and fully European electoral system. Fundamentally different electoral rules violate the basic democratic principle of equality that ought to inform elections to the supranational parliament. Ideally, provisions regarding European elections ought to be transferred fully into a single set of unified European electoral rules, i.e. a truly European Electoral Law

The suggestions above require revision and ratification of the EU Treaties as well as the European Election Act. Given the EU's large number of veto players as well as their lack of incentives to implement them, the prospects for reforms are not necessarily good. Yet the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, currently likely to start in September 2020, may provide a true opportunity.

The success of the Conference will depend crucially on the agenda and how it is set. Putting issues related to institutional matters, including the Spitzenkandidaten system, transnational lists and European election rules on the agenda could allow for a broad public debate and provide citizens with an actual say over their democratic participation in the EU. This requires, however, that possible Treaty changes or amendments of the European Electoral Act are not, formally or informally, taken off the agenda.

The success of the Conference will also crucially depend on how citizens and civil society are involved. Instruments such as citizens' dialogues or online consultations can undoubtedly foster mutual understandings, both among citizens and between citizens and decision makers. Given the experiences with previous exercises, however, an improved approach is needed to take citizens' views into account and to actually transform them into EU policy making.

We welcome the Commission's emphasis on communication as a joint responsibility, on the fight against disinformation and the promotion of media literacy as well as EU education. Yet we caution against any attempt to return, within a corporate communication approach, to a 'neutralisation of ideology' – whether based on allegedly purely factual arguments or on engaging and emotional storytelling.

Finally, the EU also needs take the legitimising potential of national parliaments and inter-parliamentary cooperation and communication more seriously. Here, the introduction of an annual 'European Week' taking place simultaneously in all national parliaments, with debates between MPs, European Commissioners, MEPs and representatives of civil society on the Commission Work Programme could support the emergence of connected inter-parliamentary public spheres. In addition, such an event is likely to attract rather considerable media coverage. We also advocate a formal institutionalisation of the so-called 'green card' as a means to provide national parliaments with an opportunity to engage collectively in an active and constructive inter-parliamentary deliberation on EU responsibilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the European project drew its legitimacy from its capacity to solve problems effectively, and the process of integration was largely accompanied by what has been called the 'permissive consensus'¹. This 'permissive consensus' of the European publics, ill-informed and disinterested in European politics but willing to go along with integration, enabled political elites to pursue their own, mostly integrationist goals in a rather unchecked fashion. With the erosion of public support for the European Union (EU) and the politicisation of the integration project, however, the alleged consensus gave way to something that Hooghe and Marks² labelled a 'constraining dissensus': European integration became a far more salient and often a highly contested issue. Public support of the EU declined, and parties, voters and political entrepreneurs tried to pick up and exploit these concerns for their electoral benefit.

In a highly influential account, Simon Hix³ addressed 'what's wrong about the European Union' and also discussed 'how to fix it'. Crucially, the author underlines that policy gridlock within, and draining support for, the EU do not per se arise from its flawed institutional construction, but have rather been reinforced by a shift in its political programme that has moved from regulatory politics and market building in its initial stages towards distributive politics as well as social and economic reform within a state of both wider and deeper integration. The key diagnosis was that EU politics has for decades pretended that there is not any 'real' politics in 'Brussels' and thereby refused to address pivotal political differences, political debates, and divergent political concepts within the European 'family' – when, in reality, intense ideological conflicts exist, for instance among neo-liberal reformers and the preservers and supporters of a traditional European social model.

The suggested remedy is to openly address political conflict and to utilise emergent ideological and political conflict in order to increase the visibility, transparency, and legitimacy of policy-making at the European level. Politicisation is supposed to insert elements of drama, to thus increase public awareness and interest in EU politics with the aim of reinforcing the connection between EU politicians and citizens. Only openness and transparency of democratic politics at the European level ensure that those who believe they do not gain in substantive terms are at least willing to provide 'loser's consent' to specific policies and to European integration, in general. Hix⁴ identifies two key prerequisites, namely (1) an appropriate institutional design, which allows for a democratic leadership contest and (2) political elites willing to accept political contestation and the legitimacy of those who 'win' and get to implement their political program.

At the same time, transparency, openness and politicisation are intimately related to the notion of the European public sphere as an arena for EU-wide public discourse. Most commentators agree that a unified and truly European public sphere would require a common language, a shared identity and, most importantly, a common infrastructure, i.e. European media⁵ – and that neither of these vital

¹ Lindberg, L. L. and Scheingold, S. A., *'Europe's would-Be polity: Patterns of change in the European community'*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

² Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 1-23.

³ Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008.

⁴ Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008.

⁵ Gerhards, J., 'Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, 1993, pp. 96-110; Grimm, D., 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?', *European Law Journal*,

elements are seen as present or likely to develop within the EU within the near future. As a result, the academic debate has turned to the notion of national, but *Europeanised and connected*, public spheres. The definition of and the functions ascribed to the public sphere differ according to the democratic theories they are based on, yet there is a basic consensus that it should, first, provide citizens with the necessary information to, second, enable them to scrutinise actions of political actors to hold them accountable, third, provide citizens and groups with the opportunity of discussing important political questions and making their voices heard by policy makers and, fourth, foster the development of a sense of belonging to a common (European) community⁶.

Even complex phenomena, such as European (Union) politics, may be summarised by some simple notions. In a seminal account, Plott⁷ proposes the 'fundamental equation of politics' and concludes that political outcomes are an interactive result of individual preferences and collective institutions: Preferences x Institutions => Outcomes. Therefore, any attempt to introduce political change may either try to change individual preferences or to re-write institutional rules.

Certainly, systematically addressing, influencing, and changing the political preferences of political actors or citizens is the harder alternative. The preferences of individual citizens and the structuring of the European political space are not easily altered. Political cleavages and cleavage structures as the baselines of a European political space emerge from often long-standing historical processes and are not easily shifted by political actors. At the same time, any attempt to Europeanise European elections depends crucially on the willingness of national political parties and actors, who have little incentive to do so. This is also the case regarding a Europeanisation of national public spheres. The media operate according to their own logic, which is not always conducive to a broad coverage of EU affairs. Similarly, national parliaments have become more aware of their communication function in EU affairs, but mainstream parties still face disincentives when it comes to the politicisation of EU policies, politics and integration. The EU, finally, has invested considerably resources into (mostly) traditional political advertising, but these efforts have often not been overly successful, and European citizens did not necessarily like what they saw.

By contrast, changing the rules of the game is often an easier and more effective alternative so as to introduce political change and to enhance the effectiveness and/or legitimacy of political decision-making. Giovanni Sartori⁸ has coined the term 'Comparative Constitutional Engineering' to summarise attempts to manipulate electoral systems and/or the parliamentary or presidential structure of executive government. Yet even within a nation state, inducing institutional and/or political reform steps is a complex and complicated process. First, it is always difficult to provide an informed guess on how some specific 'constitutional engineering' will impact preferences of publics and political actors and whether a reform is actually able to achieve 'its' goals concerning both the input and output dimensions of politics, and the parallel fulfilment of legitimacy and efficiency goals. Furthermore, any reform project needs to be accepted, implemented and enacted by self-interested political actors. Therefore, 'arguing' on reform proposals that claim or do achieve common gains is all too often

Vol. 1, No 13, 1995, pp. 282–302; Kielmansegg, P., 'Integration und Demokratie', in M. Jachtenfuchs and B. Kohler-Koch, (eds.), *Europäische Integration*, Leske und Budrich, Opladen, 1996, 47–71.

⁶ Meyer, C. O., *'Europäische Öffentlichkeit als Kontrollsphäre: Die Europäische Kommission, die Medien und politische Verantwortung'*, Vistas, Berlin, 2002, pp. here 68–71; Eriksen, E. O., 'An Emerging European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, No 3, 2005, pp. 341–363; De Vreese, C.H., 'The EU as a public sphere', *Living Reviews in European Governance* Vol. 2, No 3, 2012, (updated version), here p. 6.

⁷ Plott, C., 'Will Economics Become an Experimental Science?', *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 57, No 4, 1991, pp. 901–919.

⁸ Sartori, G., *'Comparative Constitutional Engineering. An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes'*, Macmillan, London, 1994.

overshadowed by 'bargaining' among political actors who lack motivation to change rules that awarded them political office or are unable and/or uninterested to look or move beyond their personal interest. The political science literature refers to numerous cases of (very frequently failed) attempts to induce political change in established democracies and has especially focused on institution building during and after transitions from authoritarian or totalitarian rule.

Of course, reform discussions are more complex and reform processes are much more complicated and dragged out in political systems with many veto players.⁹ Needless to say that the EU is the example of a political system severely constrained by both partisan and institutional veto players.¹⁰ Within EU politics, self-interested bargaining therefore easily outweighs arguing about common goods, and numerous actors within the European multi-level system are well-positioned to prevent or at least slow down institutional change and reform initiatives. Lengthy negotiations therefore all too often result in hyper-complex (institutional) compromise which is almost impossible to communicate and tends to reinforce the image of the EU as an inefficient, slow, and detached political entity.

The reform proposals we discuss or propose within this report focus on the input and legitimacy aspects of EU politics and assume that, in line with the suggestions by Simon Hix and others, aspects of political legitimation and legitimacy can and will only be successfully addressed by increasing politicisation, transparency, and visibility of its core institutions. We also believe that any reform proposal needs to be evaluated whether it contributes to the simplification of political processes at the European level, because the key problem is that too many citizens do not comprehend what the EU actually is, what it does, and how it does things.

In the subsequent sections, we therefore start by providing a short overview of the concept of 'Europeanisation', its development and the main mechanisms of Europeanisation identified in the academic literature. We then focus on two related but distinct developments regarding the Europeanisation of politics, in particular, growing contestation and politicisation of the EU and EU integration (section 2). Section 3 then discusses the European public sphere from a theoretical as well as empirical perspective. Regarding the former, we present distinct conceptions of the public sphere based on liberal, participatory and deliberative democratic theory; regarding the latter we focus on two main arenas that provide the infrastructure for a public sphere, namely the media and parliaments.

The following sections focus on the Europeanisation of political contests and the elections to the European Parliament (Parliament, EP), in particular. Section 4 introduces the topic by outlining the academic contributions on both the second-order election model and on EU issue voting. Section 5 then turns to the 2019 elections and analyses whether and to what extent they were more Europeanised elections compared to 2014. Here, we focus on the extent to which proposals by the European Parliament, especially regarding the visibility of European parties in the campaigns, have been implemented within the member states, on the intensity and issues of national campaigns, on the media coverage of the elections and the campaigns on social media.

We then turn to the two most prominent proposals for institutional electoral reform that aim at turning European elections into first-order contests: Section 6 evaluates to what extent the *Spitzenkandidaten* process has fulfilled its aims after two rounds of the exercise in terms of increasing turnout, fostering the personalisation of the elections, strengthening the electoral connection and providing incentives

⁹ Tsebelis, G., *Veto Players. How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002.

¹⁰ Cf., instead of many others, the contributions in König, T., Tsebelis, G. and Debus, M. (eds.), *Reform Processes and Policy Change: Veto Players and Decision-Making in Modern Democracies*, Springer, New York, Berlin, 2012.

for more Europeanised campaigns. We also discuss what we see as the greatest obstacle to a successful continuation of the process, namely its almost casual abandonment after the 2019 election. Section 7 then examines the evolution of the debate on the introduction of transnational lists and discusses potential advantages of and preconditions for a transnational constituency. In the final section, we discuss policy recommendations aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the European Union based on our analysis.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEANISATION

Despite the increasing importance of Europe for and its impact on the EU member states, political science discovered the phenomenon of Europeanisation rather late. Scholars focused on the process of European integration, trying to answer the question why sovereign states decide to cooperate ever more closely and to set up supranational institutions to which they transfer part of their sovereignty. Thus, they were mainly interested in 'the process of [European] integration as the end point of a causal process beginning with domestic and transnational societal interests and ending with European outcomes'¹¹, i.e. a bottom-up perspective¹² on European integration.

From the early 1990s onwards, however, scholars became interested in the impact the European integration process had on the member states – not least because this impact could no longer be overlooked. Since the Single European Act of 1986, the policy-making competencies of the EC/EU have become more and more comprehensive. After the long phase of neglect, research on 'Europeanisation' became something of a growth industry during the 2000s. This popularity was largely due to the fact that the EU became a research field for comparative politics. While traditionally the focus of the political science sub-discipline of international relations with its attention to processes of European integration, both the recognition of the EU as a political system as well as its impact on the political systems of the EU member states attracted the interest of researchers of comparative politics. Here, the concept of Europeanisation can be considered as a link between these two subfields of political research.

2.1. The Problem of Defining Europeanisation

Despite a 'torrent of publications, however, or perhaps even because of it, the concept of Europeanization remains poorly and confusingly defined'¹³, and there is still no unified theory of Europeanisation, but rather a broad range of different approaches. In fact, a look at the literature demonstrates that scientists do not even agree on what is actually meant by the term Europeanisation, which 'Europe' it refers to or what the term is trying to explain. Different disciplines developed distinct meanings of the term, and even within political science several definitions and conceptualisations exist.

In some conceptualisations¹⁴, the term Europeanisation refers to the export or transfer of political organisation, institutions, governance or just 'ways of life' beyond the European continent, a transfer that from a historical perspective often took place through colonisation and force. A related understanding of Europeanisation as changes in the EU's territorial borders refers to EU enlargement and on the accompanying processes of transformation and modernisation in new member states. From

¹¹ Risse, T., Green Cowles, M., and Caporaso, J.A., 'Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction', in M. G. Cowles, J. A. Caporaso and T. Risse (eds.), *Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001, pp. 1-20, here p. 12.

¹² Caporaso, J. A. and Keeler, J. T.S., 'The European Union and Regional Integration Theory', in C. Rhodes and S. Mazey (eds.), *The State of the European Union: Building a European Polity?* Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1995, pp. 29-61.

¹³ Mair, P., 'The Europeanization Dimension', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2004, pp. 337-348, here p. 338.

¹⁴ For overviews, see Featherstone, K., 'Introduction: In the Name of 'Europe'?', in K. Featherstone and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 3-26; Olsen, J.P., 'The Many Faces of Europeanization', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 5, 2002, pp. 921-952; Sittermann, B., 'Europeanisation – A Step Forward in Understanding Europe?', Working paper, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster Nachwuchsgruppe Europäische Zivilgesellschaft und Multi-Level Governance', online at: https://ceses.cuni.cz/CESES-141-version1-2_1_Sittermann_Nachwuchsgruppe_on_Europeanisation_2006.pdf

a cultural perspective, in turn, Europeanisation takes a rather broad understanding that focuses on the transnational dispersion of cultural practices, lifestyles, ideas or traditions within Europe. The 'increasingly undifferentiated supermarkets, the pizza parlours, the Benetton outlets, and the Irish bars that are now to be found in the heart of almost every European city reflect a rapidly widening process of informal Europeanization, or cross-cultural convergence'¹⁵ – a process not always easy to distinguish from globalisation.¹⁶ As the examples show, Europeanisation can refer to Europe in a broader territorial or cultural sense, which is why some scholars have suggested distinguishing (political) processes related to the European Union as 'EU-isation'¹⁷.

Within political science, two main conceptualisations of Europeanisation have become dominant. The first defines Europeanisation as the transfer of sovereignty to the European level resulting in 'the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance'¹⁸. These definitions zoom in on the (bottom-up) creation or development of institutions and policies at the European level and thus on the '*institutionalization* of a distinctly European political system'¹⁹. As a result, this concept of Europeanisation is difficult to distinguish from the concept of European integration.

The larger share of the literature is based on the second perspective and 'speaks of Europeanisation when something in national political systems is affected by something European'²⁰, conceptualising Europeanisation as a top-down or horizontal process. The first impetus for the new research agenda on Europeanisation is generally attributed to an article by Peter Gourevitch on the international system as a determinant of domestic politics – the so-called 'second image reversed'.²¹ Yet Robert Ladrech was the first to provide a precise and since widely cited definition of the term Europeanisation in this sense. He saw Europeanisation as 'a process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree the EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making'.²² This implies that domestic actors redefine their interests and behaviour according to the norms, challenges and logic of EU membership. In a similar way, Europeanisation has been defined as a process 'by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making'²³

¹⁵ Mair, P., 'The Europeanization Dimension', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2004, pp. 337-348, here p. 341.

¹⁶ Sittermann, B., '*Europeanisation – A Step Forward in Understanding Europe?*', Working paper, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster Nachwuchsgruppe Europäische Zivilgesellschaft und Multi-Level Governance', online at: https://ceses.cuni.cz/CESES-141-version1-2_1_Sittermann_Nachwuchsgruppe_on_Europeanisation_2006.pdf, here p. 4.

¹⁷ Flockhart, T., 'Europeanization or EU-ization? The Transfer of European Norms across Time and Space', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 48, No 4, 2010, pp. 787–810; Radaelli, C.M., 'The Europeanization of Public Policy', in K. Featherstone and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 27-56, here p. 27.

¹⁸ Risse, T., Cowles, M. G., and Caporaso, J. A., 'Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction', in M. Green Cowles, J. A. Caporaso and T. Risse (eds.), *Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2001, pp. 1-20, here p. 3.

¹⁹ Mair, P., 'The Europeanization Dimension', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2004, pp. 337-348, here p. 340, emphasis in original.

²⁰ Vink, M. P., 'What is Europeanisation? And other questions on a new research agenda', *European Political Science* Vol. 3, No 1, 2003, pp. 63-74, here p. 63.

²¹ Gourevitch, P., 'The second image reversed: the international sources of domestic politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 32, No.4, 1978, pp. 881-912.

²² Ladrech, R., 'Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 32, No 1, 1994, pp. 69-88, here p. 69.

²³ Börzel, T. A., 'Institutional Adaptation to Europeanization in Germany and Spain', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 37, No 4, 1999, pp. 573-596, here p. 574.

or as a process of 'domestic adaptation to pressures emanating directly or indirectly from EU membership'²⁴.

An encompassing and widely cited definition, finally, that incorporates both perspectives was provided by Claudio Radaelli:

*'Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.'*²⁵

Europeanisation in this sense can impact various different aspects of domestic adaptation, such as political institutions, policies, actor preferences, actions and strategies, but also norms, ideas, cultural traditions, everyday habits and identities. Europeanisation should not, however, be confused with either convergence or harmonisation. Convergence can be a *consequence* of European integration and Europeanisation processes. Similarly, harmonisation of, e.g., national policies is often seen as an important goal of European integration. Yet empirical research suggests that Europeanisation can lead to a 'differential' impact of European requirements on domestic policies: 'Countries have responded to the pressures of Europeanization as they have to those of globalisation at different times to differing degrees with different results'²⁶. Importantly, the ways, or mechanisms, through which European integration and EU politics/policies impact the member states vary. Here, scholars distinguish between vertical and horizontal mechanisms.

2.2. Vertical Mechanisms of Europeanisation

In many policy areas the EU regulates through supranational law or decisions, which directly and hierarchically impact policies or institutions within the member states. The precise mechanism of Europeanisation, however, depends on the type of European intervention with a distinction being made between instruments of positive and negative integration.

Positive Integration refers to the active development of European policies²⁷. Examples can be found primarily in the area of regulatory policies, such as consumer protection or environmental policies, but even the Monetary Union is an example of positive integration 'in which a fully fledged institutional model of monetary policy is being diffused to the countries of the Euro-zone'²⁸. Legislation at the European level forces member states to adapt existing, or to develop new, policies or specific instruments, often within a set period of time. In the case of *negative integration*²⁹, EU legislation does not force the member states to implement specific policies or policy instruments. Rather, the aim is to restrict national regulatory options, mainly to create a common market without exactly defining what

²⁴ Featherstone, K., 'Introduction: In the Name of 'Europe'?', in K. Featherstone and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 3-26, here p. 17.

²⁵ Radaelli, C. M., 'Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?', *European Integration Online Papers* (EIoP), Vol. 8, No 5, 2004, here p. 3.

²⁶ Schmidt, V., 'Europeanization and the Mechanics of Policy Adjustment', *European Integration online Papers* (EIoP), Vol. 5, No 6, 2001, here p. 1.

²⁷ Scharpf, F. W., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, here p. 45.

²⁸ Radaelli, C. M., 'Whither Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change', *European Integration online Papers* (EIoP), Vol. 4, No 8, 2000, here p. 16.

²⁹ Scharpf, F. W., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, here pp. 50-71.

this market should look like, for example through the mutual recognition of national regulations (e.g. based on the 1979 'Cassis-de-Dijon' decision of the European Court of Justice³⁰) or the restriction of national regulations that may hamper free market competition (e.g. EU competition policy).

For these hierarchical mechanisms, scholars have developed different explanations.

2.2.1. Goodness of Fit

According to the concept of 'Goodness of fit'³¹, Europeanisation depends on the congruence between EU rules and regulations, on the one hand, and domestic policies or institutions, on the other, and thus on the 'level of misfit'. The less compatible the domestic system to European requirements, the greater the misfit and the greater the adaptational pressure. The basic assumption is that to produce domestic effects, EU policy must be somewhat but not too difficult to absorb at the domestic level. Domestic policies that already encompass all European regulatory demands do not need to be adapted; where, by contrast, domestic institutions or policies differ fundamentally from European requirements, adaptation is extremely difficult and might result in inactivity or simply symbolic adaptation. As a result, Europeanisation is expected to be most pronounced in cases of moderate goodness of fit. In addition, domestic institutions play a key role in absorbing, rejecting, or domesticating Europe: Misfit is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for Europeanisation.³² Whether pressure will actually lead to domestic adaptation and thus to 'Europeanisation by institutional compliance'³³ therefore also depends on domestic institutional factors³⁴ that either facilitate change/adaptation or make it more difficult.

2.2.2. Political Opportunity Structure and Regulatory Competition

One criticism levelled against the 'goodness of fit' approach is that it is only able to explain certain dynamics of Europeanisation as it is based on the existence of, more or less, clear-cut European requirements and adaptational pressure. It is therefore considered of less explanatory value in areas of *negative integration*, where adaptational pressure arises not from particular set of European requirements. As Knill and Lehmkuhl³⁵ have argued, domestic change or persistence is therefore not primarily a matter of pressures on domestic institutions to adapt but must be explained by analysing the extent to which European policies have altered the strategic position of domestic actors. Thus, instruments of negative integration can have an impact on domestic politics by changing the political opportunity structure, or in other words the rules of the game, for domestic actors. Europeanisation is

³⁰ Judgement of Court of 20 February 1979. *Rewe-Zentral AG v Bundesmonopolverwaltung für Branntwein*, Case 120/78. EU:C:1979:42. See also Alter, K. J., and Meunier-Aitsahalia, S., 'Judicial Politics in the European Community: European Integration and the Pathbreaking Cassis de Dijon Decision', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 26, No 4, 1994, pp. 535-561.

³¹ Börzel, T. A., and Risse, T., 'Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe', in K. Featherstone, and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 57-80.

³² Börzel, T. A., and Risse, T., 'Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe', in K. Featherstone, and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 57-80, here p. 63.

³³ Knill, C., and Lehmkuhl, D., 'The National Impact of European Union Regulatory Policy: Three Europeanization Mechanisms', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 41, No 2, 2002, pp. 255-280, here p. 258.

³⁴ Here, Börzel und Risse draw on two strands of neo-institutionalism: from the perspective of rational choice institutionalism, domestic veto-players with the power to block policy change play an important role; sociological institutionalism, in turn, emphasises processes of socialisation and learning as well as the role of 'policy entrepreneurs', see Börzel, T. A., and Risse, T., 'Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe', in K. Featherstone and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 57-80.

³⁵ Knill, C., and Lehmkuhl, D., 'The National Impact of European Union Regulatory Policy: Three Europeanization Mechanisms', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 41, No 2, 2002, pp. 255-280, here p. 260.

therefore the impact of EU legislation on the established constellation of the actors involved in the national decision-making process by changing the distribution of power and resources between domestic actors. The decisive factor for determining the degree of Europeanisation is which actors are being strengthened or weakened through European intervention.

Closely related is the explanation based on 'regulatory competition'³⁶. Here, the argument is that rules set by the EU can result in two kinds of competition among the member states, namely competition between economic actors for clients or consumers, and competition between regulatory systems, which may create pressure to adapt.

2.3. Horizontal Mechanisms and Soft Framing

The mechanisms of Europeanisation mentioned above are related to a clear top-down perspective and the adaptation of member states to 'hard' instruments of European policy-making, typically directives, regulations or case law of the Court of Justice. There are, however, a number of policy areas where the EU does not have the authority to interfere with member state policy in such a strictly hierarchical way. In some policy areas, the EU completely lacks the Treaty authority to become active, in others the EU does issue directives or regulations, but these are either limited to minimal requirements or not binding at all. In these areas, the European level neither exerts much pressure nor changes the rules of the game for political actors. Rather, the EU provides solutions that can be taken up and incorporated in the domestic debate. Change at the domestic level can be the result of changes in the problem perception of national actors and lead to learning, a process even institutionalised in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).³⁷ Another potential for change is that the European level provides arguments and thus political leverage to those actors at the domestic level interested in reform of a particular policy area by providing suitable solutions and powerful arguments. By enabling political actors to refer to the EU, the European level endows specific political solutions with legitimacy. Thus, in all these areas, Europeanisation is not based on hierarchical intervention by the EU but on mechanisms of 'soft framing'³⁸, in other words on change through discourse, learning and socialisation.

³⁶ Bulmer, S. J., and Radaelli, C. M., 'The Europeanisation of National Policy', in S. J. Bulmer and C. Lequesne (eds.), *Member States and the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 338-359.

³⁷ Radaelli, C. M., 'Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?', *European Integration Online Papers* (EIoP), Vol. 8, No 5, 2004, here p. 11; Bulmer, S. J., and Radaelli, C. M., 'The Europeanisation of National Policy', in S. J. Bulmer, and Lequesne, C. (eds.), *Member States and the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 338-359; Bruno, I., Jacquot, S. and Mandin, L., 'Europeanization through its instrumentation: benchmarking, mainstreaming and the open method of co-ordination... toolbox or Pandora's box?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No 4, 2006, pp. 519-536.

³⁸ Radaelli, C. M., 'The Europeanization of Public Policy', in K. Featherstone and C. M. Radaelli (eds.), *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 27-56, here p. 43; Knill, C., and Lehmkuhl, D., 'The National Impact of European Union Regulatory Policy: Three Europeanization Mechanisms', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 41, No 2, 2002, pp. 255-280, here pp. 271ff.

2.4. Europeanisation of Politics – A Politicisation of the EU?

The mechanisms discussed above have been mainly applied in studies on the Europeanisation of member state law and policies³⁹, but also, inter alia, of political parties⁴⁰, political institutions⁴¹ or administrations and their routines⁴². In addition, studies investigated the Europeanisation of new Member States⁴³ and non-EU countries⁴⁴. A second, very broad, field deals with Europeanisation from a different perspective – and often without referring to the term explicitly – namely with the question of how the EU and European integration affect political culture, citizens' identities and political attitudes in terms of opposition and support. This includes the literature on the phenomenon of public Euroscepticism, on the concept of a common European identity as well as the related debate on the European demos. Here, debates not only focus on the existence and prospects for a common identity or European demos, but also on the question whether they are indispensable pre-conditions for the democratisation of the EU or whether, in turn, a democratisation of the EU will engender a common European identity. The literature is too broad to be discussed in detail here⁴⁵, so we will focus on two more recent and related issues in this context, namely the growing contestation and politicisation of the EU. Both are intimately connected with the topic of the European public sphere, which, in turn, directly touches upon questions regarding the Europeanisation of mass media or parliamentary communication.

2.4.1. Europeanisation as Growing Salience and Contestation

For a long time, the European project drew its legitimacy from its capacity to solve problems effectively, and the process of integration was largely accompanied by what has been called the 'permissive consensus'⁴⁶. Although long-term studies have also revealed earlier periods of increasing

³⁹ Graziano, P., and Vink, M. P. (eds.), *Europeanization. New Research Agendas*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007; Radaelli, C. M. and Saurugger, S. (eds.), *The Europeanization of Public Policy*, special issue of the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, Vol. 10, No 3, 2008.

⁴⁰ Külahci, E. (ed.), *Europeanisation and Party Politics: How the EU affects Domestic Actors*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2012; Mair, P., 'Political Parties and Party Systems', in P. Graziano and M. P. Vink (eds.), *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 154-166. Poguntke, T., Aylott, N., Carter, E., Ladrech, R. and Luther, K. R., (eds.), *The Europeanization of National Political Parties: power and organizational adaptation*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007.

⁴¹ Auel, K. and Benz, A., (eds.), *The Europeanisation of Parliamentary Democracy*, special issue of the *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 11, No 3-4, 2005; Auel, K. and Christiansen, T., (eds.), *National Parliaments after Lisbon*, special issue of *West European Politics*, Vol. 38, No 2, 2015; Brouard, S., Costa, O. and König, T. (eds.), *The Europeanisation of domestic legislatures. The empirical implications of the Delors' Myth in nine countries*, Springer, New York, 2012; Goetz, K. H., and Mayer-Sahling, J.-H., 'The Europeanisation of national political systems: Parliaments and executives', *Living Review in European Governance*, Vol. 3, No 2, 2008; Hefftl, C., Neuhold, C., Rozenberg, O. and Smith, J. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of National Parliaments and the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015.

⁴² Knill, C., *The Europeanisation of National Administrations. Patterns of Institutional Change and Persistence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

⁴³ Lindstrom, N., *The Politics of Europeanization and Post-Socialist Transformations*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015; Schimmelfennig, F., and Sedelmeier, U. (eds.), *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2005; Sedelmeier, U., 'Europeanisation in new member and candidate states', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 1, No 3, 2006.

⁴⁴ Schimmelfennig, F., 'Europeanization beyond Europe', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 4, No 3., 2009.

⁴⁵ For overviews see, for example, Kaina, V. and Karolewski, I. P., 'EU governance and European identity', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 8, No 1, 2013; and Loveless, M. and Rohrschneider, R., 'Public perceptions of the EU as a system of governance', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 6, No 2, 2011.

⁴⁶ Lindberg, L. L. and Scheingold, S. A., *Europe's would-Be polity: Patterns of change in the European community*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

contestation⁴⁷, European integration was based on a broad consensus across the political mainstream on its desirability, and citizens permitted their political elites to pursue this course without much interference. What is more, European integration up to the Single European Act (SEA) was not only relatively limited in its functional scope, policy making was also relatively decoupled from ideological or partisan positions⁴⁸. This 'neutralisation of ideology' conditioned

the belief that an agenda could be set for the Community, and the Community could be led towards an ever closer union among its peoples, without having to face the normal political cleavages present in the Member States. ... European integration [was considered] as ideologically neutral regarding – or as ideologically transcending – normal debates on the left-right spectrum'.⁴⁹

Both, the 'permissive consensus' and the decoupling of EU policy making from partisan or ideological positions, have greatly changed since. The Single European Act of 1986 and the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1992 significantly extended the scope of EU policy areas. Importantly, with the Maastricht Treaty, the EU's competencies extended into the 'core state powers' of monetary policy and justice and home affairs. The Maastricht Treaty also deepened the EU's ambitions as a political union including provisions on European citizenship. As a result, decisions made by the EU institutions have increasingly been subject of political conflict, both at the domestic and the European level⁵⁰. In addition, the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council and its application to virtually all matters relating to the creation of an internal market was one of the quintessential features of the SEA, further expanded by the Maastricht and successive treaties. QMV fundamentally changed decision making at the EU level from a purely intergovernmental to a supranational mode. Until then, member states' interests were formally protected by the veto option inherent to unanimity; QMV, by contrast, formally introduced the distinction between majority and minority, between 'winners' and 'losers' of political conflicts.

Today, there seems to be neither firm consensus nor much permissiveness: 'supranational and national executive elites are confronted with a reluctant public who increasingly shows signs of disaffection if not utter disapproval of European politics'⁵¹. The 'permissive consensus' has given way to a more 'constraining dissensus'⁵² marked by growing public Euroscepticism and more virulent contestation of EU politics⁵³ and an increasing polarisation of attitudes towards the EU. As Pascal Lamy put it succinctly after the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in the first Danish referendum, '[t]he people weren't ready to agree to integration, so you had to get on without telling them too much about what was

⁴⁷ Hutter, S., and Grande, E., 'Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970–2010', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 5, pp. 1002–1018, 2014.

⁴⁸ Peters, B. G., 'Bureaucratic Politics and the Institutions of the European Union', in A.M. Sbragia (ed.), *Euro-Politics. Institutions and Policy-Making in the 'New' European Community*. The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1992, pp. 75–122, here p. 77.

⁴⁹ Weiler, J., 'The Transformation of Europe', *Yale Law Journal* Vol. 100, 1991, pp. 2404–2483, here, p. 2476f.

⁵⁰ Genschel, P., and Jachtenfuchs, M., 'From market integration to core state powers: The Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis and integration theory', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 56, No 1, 2018, pp. 178–196.

⁵¹ Pollak, J. and Slominski, P., 'Democratizing the European Union: Representation is nothing, Responsiveness is everything', *IWE Working Papers*, Vol. 27, No 3, 2002, here p. 3.

⁵² Hooghe, L., and Marks, G., 'A Postfunctional Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 1–23.

⁵³ Serrichio, F., Tsakatika, M. and Quaglia, L., 'Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 51, No 1, 2013, pp. 51–64. Usherwood, S. and Startin, N., 'Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 51, No 1, 2013, pp. 1–16.

happening. Now [this] is finished. It can't work when you have to face democratic opinion'⁵⁴. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that not only numerous EU projects have been rejected by popular vote (the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark 1992, the Nice Treaty in Ireland 2001, the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands 2005 and the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland 2008), but also EU membership as such in the 2016 referendum in the UK.

As Robert Dahl observed more than two decades ago, the process of European integration presents the European publics and its political leaders with a 'fundamental democratic dilemma'⁵⁵. On the one hand, inter- or supranational cooperation enhances their capacity to deal with challenges effectively; on the other hand, citizens' and their representatives' ability to influence the government through direct or indirect participation diminishes. This 'democratic dilemma' can be translated into a legitimacy deficit defined as an imbalance between *output* and *input* legitimacy – a distinction elaborated by Fritz Scharpf. Output legitimacy highlights that 'political choices are legitimate if and because they effectively promote the common welfare of the constituency in question'⁵⁶. Input-oriented legitimacy, by contrast, emphasises that '[p]olitical choices are legitimate if and because they reflect the "will of the people" – that is, if they can be derived from the authentic preferences of the members of a community' (ibid.). The 'permissive consensus' was to some extent based on the acceptance of limited input legitimacy because the EU delivered in terms of output legitimacy. Today, both types of legitimacy have come under stress.

Growing contestation and Euroscepticism are certainly to some extent the result of national political actors using the EU as a convenient scapegoat for domestic economic or social problems⁵⁷, but they are also due to a growing sense of political alienation among EU citizens.⁵⁸ The latter is, at least partly, based on difficulties in understanding, let alone participating in, remote decision-making at the EU level, and a feeling of helplessness vis-à-vis far-reaching political decisions that affect their daily lives but that they have little voice in or vote on. On the one hand, the opacity of policy-making processes and the lack of accountability within the multi-level system of the EU have long been diagnosed as core problems of legitimacy within the broader discussion of the EU's democratic deficit.⁵⁹ On the other hand, fundamental differences between national and European governance come into play⁶⁰: Citizens

⁵⁴ Pascal Lamy, cited from Eriksen, E. O. and Fossum, J. E., 'Preface', in E.O. Eriksen and J.E. Fossum (eds.), *Democracy in the European Union. Integration through Deliberation?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. xi-xiii, here p. xii.

⁵⁵ Dahl, R. A., 'A democratic dilemma: system effectiveness versus citizen participation', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 109, No 1, 1994, pp. 23–34, here p. 23.

⁵⁶ Scharpf, F. W., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, here p. 6.

⁵⁷ Heinkelmann-Wild, T., Kriegmair, L. and Rittberger, B., 'The EU Multi-Level System and the Europeanization of Domestic Blame Games', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 8, No 1, 2020, pp. 85–94.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, V. A., 'Politicization in the EU: Between national politics and EU political dynamics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 1018–1036.

⁵⁹ Bovens, M., Curtin, D. and 't Hart, P. (eds.), *The Real World of EU Accountability. What Deficit?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010; Curtin, D., Mair, P. and Papadopoulos, Y. (eds.), *Accountability and European Governance*, Routledge, New York, 2010; Føllesdal, A. and Hix, S., 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No 3, pp. 533–562, 2006; Gustavsson, S., Karlsson, C. and Persson, T. (eds.), *The Illusion of Accountability in the European Union*, Routledge, London, 2009; Harlow, C., *Accountability in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002; Héritier, A., 'Composite democracy in Europe: the role of transparency and access to information', *Journal of European Public Policy* Vol. 10, No 5, 2003, pp. 814–834; Mair, P., 'Popular Democracy and the European Union Polity', *European Governance Papers* C-05-03, 2005; Puntischer Riekman, S., 'In Search of Lost Norms: Is Accountability the solution to the legitimacy problems of the European Union?', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 5, No 1, 2007, pp. 121–137.

⁶⁰ Schmidt, V. A., 'Politicization in the EU: Between national politics and EU political dynamics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 1018–1036.

are (more or less) familiar with political parties, political competition and government formation at the domestic level(s). Yet policy in an increasing range of areas is made at the European level, where decision-making processes are highly complex and difficult to understand, European political parties and groups in Parliament are mostly unknown, elections do not have a recognisable effect on government formation and familiar left-right politics appear displaced by technocratic decision-making. In other words, the EU lacks the familiar structures and institutions that provide input legitimacy. The result is a growing 'democratic disconnect' - the 'crucial disconnect ... between [citizens'] perception of European governance as bureaucratic and distant, on the one hand, and attachments to national institutions as the true loci of democratic and constitutional legitimacy, on the other'⁶¹.

While public contestation of EU politics has been on a steady rise since the 1990s (albeit to a varying degree and with different meanings in different member states⁶²), the EU's consecutive crises (including the eurozone crisis, the refugee and migration crisis or Brexit) – also termed the EU's 'polycrisis' by then European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker⁶³ – have accelerated this development.⁶⁴ Especially in the context of the eurozone crisis, the impact of EU decision-making became increasingly (and often painfully) evident for citizens in the EU.⁶⁵ Both the eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis also appeared to demonstrate a fundamental lack of effectiveness of EU governance, challenging the output legitimacy of the EU.

It will remain to be seen to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 will contribute to this development. As the meta analyses of national polls published by the European Parliament's Public Opinion Monitoring Unit⁶⁶ demonstrate, the pandemic mainly led to a surge of support for national governments and leaders in most EU member states.⁶⁷ By contrast, a survey conducted by Eurofund in early April 2020⁶⁸ found that trust in the EU was on average lower than trust in national governments, with respondents from Finland, Ireland and Denmark trusting the EU the most and those from France, Czechia and Greece the least. It is indeed 'unusual that a survey measures trust in the EU lower than

⁶¹ Lindseth, P., *Power and Legitimacy: Reconciling Europe and the Nation State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, here p. 10.

⁶² de Vries, C., *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018.

⁶³ Juncker, J. C., *Speech at the annual general meeting of the Hellenic federation of enterprises*, Athens, 21 June 2016, available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2293_en.htm.

⁶⁴ Börzel, T. and Risse, T., 'From the euro to the Schengen crises: European integration theories, politicization, and identity politics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No 1, 2018, pp. 83–108; Zeitlin, J., Nicoli, F., and Laffan, B., 'Introduction: The European Union beyond the polycrisis? Integration and politicization in an age of shifting cleavages', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 963–979.

⁶⁵ Hurrelmann, A., 'Democracy beyond the State: Some Insights from the European Union', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 129, No 1, 2014, pp. 87–106.

⁶⁶ European Parliament, 'Public Opinion in the time of Covid-19', Newsletter published by the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit of the European Parliament's DG communication, 2020, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/public-opinion-in-the-time-of-covid-19>.

⁶⁷ See also the overview of various national polls in Euronews, available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/21/coronavirus-why-did-european-leaders-approval-ratings-rise-during-lockdown>.

⁶⁸ Eurofund, Living, working and COVID-19, First findings – April 2020, Publications Office of the European Union, Brussels, 2020, available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20058en.pdf.

average trust in the government⁶⁹, yet a strong increase in support for the government in a crisis, the so-called 'rally around the flag effect'⁷⁰, is by no means uncommon.

*There seem to be certain "truths" in politics, including one long-established one: at times of crisis, people turn to their governments. And with [the] coronavirus pandemic, it seems no different. Many of our politicians have never been so popular. [...] at times of crisis, when people are frightened and face an uncertain future, they hold on to what they know. And they know their leaders. Most believe those same leaders are trying to do the best they can.'*⁷¹

Indeed, a survey conducted by Kantar at the request of Parliament in 21 EU member states⁷² suggests that only a minority of European citizens knows how the EU is involved in managing the Covid-19 crisis. Close to three quarters (74 per cent) stated to have heard of, seen or read about measures or actions initiated by the EU to respond to the pandemic – yet only 33 per cent also claimed to know what they are⁷³. Importantly, a little less than 70 per cent of respondents across the EU declared that they did not really know what the EU was doing to combat the pandemic and its consequences.

Still, more than two thirds of the respondents agreed that the EU should have more competencies to deal with such crises (69 per cent). The level of agreement varied across member states, yet there were only two member states in which respondents in favour of greater EU competencies were not in the majority, Sweden (48 per cent) and the Czech Republic (43 per cent). The most often named competencies the EU ought to have in the eyes of respondents were ensuring the provision of medical supplies for all member states (55 per cent), the allocation of research funds for the development of a vaccine (38 per cent) and the provision of direct financial support to the EU member states (33 per cent).

This support for more engagement by the EU was also mirrored in the respondents' level of satisfaction with the solidarity between EU member states in fighting the virus. While satisfaction is, unsurprisingly, lowest in countries hit hardest by the virus, such as Italy (16 per cent) or Spain (21 per cent) the share of respondents satisfied with member state solidarity only reached an absolute majority in Ireland (59 per cent). When it comes to the satisfaction with the EU measures taken so far⁷⁴, the pattern of responses was similar to the levels of satisfaction with the solidarity between EU member states. Despite great variation between the responses across member states, and despite the general lack of knowledge regarding the EU's activities regarding the pandemic, the overall impression from the survey is that EU citizens on the whole expected more from both the EU and the member states.

⁶⁹ Eurofund, Living, working and COVID-19, First findings – April 2020, Publications Office of the European Union, Brussels, 2020, available at:

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20058en.pdf, here p. 3. See also European Commission, Eurobarometer 92, Autumn 2019, First Results, European Union, Brussels, 2019, here p. 5.

⁷⁰ On the original development of the 'rally around the flag effect' see Mueller, J. E., 'Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, No 1, 1970, pp. 18-34.

⁷¹ McCaffey, D., 'Analysis: Why are our politicians so popular during COVID-19 crisis?', Euronews, 22.04.2020, available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/16/analysis-why-are-our-politicians-so-popular-during-covid-19-crisis>.

⁷² European Parliament, Public Opinion in the EU in Time of Coronavirus Crisis, survey conducted by Kantar, 2020, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20200527RES79925/20200527RES79925.pdf>.

⁷³ There is no data on any follow-up questions, so it remains unclear, whether and to what extent this self-assessment is true and which EU measures these 33 per cent actually know.

⁷⁴ It is, unfortunately, unclear from the data provided by Kantar whether the question was posed to all respondents who were at least aware of EU measures or only those who also claimed to know what the measures were. The press release by the EP words this as 'those who know about EU action in this crisis', see <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200525IPR79717/eu-citizens-want-more-competences-for-the-eu-to-deal-with-crises-like-covid-19>.

2.4.2. Europeanisation and Politicisation

The developments sketched above are often subsumed under the term *politicisation* of the EU.

*The last decades have transformed the EU from an international organisation into a full political system interwoven in a multilevel logic with the domestic systems of the member states. The growing EU politicisation over the past decades has further resulted in a transformation of the EU issue from being sui generis and unrelated to basic political competition to being one issue among (many) others that is contested by parties, but also well-structured and important for electoral decisions at the voter level.*⁷⁵

Yet while there is a broad consensus that the Europeanisation of national policies has led to an increasing politicisation of the EU⁷⁶, definitions of the term and, especially, the assessment of its implications for EU politics at both the domestic and the EU level differ.⁷⁷

For some scholars, politicisation can be defined as the process through which European integration or the EU as such have become the subject of public contestation. As such, politicisation has an inherently negative connotation. Indeed, for some authors, politicisation means that the EU has failed to successfully depoliticise certain issues, i.e. to isolate them from public debate and contestation in order to achieve better policy outcomes.⁷⁸ Both Giandomenico Majone⁷⁹ and Andrew Moravcsik⁸⁰, for example, emphasised the apolitical character of the EU which focused neither on distributive nor on salient issues, and allowed the EU to manage, silently and efficiently, the coordination of regulatory policies to achieve Pareto-efficient outcomes (where some benefit and no one is made worse off). From this perspective, the increasing politicisation of European integration over the last two decades mainly prevents or at least constrains national leaders from agreeing on the compromises needed to solve urgent policy problems⁸¹ for fear of domestic backlash. In addition, the politicisation of EU issues is seen as creating the space for the mobilisation of national publics against EU institutions and actors, for example by Eurosceptic challenger parties.⁸² Increasing successes of Eurosceptic parties, in turn, could lead to growing Euroscepticism within the EU institutions, either through Eurosceptic parties in

⁷⁵ Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J. and de Vreese, C. H., 'Mismatch? Comparing elite and citizen polarisation on EU issues across four countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2020, pp. 310-328, here p. 312.

⁷⁶ De Wilde, P., and Zürn, M., 'Can the Politicization of European Integration Be Reversed?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 50, No 51, 2012, pp. 137-153; Hutter, S., Grande, E. and Kriesi, H., *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016; Zürn, M., 'Politicization compared: at national, European, and global levels', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 977-995.

⁷⁷ Schmidt, V. A., 'Politicization in the EU: Between national politics and EU political dynamics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 1018-1036.

⁷⁸ Majone, G., *Rethinking the Union of Europe Post-Crisis: Has Integration Gone Too Far?*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014; Moravcsik, A., 'Preferences, power and institutions in 21st century Europe', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 56, No 7, 2018, pp. 1648-74.

⁷⁹ Majone, G., 'Europe's "Democratic Deficit": The Question of Standards', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 4, No 1, 1998, pp. 5-28.

⁸⁰ Moravcsik, A., 'Is there a "democratic deficit" in world politics? A framework for Analysis', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, No 2, 2004, pp. 336-363; Moravcsik, A., 'What Can We Learn from the Collapse of the European Constitutional Project?', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Vol. 4, No 2, 2006, pp. 219-241.

⁸¹ Laffan, B., 'Europe's union in the 21st century: from decision trap to politics trap', unpublished paper, Florence: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2019.

⁸² Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 1-23; Bakker, R., Jolly, S. and Polk, J., 'Multidimensional incongruence, political disaffection, and support for anti-establishment parties', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2020, pp. 292-309.

Parliament or through governments represented in the Council, hampering the EU decision-making process or, in the worst case, even threatening the EU itself.

*'In the specific rule set and consensus-based political system of the EU, [politicisation] may become a source of deadlock, since a blocking minority or a veto by a single member state may be sufficient to hamper common progress on a salient contested issue, even in the midst of a crisis, especially where questions of Union competence are at stake. Such a deadlock, in turn, may quickly develop into instability, since the lack of policy action in the face of a crisis may undercut the Union's output-based legitimacy.'*⁸³

In other words, the politicisation of the EU is mainly seen as constraining the EU institutions in their capacity to deliver effective solutions to urgent problems – and thus as undermining the output legitimacy of the EU – possibly even resulting in a vicious cycle of declining effectiveness and support.⁸⁴

According to a widely used definition⁸⁵, by contrast, politicisation is a process through which issues become more *salient*, public opinion becomes more *polarised*, and actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU governance *expand*. *Salience* refers to the importance attributed to the EU and European integration, for example in the national media, by parliaments and political parties, but also by the citizens. Second, although often driven by growing contestation, the focus here is on increasing *polarisation* within public and elite opinion, which emphasises the emergence of more explicitly held and voiced *different* positions and opinions regarding the EU.⁸⁶ This opens up an association of politicisation not just with Euroscepticism, but also with Europhilia.⁸⁷ Finally, it highlights a growing number of actors engaged with issues of European governance via direct participation, public debate or protest. Among citizens, this also includes a growing audience for such debates, for example an increasing number of citizens regularly following EU events and news. As a result, European integration and governance is seen as becoming the subject of (more or less informed) fundamental controversies among EU citizens, within the media and in party competition.⁸⁸ Importantly, these controversies touch on both constitutional issues, such as EU membership or the powers of the EU institutions, and EU policy issues.

⁸³ Zeitlin, J., Nicoli, F., and Laffan, B., 'Introduction: The European Union beyond the polycrisis? Integration and politicization in an age of shifting cleavages', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 963–979, here p. 966.

⁸⁴ Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 1–23.

⁸⁵ De Wilde, P., Leupold A., and Schmidtke H., 'Introduction: the differentiated politicisation of European governance', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 3–22, here pp. 4f.; see also De Wilde, P., 'No Polity for Old Politics? A Framework for Analyzing the Politicization of European Integration', *Journal of European Integration*, 2011, 33:5, 559–575; De Wilde, P., and Zürn, M., 'Can the Politicization of European Integration Be Reversed?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 50, No 1, 2012, pp. 137–153; Green-Pedersen, C., 'A Giant Fast Asleep? Party Incentives and Politicisation of European Integration', *Political Studies*, vol. 60, No 1, 2012, pp. 115–130; Hutter, S., and Grande, E., 'Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970–2010', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 5, 2014, pp. 1002–1018; Statham, P., and Trezn, H.-J., *The Politicization of Europe: Contesting the Constitution in the Mass Media*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013.

⁸⁶ Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J. and de Vreese, C. H., 'Mismatch? Comparing elite and citizen polarisation on EU issues across four countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2020, pp. 310–328.

⁸⁷ Turnbull-Dugarte, S. J., 'The impact of EU intervention on political parties' politicisation of Europe following the financial crisis', *West European Politics*, Vol. 43, No 4, 2019, pp. 894–981.

⁸⁸ De Wilde, P., Leupold, A. and Schmidtke, H., 'Introduction: the differentiated politicisation of European governance', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 3–22, here p. 3; Risse, T., (ed.), *European Public Spheres: Politics is Back*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

In this view, the politicisation of the EU is seen as not just an inevitable⁸⁹, but often as a welcome development:

*'Finally some politics in the EU! For years, or even decades, European leaders have found it convenient to pretend that there is no politics in Brussels. Either they did not want to reveal that they were sometimes on the losing side of political debates, or they feared that any political arguments would (further) undermine support for the EU. After the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, however, the "gloves are off".'*⁹⁰

*'At long last, the European integration process has attracted considerable media coverage, polarized public opinion, and even provoked open protest at several stages. EU politics thus now involves political passions. That is good. In effect, this politicization puts an end to the "permissive consensus" that had formed the social basis for elitist and largely non-transparent decision-making.'*⁹¹

Whether seen as a positive and legitimising or as a constraining, potentially destructive development, most commentators agree that politicisation within EU is a reality, albeit not a homogenous process, but one with significant fluctuations over time and variation across member states⁹². In addition, politicisation varies substantially between different types of political arenas, namely institutional arenas, such as the European Parliament or national parliaments, intermediary arenas including political parties, interest groups or the media, and various arenas of citizen engagement in politics including elections, but also discussions with friends and family.⁹³

While much of the existing research has focused on institutional⁹⁴ and intermediary arenas, we know much less about whether and to what extent a politicisation of European integration and politics can also be observed among citizens. Here, especially qualitative studies cast some doubt on the politicisation thesis. They have found, rather consistently, a fairly low degree of interest in and information on EU affairs resulting largely in the absence of EU-related issues in political debates

⁸⁹ De Wilde, P. and Zürn, M., 'Can the Politicization of European Integration be Reversed? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 50, No 51, 2012, pp. 137-153.

⁹⁰ Hix, S., 'Why the EU needs (left-right) politics? Policy reform and accountability are impossible without it', *Notre Europe*, Policy Paper 19, 2006, here p. 3, see also Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity, Cambridge, 2008.

⁹¹ Zürn, M., 'The EU's Politicization, At Long Last. Are we finally witnessing politicization of the debate over the future of the EU?', *The Globalist*, 24 July, 2013, available at: <https://www.theglobalist.com/the-eus-politicization-at-long-last/>.

⁹² Hutter, S., and Grande, G., 'Politicizing Europe in the National Electoral Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970–2010', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 5, 2014, pp. 1002–1018; Hutter, S., Grande, E. and Kriesi, H., *Politicising Europe. Integration and Mass Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016. See also the contributions in De Wilde, P., Leupold, A. and Schmidtke, H. (eds.), *The differentiated politicisation of European governance, Special Issue of West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016.

⁹³ Baglioni, S. and Hurrelmann, A., 'The Eurozone Crisis and Citizen Engagement in EU Affairs', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 104-124, here p. 106.

⁹⁴ For the EP: Hix, S., Noury, A. and Roland, G., *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Otjes, S. and Van der Veer, H., 'The Eurozone crisis and the European Parliament's changing lines of conflict', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 17, 2016, pp. 242–37; for the Commission: Hartlapp M., 'Politicization of the European Commission: When, How, and with What Impact?', in M. W. Bauer and J. Trondal (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System. European Administrative Governance*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015, pp. 145-160; Rauh, C., 'EU politicization and policy initiatives of the European Commission: the case of consumer policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 3, 2019, pp. 344-365, but see on the weak politicisation of the European Commission bureaucracy Bauer, M. and Ege, J., 'Politicization within the European Commission's bureaucracy', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 78, No 3, 2012, pp. 403-424.

among citizens.⁹⁵ While the recent crises seem to have led to a greater polarisation among citizens regarding specific EU policies, such as EU asylum policy or the EU budget,⁹⁶ the dominant patterns found through in interviews and focus groups were 'euro-indifference' as well as insecurity based on feelings of ambivalence, distance and alienation, and fatalism⁹⁷. Similarly, Hurrelmann et al. found that 'European integration can no longer be described as non-politicized in the European citizenry'⁹⁸ but that this politicisation is limited to a small number of fundamental questions such as EU membership, possible further enlargement, as well as the democratic legitimacy of the EU. In turn, they found no significant politicisation of issues related to the routine functioning of the EU's political system, and EU-level policy making in particular. Overall, the authors highlight a 'distinct pattern of *uninformed politicization*': the salience of EU issues has grown, but citizens' knowledge about the EU remains limited, resulting in 'a more diffuse yet also more fundamental feeling of disenfranchisement'⁹⁹. Importantly, this pattern of uninformed politicisation seems to have remained largely unaffected by the eurozone crisis.¹⁰⁰ Citizens are indeed aware of the EU, but still feel neither knowledgeable about its day-to-day activities nor comfortable discussing EU institutions or policies. Importantly, they view their ability to participate effectively in its democratic procedures rather pessimistically.

*'This implies that unless it is possible to increase Europeans' interest in the day-to-day operations of the EU, to make the effects of EU policies more palpable to the citizens, and to bolster their sense of political efficacy at the EU level, the politicisation of European integration – when and where it occurs – is more likely to lead to a renationalisation than to a supranationalisation of European politics. Such a renationalisation is not necessarily bad for democracy, but it requires different democratisation strategies than ones that emphasise supranational citizenship.'*¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Duchesne, S., Frazer, E., Haegel, F. and Van Ingelgom, V., *Citizens' Reactions to European Integration Compared. Overlooking Europe*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, Basingstoke, 2013; Favell, A., *Eurostars and Eurocities. Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2008; Gaxie, D., Hube, N. and Rowell, J., *Perceptions of Europe. A Comparative Sociology of European Attitudes*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2011; White, J., *Political Allegiance After European Integration*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011.

⁹⁶ Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J., and de Vreese, C. H., 'Mismatch? Comparing elite and citizen polarisation on EU issues across four countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2020, pp. 310-328, here p. 312.

⁹⁷ Van Ingelgom, V., *Integrating Indifference: A Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Approach to the Legitimacy of European Integration*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2014.

⁹⁸ Hurrelmann, A., Gora, A. and Wagner, A., 'The Politicization of European Integration: More than an Elite Affair?', *Political Studies*, Vol. 63, No 1, 2015, pp. 43-59, here p. 56.

⁹⁹ Hurrelmann, A., Gora, A. and Wagner, A., 'The Politicization of European Integration: More than an Elite Affair?', *Political Studies*, Vol. 63, No 1, 2015, pp. 43-59, here pp. 56-57, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Baglioni, S. and Hurrelmann, A., 'The Eurozone Crisis and Citizen Engagement in EU Affairs', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 104-124.

¹⁰¹ Baglioni, S. and Hurrelmann, A., 'The Eurozone Crisis and Citizen Engagement in EU Affairs', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 104-124, here p. 121.

3. THE (EUROPEAN) PUBLIC SPHERE

As the very short overview over the debate on EU politicisation processes illustrates, ‘the idea of “the politicisation of European governance” in the singular is untenable to maintain. Rather, we face differentiated forms, degrees and manifestations of politicisation depending on the time, setting and location in which it unfolds’¹⁰². Importantly, it directs attention to the public sphere as the infrastructure for politicisation. Politicisation, in general terms, ‘means the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the field or sphere of politics’, and thus into the ‘realm of public choice’¹⁰³ or, in other words, into the public sphere. Politicisation therefore not simply implies ‘de-legitimation, per se. On the contrary, a political public sphere promoting discursive processes of opinion formation is classically seen as a legitimising force for a political system’¹⁰⁴.

3.1. What Is the Public Sphere?

A ‘public sphere is most commonly referred to as a space or arena for (broad, public) deliberation, discussion, and engagement in societal issues’¹⁰⁵. Definitions are often based on Habermas’ original notion of the public sphere, which conceives it as an arena for ‘the perception, identification, and treatment of problems affecting the whole society’¹⁰⁶, where ‘new problem situations can be perceived [...], discourses aimed at achieving self-understanding can be conducted [...], and collective identities and need interpretations can be circulated’¹⁰⁷. While Habermas’ work originally did not focus on the EU or any form of transnational or international cooperation but on nation states, his later work unequivocally links the emergence of a European public sphere to the EU’s democratic legitimacy:

‘There will be no remedy for the legitimization deficit, however, without a European-wide public sphere—a network that gives citizens of all member states an equal opportunity to take part in an encompassing process of focused political communication.’¹⁰⁸

Habermas’ work inspired a broad literature on the European public sphere from the 1990s onwards, mainly motivated by the growing salience of the debate over the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Yet as with other concepts, such as Europeanisation (see above) or politicisation, scholars draw on various

¹⁰² De Wilde, P., Leupold, A., and Schmidtke H., (2016), ‘Introduction: the differentiated politicisation of European governance’, *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2016, pp. 3-22, here p. 15, emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Zürn, M., ‘Politicization compared: at national, European and global levels’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 977-995; see also Hay, C., *Why We Hate Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, here p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Barisione, M. and Michailidou, A., ‘Do We Need to Rethink EU Politics in the Social Media Era? An Introduction to the Volume’, in M. Barisione and A. Michailidou (eds.), *Social Media and European Politics. Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017, pp. 1-23, here p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ De Vreese, C. H., (2012), ‘The EU as a public sphere’ *Living Reviews in European Governance* Vol. 2, No 3 (updated version), here p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Habermas, J., *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996 [1962], here p.: 301.

¹⁰⁷ Habermas, J., *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996 [1962], here p. 308.

¹⁰⁸ Habermas, J., ‘Why Europe Needs a Constitution’, *New Left Review* 11, 2001, pp. 5- 26, here p. 17.

different definitions¹⁰⁹. The public sphere has been defined as 'open forums of communication'¹¹⁰, as a 'space for communication between political actors and citizen for discussions of matters of common interest'¹¹¹; as 'the place where civil society is linked to the power structure of the state'¹¹²; as 'a system of communication where issues and opinions are being gathered (input), processed (throughput) and passed on (output)'¹¹³; as 'the informally mobilized body of nongovernmental discursive opinion that can serve as a counterweight to the state'¹¹⁴; as the 'space of visible communication between collective decision-making actors and their publics'¹¹⁵, as 'arenas in which (political) issues and positions are discussed'¹¹⁶ or – seemingly simply – as 'an arena which enables citizens to interact and talk about political issues'¹¹⁷.

3.2. Who Ought to Participate in the Public Sphere?

Which communicators ought to be included in political communication and to what degree, however, also depends on the underlying normative democratic assumptions. Within the debate on the European public sphere, scholars draw, more or less explicitly, on three broad approaches to democratic theory, namely theories of liberal representative, participatory and deliberative democracy¹¹⁸. While overlaps are frequent and a precise delineation of these approaches is difficult, the following presents a very abridged and rough outline of some of the main fundamental differences.

3.2.1. Liberal Representative Democracy

The term liberal democratic theory encompasses a range of, both more elitist and more participatory, approaches that consider the expression of citizens' interests and preferences through political participation as essential, but usually limit such participation to indirect and representative means. The most important of these means is the regular election of political representatives, and the main instrument of democratic control by the citizens therefore their ability 'to throw the rascals out'. While

¹⁰⁹ De Vreese, C. H., 'The EU as a public sphere', *Living Reviews in European Governance* Vol, 2, No 3, 2012 (updated version), here p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Risse, T., 'Introduction: European public spheres', in T. Risse (ed.), *European public spheres: Politics is back*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2015, pp. 10-26, here p. 6.

¹¹¹ Brantner, C., Dietrich, A. and Saurwein, F., 2005, 'Europeanization of national public spheres: empirical evidence from Austria', conference paper, online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228423357_Europeanisation_of_National_Public_Spheres_Empirical_Evidence_from_Austria.

¹¹² Eriksen, E. O., 'An Emerging European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, No 3, 2005, pp. 341–363, here p. 342.

¹¹³ Neidhardt, F., 'Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen', in F. Neidhardt (ed.) *Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegung*. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, 1994, pp. 7–41, here p. 8, translation from German.

¹¹⁴ Fraser, N., 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992, pp. 109–42, here p. 134.

¹¹⁵ Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication* Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291–319, here p. 293.

¹¹⁶ Adam, S., 'The European Public Sphere', in G. Mazzoleni (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2015.

¹¹⁷ De Vreese, C., Boomgaarden, H., Banducci S. and Semetko H., 'Light at the End of the Tunnel: Towards a European Public Sphere?', in Thomassen, J., *The Legitimacy of the EU after Enlargement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 44-64, here p. 46.

¹¹⁸ For good overviews, Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J. and Rucht, D., 'Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies', *Theory and Society*. Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 289–324; Walter, S., 'Three Models of the European Public Sphere', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 18, No 6, 2017, pp. 749-770.

more elitist approaches limit citizen participation to the electoral process¹¹⁹, more participatory liberal approaches accord other representatives an important role in articulating and representing citizens' interests as well. Here, citizens' political participation includes representation and/or membership in civil society organisations, interest groups and, above all, political parties¹²⁰.

As a result, liberal approaches also limit citizen participation in the public sphere to a more passive and indirect role:

*'From this perspective, an important criterion of good public discourse is its transparency. It should reveal what citizens need to know about the workings of their government, the parties that aggregate and represent their interests, and the office-holders they have elected to make policy on their behalf. Inclusion is important, not in the sense of giving ordinary citizens a chance to be heard, but in the sense that their representatives should have the time and space to present their contrasting positions fully and accurately.'*¹²¹

From a liberal perspective, the public sphere is thus mainly constituted through political communication of and between political representatives, and less by citizens themselves, with a focus on transparency, public accountability and justification. This view goes back to the writings of Mill who argued that one important aspect of democratic representation was to ensure that those whose 'opinions are over-ruled feel satisfied that their opinion has been heard and set aside [...] for what are thought to be better reasons'¹²².

This perspective is dominant among scholars proposing changes at the EU level aimed at 'allowing the majority in the European Parliament to set the internal agenda of the Parliament, [...] opening up the legislative process inside the Council, and [...] having a more open contest for the Commission President'¹²³. Here, the focus is on the lack of a connection between politics within Parliament and the Council, on the one hand, and the views of EU citizens, on the other: 'The parties in the European Parliament and the governments in the Council may well reflect the various positions of the voters they represent on the issues at stake. However, without an electoral contest connected to political behaviour in these EU institutions it is impossible for voters to punish MEPs or governments for voting the "wrong way". Government responsiveness suffers'¹²⁴.

¹¹⁹ Most famously: Schumpeter, J. A., *'Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy'*, Harper and Row, New York, 1942; Downs, A., *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York, 1957.

¹²⁰ Walter, S., 'Three Models of the European Public Sphere', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 18, No 6, 2017, pp. 749-770, here pp. 751f.; See also Beetham, D., 'Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization', *Political Studies* Vol. 40, No 1, 1992, 40-53, here p. 47.

¹²¹ Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J. and Rucht, D., 'Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 289-324, here p. 291.

¹²² Mill, J. St., *Considerations on Representative Government*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998 [1861], here p. 282.

¹²³ Hix, S., 'Why the EU needs (left-right) politics? Policy reform and accountability are impossible without it', *Notre Europe, Policy Paper* 19, 2006, here p. 2, see also Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity, Cambridge, 2008; Føllesdal, A., and Hix S., 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No 3, 2006, pp. 533-562; Mair, P., 'Political opposition and the European Union', *Government and Opposition* Vol. 42, No 1, 2007, pp. 1-17; Statham, P., and Trenz, H.-J., 'Understanding the Mechanisms of EU Politicization: Lessons from the Eurozone Crisis', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 13, No 3, 2015, pp. 287-306.

¹²⁴ Føllesdal, A., and Hix S., 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No 3, 2006, pp. 533-562, here p. 553.

A similar perspective is also emphasised, for example, by scholars focussing on the role of national parliaments in EU politics¹²⁵, and the parliamentary communication function, in particular¹²⁶. According to Rauh, the 'communicative performance of national parliaments in EU affairs is directly related to the often discussed democratic deficits of supranational governance: if MPs raise European issues, they offer a remedy to the otherwise opaque procedures, the overwhelming complexity, and the difficult attribution of political responsibility in decision-making beyond the nation state'¹²⁷.

Both approaches thus highlight the importance of the public sphere as a medium for (party) political competition, the mobilisation of political support as well as for political justification and accountability, a view also evident in the ruling of the German Federal Constitutional Court on the Lisbon Treaty on 30 June 2009.

*'Democracy first and foremost lives on, and in, a viable public opinion that concentrates on central acts of determination of political direction and the periodic allocation of highest-ranking political offices in the competition of government and opposition. Only this public opinion makes visible the alternatives for elections and other votes and continually calls them to mind also as regards decisions relating to individual issues so that they may remain continuously present and effective in the political opinion-formation of the people via the parties, which are open to participation for all citizens, and in the public space of information'*¹²⁸.

3.2.2. Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy approaches, in turn, criticise the limited forms of citizen participation advocated by liberal approaches and promote both more direct channels of participation for citizens and the regular inclusion of indirect channels via civil society organisations, interest groups or social movements. Participatory approaches thus neither deny the importance of representation for democracy¹²⁹, nor demand that citizens participate in all political decisions at all times. Rather, highlighting the importance of active citizen engagement in politics both for the citizen as an individual and for the system as a whole, participatory democracy, also referred to as 'associative democracy'¹³⁰ focuses on the availability of institutional opportunities to ensure that citizen participation can take place continuously and as far as possible:

¹²⁵ For overviews, see Auel, K., 'National Parliaments and the European Union', in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019, online publication: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1490>; Rozenberg, O., *The Role of National Parliaments in the EU after Lisbon: Potentialities and Challenges*, Study for the European Parliament, 2017, online at:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/de/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2017\)583126](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/de/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2017)583126); Rozenberg, O. and Hefftl, C., 'Introduction', in Hefftl, C., Neuhold, C., Rozenberg, O., and Smith, J. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of National Parliaments and the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015, pp. 1-39.

¹²⁶ Auel, K., 'Democratic Accountability and National Parliaments: Redefining the Impact of Parliamentary Scrutiny in EU Affairs', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 13, No 4, 2007, pp. 487-504; Auel, K., and Raunio, T., 'Introduction: Connecting with the Electorate? Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 1-12; Rauh, C., 'Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991-2013', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 16, No 1, 2015, pp. 116-138.

¹²⁷ Rauh, C., 'Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991-2013', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 16, No 1, 2015, pp. 116-138, here p. 118.

¹²⁸ BVerfGE, 2 BvE 2/08, 30 June 2009, para. 250.

¹²⁹ E.g. Fishkin, J., *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2009; Warren, M. E., 'What Can Democratic Participation Mean Today?', *Political Theory* Vol. 30, No 5, 2002, pp. 677-701.

¹³⁰ Hirst, P., *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Government*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994.

*Active citizens govern themselves directly here, not necessarily at every level and in every instance, but frequently enough and in particular when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is deployed. Self-government is carried on through institutions designed to facilitate ongoing civic participation in agenda-setting, deliberation, legislation, and policy implementation.*¹³¹

As a result, preconditions for good public discourse go beyond demands for transparency in and through political communication. Rather, the role of public discourse 'is to mobilize participation among ordinary people, not merely to help elites decide'¹³², and the public sphere should therefore provide 'the institutional sites where popular political will should take form and citizens should be able to constitute themselves as active agents in the political process'.¹³³

3.2.3. Deliberative /Discursive democracy

Deliberative democracy approaches, finally, focus on both citizen participation and, in particular, on the quality of public discourse.

Similar to participatory democracy approaches, proponents of deliberative democracy argue that citizen participation needs to extend beyond voting in elections or being represented by civil society organisations. Rather citizens ought to have means of direct participation in political processes, in particular through access to deliberative discourses.¹³⁴

Again, deliberative democracy theorists usually accept that routine political decisions are made by political representatives, i.e. governments, parliaments, courts and political parties, but argue that for important normative questions political discourse ought not be limited to actors at the political centre but include citizens as well. 'In an ideal "public sphere", equal citizens assemble into a public and set their own agenda through open communication'¹³⁵. In addition, deliberative democracy approaches emphasise criteria regarding the style of public discourse. In particular, they stress that debates have to be held in a rational manner and be based on reasoned argument and mutual respect, rather than on negotiation, compromise or simple demand.¹³⁶ To be truly deliberative, participants in discourses also have to be free from any constraints by political or economic force or rules imposed by authorities and be considered as equals irrespective of status or power – with equal chances to participate as well as equal access to freely available information.¹³⁷ Deliberative democracy assumes that if public discourse takes place in such a truly deliberative manner, it is possible for citizens to see beyond their pure self-interest and to agree on a common good¹³⁸ – a concept that theorist with a more elitist liberal

¹³¹ Barber, B., *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, here p. 151.

¹³² Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W.A., Gerhards, J. and Rucht, D., 'Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies', *Theory and Society* Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 289–324, here p. 299.

¹³³ Dahlgren, P., 'Introduction', in P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds.), *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 1–24, here p. 2.

¹³⁴ Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D., *Democracy and Disagreement*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

¹³⁵ Fossum, J.E. and Schlesinger, P., 'The European Union and the public sphere A communicative space in the making?', in J.E. Fossum and P. Schlesinger (eds.), *The European Union and the Public Sphere. A communicative space in the making?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 119, here p. 3.

¹³⁶ E.g. Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D., *Democracy and Disagreement*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge., 1996; see also Gutman, A. and Thompson, D., *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2004.

¹³⁷ Cohen, J., 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in D. Matravers and J. Pike (eds.), *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Routledge, London, New York, 2003, 342–360; Habermas, J., 'Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, No 4, 2006, pp. 411–426.

¹³⁸ Bohman, J., 'Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No 4, 1998, pp. 400–425.

understanding of democracy argue does not exist or at least cannot be rationally agreed on.¹³⁹ For deliberative theorists, the public sphere is therefore

'a precondition for the realisation of popular sovereignty, because, in principle, it entitles everybody to speak without any limitation, whether on themes, participation, questions, time or resources. The idea of a public sphere provides the sort of deliberative arrangement that fits the requirement of discourse theory, namely that a norm is deemed legitimate only when all affected have accepted it in a free and rational debate. A deliberative public sphere has problem-solving functions as it increases the level of information and understanding between co-operators, but more importantly, it is a sphere of political justification intrinsic to democracy'.¹⁴⁰

From a deliberative theory perspective, the main question is therefore whether the EU can develop a public sphere that all citizens can access as equals, and through the medium of which all points of view can be debated and compared. 'Access to *one* common public – one single European public space – is necessary to enable citizens to address the same political issues and be exposed to the same information, arguments and counter-arguments.'¹⁴¹ As will be discussed below, such a vision of the European public sphere raises important problems regarding a common language, media and identity.

3.2.4. Functions of the Public Sphere

As the short summary illustrates, different approaches to democratic theory come with different conceptions of the role and function of public discourse, the public sphere and especially the role of citizens in both. Yet as a bare minimum four, partially overlapping, functions ascribed to the public sphere in a democratic polity can be distilled¹⁴²:

1. Information: provide citizens with information on political positions, i.e. problem definitions and proposed solutions, of different political actors to enable them to identify those closest to their own preferences.
2. Justification and Accountability: enable citizens to scrutinise actions of political actors to hold them accountable and to exercise their right of democratic control at and in between elections.
3. Participation and Responsiveness: provide citizens and groups with the opportunity of discussing important political questions and making their voices heard by policy makers.
4. Social Cohesion and Trust: help to build a collective identity which may in turn trigger a sense of belonging to a common (European) community.

¹³⁹ Schumpeter, J. A., *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York, 1942, here p. 252.

¹⁴⁰ Eriksen, E. O., 'Conceptualising European public spheres: general, segmented and strong publics', in J.E. Fossum and P. Schlesinger (eds.), *The European Union and the Public Sphere. A communicative space in the making?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 23-43, here p. 27.

¹⁴¹ Eriksen, E. O., 'Conceptualising European public spheres: general, segmented and strong publics', in J.E. Fossum and P. Schlesinger (eds.), *The European Union and the Public Sphere. A communicative space in the making?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 23-43, here p. 38.

¹⁴² See also Meyer, C. O., *'Europäische Öffentlichkeit als Kontrollsphäre: Die Europäische Kommission, die Medien und politische Verantwortung*, Vistas, Berlin, 2002, pp. here 68-71; Eriksen, E. O., 'An Emerging European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, No 3, 2005, pp. 341-363; De Vreese, C., 'The EU as a public sphere', *Living Reviews in European Governance* Vo. 2, No 3, 2012, (updated version), here p. 6.

Ultimately, thus, ‘the main contribution of a public sphere to democracy is its ability to transform isolated individuals into a community of active, informed and mutually trusting citizens’¹⁴³.

3.3. Is There a European Public Sphere?

In the debate over the European public sphere, two main approaches can be distinguished:

The first approach describes a unified European public sphere that stretches beyond the nation states and includes all EU citizens (either as participants or just the audience) in a common public debate. Whether or not such a European public sphere can emerge, has been subject of intense debate. For most commentators, a European public sphere in this sense would require a common language, a shared identity and a common infrastructure, i.e. European media¹⁴⁴ - and neither of these vital elements are seen as present or likely to develop within the EU. Accordingly, the EU faces ‘the triple deficits of the lack of a pre-existing sense of collective identity, the lack of a Europe-wide policy discourse, the lack of a Europe-wide institutional infrastructure that could assure the political accountability of office holders to a European constituency’¹⁴⁵. A truly European public sphere in the sense of a common EU-wide public debate – on the same themes and issues under the same criteria of relevance – is therefore considered not achievable, at least not in the foreseeable future, a perspective also well illustrated in the decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court in its decision on the Lisbon Treaty:

‘Even if due to the great successes of European integration, a joint European public that engages in an issue-related cooperation in the rooms of resonance of their respective states is evidently growing ... it cannot be overlooked, however, that the public perception of factual issues and of political leaders remains connected to a considerable extent to patterns of identification which are related to the nation-state, language, history and culture.’¹⁴⁶

As a result, the concept of a European public sphere defined as a single and unified public space spanning the whole of the EU was rejected in the academic literature rather early on as an unreachable ideal or utopia. Instead, and in part drawing on Habermas’s re-conceptualisation of the public sphere as constituted by different interconnected arenas of public communication¹⁴⁷, the focus turned to the concept of *national, but connected and Europeanised*, public spheres¹⁴⁸.

The public sphere extends from episodic café and street gatherings, via organised professional, cultural and artistic public spheres, to abstract public spheres, where listeners, readers and viewers

¹⁴³ See also Meyer, C. O., *‘Europäische Öffentlichkeit als Kontrollsphäre: Die Europäische Kommission, die Medien und politische Verantwortung*, Vistas, Berlin, 2002, here p. 71, translation by the authors.

¹⁴⁴ Gerhards, J., ‘Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit’, *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, 1993, pp. 96–110; Grimm, D., ‘Does Europe Need a Constitution?’, *European Law Journal*, Vol. 1, No 13, 1995, pp. 282–302; Kielmansegg, P., ‘Integration und Demokratie’, in M. Jachtenfuchs and B. Kohler-Koch, (eds.), *Europäische Integration*, Leske und Budrich, Opladen, 1996, 47–71.

¹⁴⁵ Scharpf, Fritz W., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, here p. 187.

¹⁴⁶ BVerfGE, 2 BvE 2/08, 30 June 2009, para. 251.

¹⁴⁷ Habermas, J., *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996, here p. 373.

¹⁴⁸ Koopmans, R. and Erbe, J., ‘Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanised Political Communication’, *Discussion Paper SP IV 2003-403*, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), 2003; Wessler, H., Peters, B., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen-von Königslöw, K., and Sifft, S., *The Trans-nationalization of Public Spheres*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.

*are isolated and spread in time and space. There are strictly situated public spheres, where the participants meet face to face; there are written public spheres, and there are anonymous, faceless, public spheres made possible by the new electronic technologies.'*¹⁴⁹

Within the discussion on the European political public sphere, the empirical literature focuses mainly on three arenas, most importantly the media, but also on parliaments, and here national parliaments in particular, as well as political parties. Section 4 deals with political parties; here, we will discuss the media and parliaments, following the distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' publics introduced by Nancy Fraser. According to Fraser, strong publics, such as parliaments, are spaces of institutionalised deliberation 'whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision making', while weak publics, such as the media are spaces 'whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making'¹⁵⁰. Yet lack of institutionalisation and formal decision-making competencies should not per se be equated with powerlessness. 'Soft public spheres have discursive powers. The media or even protests on the street might be very powerful in influencing political decisions'¹⁵¹. The following discusses the findings for each of these arenas and then investigate the question to what extent these arenas relate to each other, thus broadening their scope in terms of creating a European or Europeanised public sphere.

3.4. The Media as Infrastructure and Embodiment of the (European) Public Sphere

Both the literature on politicisation in the EU, as well as the studies on the emergence of European(ised) political public spheres focus predominantly on the on the mass media. This is based on the argument that in today's 'audience democracy'¹⁵², the media act as a relais between political arenas and the citizens. 'Information in the mass media becomes the only contact many [citizens, the authors] have with politics ... most of what people know comes to them "second" or "third" hand from the mass media or other people.'¹⁵³ The mass media have become indispensable for political communication and 'the central means by which individuals are connected to the wider social and political world'.¹⁵⁴ Yet the media are, of course, not just a mouthpiece of political elites but relatively free in selecting what news

¹⁴⁹ Eriksen, E. O., 'Conceptualising European public spheres: general, segmented and strong publics', in J.E. Fossum and P. Schlesinger (eds.), *The European Union and the Public Sphere. A communicative space in the making?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 23-43, here p. 27.

¹⁵⁰ Fraser, N., 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992, pp. 109-42, here p.134; for a similar distinction Eriksen, E.O., 'Conceptualizing European Public Spheres: General, Segmented and Strong Publics', *ARENA Working Paper* No 3, 2004.

¹⁵¹ Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg, H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette* Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693-712, here p. 694.

¹⁵² Manin, B., *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, here p. 220.

¹⁵³ McCombs, M. E. and Shaw, D. L., 'The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No 2, 1972, pp. 176-187, here p. 176, see also Bennett, L. and Entman R. M., 'Mediated politics: An Introduction', in L. Bennett and R. M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 1-31; Koopmans, R., and Statham, P., (eds.), *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010; Mazzoleni, G. and Schulz, W., '"Mediatization" of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?', *Political Communication*, Vol. 16, No 3, 1999, pp. 247-261, here p. 254.

¹⁵⁴ Hallin, D. C. and Mancini, P., *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, here pp. 33-34.

they deem worthy of covering and thus in creating realities by categorizing and framing events and actors.¹⁵⁵

The media are considered to fulfil a manifold role regarding the public sphere: From a liberal democratic perspective, their main function is to act as a mirror of the political system, thus mainly providing information and transparency for citizens on political matters. From a participatory perspective, the media have a crucial function of representing 'all significant interests in society. [The media] should facilitate their participation in the public domain, enable them to contribute to public debate and have an input in the framing of public policy'¹⁵⁶. This includes channelling not only plural, but also and necessarily conflictive views on politics.¹⁵⁷ Approaches based on deliberative democracy, finally, see the media as playing a crucial role in making expressions, discourses, images, and events publicly available.¹⁵⁸ Both participatory and deliberative democratic theory approaches therefore insist on the importance of a visibility of civil society actors and citizens in the media.¹⁵⁹

In short, by informing, mirroring, aggregating and influencing public opinion, the media both embody¹⁶⁰ and provide the infrastructure for the political sphere. This role becomes even more important in the case of complex and 'remote' topics such as EU politics for citizens¹⁶¹, not just in terms of informing citizens on EU issues, but also by mobilising citizen participation in EU affairs.

*'[T]he more the national populations realize, and the media help them to realize, how profoundly the decisions of the European Union pervade their daily lives, the more their interest in making use of their democratic rights also as EU citizens will increase.'*¹⁶²

It is therefore hardly surprising that the media have been the main object of research on the European public sphere(s). Here, we find two main strands of the literature focussing on European media, on the one hand, and Europeanised national media, on the other.

3.4.1. (Pan-)European Media

A first, relatively small strand of the literature focuses on the development of truly European - i.e. supranational or pan-European - mass media, yet the assessment remains overall rather bleak. Although a number of supranational print and digital media have been established, such as the rather short-lived newspaper *The European*, the weekly *European Voice*, *EU Observer* or *Euroactiv.com*, they have so far failed to reach the broad public. These are accompanied by international or pan-European newspapers, both paper-based and digital, such as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Politico Europe*, *Financial*

¹⁵⁵ Chong, D. and Druckman, J. N., 'Framing Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 10, 2007, pp. 103–126.

¹⁵⁶ Curran, J., 'Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere', in P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds.), *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*. Routledge, London, 1991, 27–57, here p. 30; see also Dahlgren, P., 'Introduction', in P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds.), *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*. Routledge, London, 1991, 1–24, here p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Trenz, H., 'Understanding Media Impact on European Integration: Enhancing or Restricting the Scope of Legitimacy of the EU?', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 30, No 2, 2008, 291–309, here p. 294.

¹⁵⁸ Peters, B., 'Public Discourse, Identity and the Problem of Democratic Legitimacy', in E. O. Eriksen (ed.), *Making the European Polity: Reflexive Integration in the EU*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp. 84–124, here p. 88.

¹⁵⁹ Walter, S., 'Three Models of the European Public Sphere', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 18, No 6, 2017, pp. 749–770, here p. 155.

¹⁶⁰ For a critical view of equating 'the public sphere' with 'the media' see van de Steeg, M., 'Rethinking the conditions for a public sphere in the European Union', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 5, No 4, 2002, pp. 499–519, here p. 502f.

¹⁶¹ De Vreese, C. H. and Boomgaarden, H. G., 'Media effects on public opinion about the enlargement of the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 44, No 2, 2006, pp. 419–36, here p. 421.

¹⁶² Habermas, J., 'The Crisis of the European Union in the Light of a Constitutionalization of International Law', *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 23, No 2, 2012, pp. 335–348, here p. 347.

Times or The Economist. Yet despite their evident success, their audience also remains limited to political, cultural or business elites. Finally, there are a fairly large number of TV channels that are pan-European or global in scope¹⁶³, broadcast in most if not all European member states and often have subtitles, dubbing or even special versions for particular areas or countries. Among them are channels mainly devoted to content related to sports (e.g. Eurosport), music (MTV) and other specialised interests (Discovery Channel) as well as to content for children (Cartoon Network), but a number of them are dedicated to general political content. Here, Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg identify BBC World, CNN International, Euronews, Sky News, CNBC-Europe, Deutsche Welle TV, TV 5, France 24 and Al Jazeera English.¹⁶⁴ In addition, Arte TV provides a mix of cultural and political content. According to data from the European Audiovisual Observatory, more than one fifth of all TV channels based in the EU28 were specifically targeting other EU28 markets in 2019.¹⁶⁵

According to Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg¹⁶⁶, three developments have contributed to the growth of European or transnational TV media. In addition to the introduction of private TV stations and technological innovations such as satellite broadcasting the authors highlight the role of the EU and its member states in facilitating 'the opening of the European market for transnational media ownership, production and consumption with a view to promoting the emergence of a European media market with European players who can compete on a global scale'. While the main interest may have been economic¹⁶⁷, the aim was also to promote a European public sphere constituted by a diversity of European media to generate a broader identification with the EU among citizens.

Again, the success of transnational news television channels in Europe should not be overestimated: By 2009 they had acquired no more than 2 percent of the cumulated audience share in national markets.¹⁶⁸ While we do not have more recent figures, the latest report on the internationalisation of TV audience markets in Europe of the European Audiovisual Observatory¹⁶⁹ suggests that this market share has not grown substantially since. Thus, while we have undoubtedly witnessed a transformation of the European transnational media landscape over the last three decades that is rather remarkable¹⁷⁰, news oriented transnational media continue to attract mainly elite audiences, while the reach among the

¹⁶³ Chalaby, J. K., 'Transnational Television in Europe: The Role of Pan-European Channels', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17, No 2, 2002, pp. 183–203; Chalaby, J. K., 'Deconstructing the Transnational: A Typology of Transnational Television Channels in Europe', *New Media and Society*, Vol. 7, No 2, 2005, pp. 155–75; Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693–712.

¹⁶⁴ Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693–712.

¹⁶⁵ Ene, L., 'Supply of audiovisual media services in Europe. MAVISE insights – 2019', *European Audiovisual Observatory*, 2020, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/supply-of-audiovisual-media-services-in-europe-mavise-insights-2019/16809c7874>, see also Schneeberger A., 'The internationalisation of TV audience markets in Europe', *European Audiovisual Observatory*, Strasbourg, 2019, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/the-internationalisation-of-tv-audience-markets-in-europe/168094ea72>.

¹⁶⁶ Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693–712, here p. 697; see also Gripsrud, J., 'Television and the European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 22, No 4, 2007, pp. 479–492, here p. 485ff.

¹⁶⁷ Baisnée, O. and Marchetti, D., 'La Production de l'information "européenne". Le cas de la chaîne paneuropéenne d'information Euronews', in D. Marchetti (ed.), *En quête d'Europe. Médias européens et médiatisation de l'Europe*, Presses Universitaires, Rennes, 2004, pp. 25–52, here p. 34.

¹⁶⁸ Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693–712, here p. 698.

¹⁶⁹ Schneeberger A., 'The internationalisation of TV audience markets in Europe', *European Audiovisual Observatory*, Strasbourg, 2019, <https://rm.coe.int/the-internationalisation-of-tv-audience-markets-in-europe/168094ea72>.

¹⁷⁰ Brüggemann, M. and Schulz-Forberg H., 'Becoming Pan-European? Transnational Media and the European Public Sphere', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No 8, 2009, pp. 693–712, here p. 707.

broader European public remains very modest. For the foreseeable future, the formation of a unified European political public sphere is seen to be hampered by linguistic restrictions, cultural heterogeneity, and the strong link between media systems and national mass audiences¹⁷¹.

3.4.2. Europeanisation of National Media

For most scholars, the *national* mass media are therefore the principal forums within which a Europeanised public sphere can materialise.¹⁷² For Schlesinger¹⁷³, for example, this is based on three prerequisites, namely, first, the dissemination of a European news agenda that, second, becomes an integral part of citizens' daily or routine media consumption and thus, third, enables them to define their citizenship beyond the national level and in European terms. In addition, it has been argued that a Europeanisation of national public spheres also requires the inclusion of (European) non-national actors, and the discussion of EU topics through similar frames that enable transnational discussion.¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, we can distinguish between the Europeanisation of the media in a vertical and a horizontal sense.¹⁷⁵

Europeanisation of national mass media in the former, vertical, sense can be defined as an expansion of their focus away from the purely national political arena and towards (upwards) including the EU level. An indication of a Europeanised public sphere therefore consists of increasing salience of and references to European politics and political actors/institutions within the domestic media. Here, earlier studies found rather low levels of media Europeanisation both in television news¹⁷⁶ and the print media¹⁷⁷ that only increased fairly slightly during major political events such as EP elections or national EU referendums¹⁷⁸. Indeed, 'in terms of its officials, the EU is faceless. Given the power of an institution such as the European Commission, it is amazing how absent its officials were in the television coverage of EU (!) affairs. ... there is no European public sphere. ... Television, it seems, has never left the nation state'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷¹ Pfetsch, B., 'Agents of Transnational Debate Across Europe', *Javnost - The Public*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2008, pp. 21-40, here p. 23, see also Monza, S. and Anduiza, E., 'The Visibility of the EU in the National Public Spheres in Times of Crisis and Austerity: EU public Visibility', *Politics & Policy*, 44 (3), 2016, 499-524, here p. 503.

¹⁷² Gerhards, J., 'Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, 1993, pp. 96-110.

¹⁷³ Schlesinger, P., 'Changing Spaces of Political Communication: The Case of the European Union', *Political Communication*, Vol. 16, 1999, pp. 263-79, here p. 277.

¹⁷⁴ Risse, T., 'Introduction: European public spheres', in T. Risse (ed.), *European public spheres: Politics is back*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 10-26, here p. 10f.

¹⁷⁵ Koopmans, R., and Erbe, J., 'Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanised Political Communication', *Discussion Paper SP IV 2003-403*, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), 2003, here p. 6

¹⁷⁶ De Vreese, C. H., 'Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration', Amsterdam, Aksant Academic Publishers, 2002. Peter, J., 'Why European TV news matters: A cross-nationally comparative analysis of TV news about the European Union and its effects', Amsterdam: Ascor, 2003. Peter, J. and de Vreese, C. H., 'In search of Europe – A cross- national comparative study of the European Union in national television news', *Harvard Journal of Press/Politics* Vol. 9, No 4, 2004, pp. 3-24.

¹⁷⁷ Kevin, D., 'Europe in the media: A comparison of reporting, representation and rhetoric in national media systems in Europe', Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah and London, 2004; but see Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291-319.

¹⁷⁸ de Vreese, C. H. and Semetko, H. A., 'News Matters: Influences on the Vote in the Danish 2000 Euro Referendum Campaign', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 43, No 5, 2004, pp. 699-722.

¹⁷⁹ Peter, J. and de Vreese, C. H., 'In search of Europe – A cross-national comparative study of the European Union in national television news', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 9, No 4, 2004, pp. 3-24, here p. 17 and p. 18.

More recent findings on, mainly, national print media¹⁸⁰, however, clearly suggest an increasing focus of the media on EU issues:

*'While the consensual style of politics that has marked European integration over the first decades has frequently not created sufficient news value to make European politics salient in the media, the progressively intensifying politicization of European integration has been subject to substantial news coverage.'*¹⁸¹

Still, media coverage mainly focuses on key events like EU summits, EU referenda or European elections¹⁸², on powerful executive actors¹⁸³, and on the 'output side' of politics, i.e. on the results of EU decision-making.¹⁸⁴ In addition, EU politics are still rather consistently found to be covered from a national perspective.¹⁸⁵

A smaller strand in the literature, finally, focuses on the Europeanisation of national public spheres in latter, horizontal, sense. Here, Habermas argued that

*'The transnationalization of the existing national publics does not require any different news media, but instead a different practice on the part of the existing media. They must not only thematize and address European issues as such, but must at the same time report on the political positions and controversies evoked by the same topics in other Member States.'*¹⁸⁶

Similarly, Trenz¹⁸⁷ argues that while the visibility of EU issues in term of sheer quantity of European political communication in relation to other forms of political communication within the media is the necessary precondition for a European public sphere, the *connectivity of communication* across media within member states, i.e. the coverage and communication of the same political issues, constitutes a minimal requirement for a European public sphere.

¹⁸⁰ Brüggemann, M. and Kleinen-von Königslöw, K., 'Let's Talk about Europe: Why Europeanization Shows a Different Face in Different Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, No 1, 2009, pp. 27–48; Koopmans, R., and Statham, P., (eds.), *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010; Meijers, M., 'The Euro-crisis as a catalyst of the Europeanization of public spheres? A cross-temporal study of the Netherlands and Germany', *LEQS Paper No 62*, 2013; Michailidou, A. and Trenz H.-J., 'Eurocrisis and the Media. Preserving or Undermining Democracy?', *ARENA Working Paper 10*, 2014; Wessler, H., Peters, B., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen-von Königslöw, K. and Sifft, S., *The Transnationalization of Public Spheres*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008; Boomgaarden, H. G., de Vreese, C. H., Schuck, A. R. T., Azrout, R., Elenbaas, M., van Spanje, J. H. P., and Vliegenthart, R., 'Across Time and Space: Explaining Variation in News Coverage of the European Union', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 2013, pp. 608–629; Kleinnijenhuis, J., and van Atteveldt, W., 'The impact of the explosion of EU news on voter choice in the 2014 EU elections', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 104–115.

¹⁸¹ Michailidou, A. and Trenz H.-J., 'Mediat(iz)ing EU politics: Online news coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections', *Communications*, Vol. 35, No 3, 2010, pp. 327–346, here p. 328.

¹⁸² Boomgaarden, H. G., Vliegenthart, R., de Vreese, C. H., and Schuck, A. R. T., 'News on the move: Exogenous events and news coverage of the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 17, No 4, 2010, pp. 506–526.

¹⁸³ Koopmans, R., 'Who Inhabits the European Public Sphere? Winners and Losers, Supporters and Opponents in Europeanized Political Debates', in R. Koopmans and P. Statham (eds.), *The Making of a European Public Sphere. Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 63–96.

¹⁸⁴ Wessler, H., Peters, B., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen-von Königslöw, K. and Sifft, S., *The Transnationalization of Public Spheres*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ De Wilde, P., Michailidou, A. and Trenz, H.-J., *Contesting Europe. Exploring Euroscepticism in Online Media Coverage*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Habermas, J., 'The Crisis of the European Union in the Light of a Constitutionalization of International Law', *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 23, No 2, 2012, pp. 335–348, here p. 346.

¹⁸⁷ Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291–319, here p. 292.

This form of Europeanisation of the media thus includes, on the one hand, the horizontal expansion of media coverage towards political developments throughout the EU, integrating news as well as opinions and arguments from political actors of other member states. On the other hand, it refers to the separate, but simultaneous coverage of EU topics by national media at the same time with the same intensity and structure of meaning.¹⁸⁸

Studies focussing on horizontal connectivity have, however, found less evidence for horizontal than for vertical Europeanisation. Again, the main finding is that national media tend to focus on EU issues from a national perspective and rarely reference other member states or non-national actors.¹⁸⁹ General exceptions are events, such as European elections, where the media cover results in other member states, and recently especially the results of Eurosceptic parties¹⁹⁰, or politicians from other member states. Similarly, *simultaneous* print media coverage of EU issues has mainly been found related to 'big events' rather than the 'the fastidious details of every single directorate general or the long drawn-out and boring decision-making processes'¹⁹¹, such as the physical introduction of the euro, the 'Haider debate' in 2000, the Commission corruption scandal or the BSE crisis, but also to broader issues such as Eastern Enlargement, the debate on institutional reform, the Future of Europe, the Lisbon Treaty or the eurozone crisis.¹⁹² Yet while issues are being discussed *at the same time* throughout Europe, domestic public spheres are rarely linked horizontally by common frames or cleavages. Analysing the media coverage of the Berlusconi -Schulz affair¹⁹³ across several member states, Downey and König point out that even in 'a case that is ideally suited to be an object of a Europeanized public sphere, we cannot find the same framings at the same time with the same intensity across EU-Europe. Distinctly European framings in national public spheres are largely absent'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ van de Steeg, M., Rauer, V., Rivet, S. and Risse, T., 2003, cited from Downey, J. and Koenig, T., 'Is There a European Public Sphere? The Berlusconi-Schulz Case', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2006, pp. 165–187, here p. 168f.

¹⁸⁹ Sifft, S., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen von KönigsLöw, K., Peters, B., and Wimmel, A., 'Segmented Europeanization: Exploring the legitimacy of the European Union from a public discourse perspective', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 45, No 1, 2007, pp. 127–155; Brüggemann, M., Sifft, S., Kleinen von KönigsLöw, K., Peters, B., and Wimmel, A., 'Segmented Europeanization: Trends and patterns in the transnationalization of public spheres in Europe', in Wessler, H (ed.), *Public deliberation and public culture: The writings of Bernhard Peters*, 1993–2005, 2003

¹⁹⁰ Dutceac Segesten, A. and Bossetta, M., 'The Eurosceptic Europeanization of public spheres: print and social media reactions to the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 17, 2019, pp. 361–379.

¹⁹¹ Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291–319, here p. 303.

¹⁹² Berkel, B., *'Konflikt als Motor europäischer Öffentlichkeit. Eine Inhaltsanalyse von Tageszeitungen in Deutschland, Frankreich, Großbritannien und Österreich'*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2006; van de Steeg, M., 'Rethinking the conditions for a public sphere in the European Union', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 5, No 4, 2002, pp. 499–519; Eder, K., Kantner, C., 'Transnationale Resonanzstrukturen in Europa. Eine Kritik der Rede vom Öffentlichkeitsdefizit', in Bach, M. (ed.) *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 40, Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften, 2000, 306 – 331; Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291–319; Van de Steeg, M., 'Does a Public Sphere Exist in the European Union? An Analysis of the Content of the Debate on the Haider Case', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 45, 2004, 609–634; Drewski D., 'Has there been a European Public Discourse on the Euro Crisis? A Content Analysis of German and Spanish Newspaper Editorials', *Javnost – The Public*, Vol. 22, No 3, 2015, pp. 264–282; Van Cauwenberge, A., Gelders, D. and Joris, W., 'Covering the European Union', *Javnost - The Public*, Vol. 16, No 4, 2009, 41–54.

¹⁹³ In his controversial address as president of the European Council of Ministers to the European Parliament on 2 July 2003, Silvio Berlusconi compared the Social Democrat MEP Martin Schulz to a kapò, an auxiliary concentration camp guard. For context see Downey, J. and Koenig, T., 'Is There a European Public Sphere? The Berlusconi-Schulz Case', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2006, pp. 165–187, here pp. 168ff.

¹⁹⁴ Downey, J. and Koenig, T., 'Is There a European Public Sphere? The Berlusconi-Schulz Case', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2006, pp. 165–187, here p. 184.

3.4.3. A Spiral of Euroscepticism? The Impact of Europeanised Media Coverage

Intimately related to the discussion of the media as the embodiment and infrastructure for Europeanised public spheres is the question of the *effects* of media coverage of EU issues on public opinion and on attitudes towards the EU, in particular. In other words, the media may 'not only influence *what* citizens think about (agenda-setting), but also *how* they think about these issues (framing)'¹⁹⁵.

One of the oldest strands of the literature on media effects has put forward the so-called 'video malaise' thesis¹⁹⁶, which postulates generally negative effects of mass media, and of TV in particular. Cappella and Jamieson's famous 'spiral of cynicism'¹⁹⁷ claims that the media with their focus on strategic reporting (focus on the political performance of politicians, the battles they are engaged in, and the tactics they employ to achieve political victory) fuels public distrust and cynicism, which in turn, can lead to a disaffection or even alienation from politics and the political system and a decrease in political participation or civic engagement. Proponents of the *mobilisation thesis*, by contrast, argue that the media have a positive effect by contributing to citizens' interest in politics, increasing political knowledge and stimulating political participation¹⁹⁸, albeit not necessarily trust¹⁹⁹. Here, as argued by Pippa Norris, the relationship between media exposure and political trust may rather be one of mutual reinforcement, or a 'virtuous circle': Citizens actively seeking information through mainstream media are generally found to be more interested in politics and to show higher levels of political trust to begin with, and continued exposure to political news will reinforce both²⁰⁰.

With regard to this dispute, studies have also found the type of media to matter. While exposure to media with high levels of political content, such as public television and broadsheets, has been found to contribute to increased knowledge and political participation (e.g. in elections), exposure to news outlets with little political content had at best slightly positive, and often negative effects.²⁰¹ Depending on the type of media, the relationship between media consumptions and political engagement may therefore result in both, a 'virtuous circle' and a 'spiral of cynicism' ('dual effects hypothesis'²⁰²).

Within the literature on the Europeanisation of national media, we find a very similar debate. There is a general consensus that 'European citizens are responsive to the ways in which the mass media cover

¹⁹⁵ De Vreese, C. H., 'A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?', *Acta Politica*, Vol. 42, 2007, 271-86, here p. 273, emphasis added.

¹⁹⁶ Robinson, M., 'American political legitimacy in an era of electronic journalism', in D. Cater and R. Adler (eds.), *Television as a social force: New approaches to TV criticism*, Praeger, New York, 1975, pp. 97-141.

¹⁹⁷ Cappella, J. N. and Jamieson, K.H., *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

¹⁹⁸ Bennett, S. E., Rhine, S., Flickinger, R. S. and Bennett, L.L.M., 'Video malaise' Revisited: public trust in the media and government, *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 4, No 4, 1999, pp. 8-23.

¹⁹⁹ Tworzecki, H., and Semetko, H., 'Media use and political engagement in three new democracies: Malaise versus mobilization in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 17, No 4, 2012, pp. 407-32.

²⁰⁰ Norris, P., *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000; see also Avery, J. M., 'Videomalaise or virtuous circle? The influence of news media on political trust', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 14, No 4, 2009, pp. 410-33.

²⁰¹ De Vreese, C. H. and Boomgaarden, H. G., 'Media Message Flows and Interpersonal Communication: The Conditional Nature of Effects on Public Opinion', *Communication Research*, Vol. 33, 2006, pp. 419-437; Strömbäck, J., Djerf-Pierre, M. and Shehata, A., 'A question of time? A longitudinal analysis of the relationship between news media consumption and political trust', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 21, No 1, 2016, pp. 88-110.

²⁰² Aarts, K. and Semetko, H. A., 'The divided electorate: Media use and political involvement', *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No 3, 2003, pp. 759-84.

EU politics and policies, and their responsiveness translates into changes in attitudes²⁰³. Yet whether exposure to media coverage leads to more positive attitudes towards the EU or to increased Euroscepticism among citizens is still an open question.

On the one hand, a number of studies assert that visibility in the media increases not just the awareness for EU issues among citizens, but also trust in EU institutions²⁰⁴, for example in Parliament²⁰⁵. The underlying argument rests on the close relationship between awareness and understanding of political institutions or processes, on the one hand, and trust in those institutions and processes, on the other. Yet as mentioned above, this may well be the result of a 'virtuous circle'²⁰⁶: Those that already have a higher level of trust in and show support for the EU and its institutions may also be more likely to consume more news regarding the EU, thus reinforcing trust and support. Similarly, more recent findings suggest that exposure to EU news may reinforce citizens' attitudes with those supportive of the EU becoming more positive, and those sceptical becoming even less supportive.²⁰⁷

Here, Trenz²⁰⁸ also highlights a different, 'banal', type of Europeanisation of the national media that consists of almost constant rhetorical references to Europe or the EU in the context of otherwise purely national reporting. These occur in different contexts, inter alia as routine references to events that structure national politicians' activities, comparative references, references to EU law, actors or institutions etc. Through such continuous references (in his analysis of newspapers in six member states, Trenz found such references in every fifth article) 'Europe is familiarized and rendered meaningful instead of being openly debated', they 'remind us of Europe's daily presence in the form of routines in our everyday lives'²⁰⁹.

Others, by contrast, contend that it is not so much the sheer quantity of EU related news citizens access that has an impact, but rather the tonality and framing of EU media coverage. More important is thus

²⁰³ De Vreese, C. H. and Boomgaarden, H. G., 'Effects of News Media Coverage on Public Support for European Integration', In van der Brug, W. and C. H. de Vreese, (eds), *(Un)Intended Consequences of European Parliamentary Elections*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. 237–254, here p. 237.

²⁰⁴ De Vreese, C. H. and Boomgaarden, H. G., 'Media Message Flows and Interpersonal Communication: The Conditional Nature of Effects on Public Opinion', *Communication Research*, Vol. 33, 2006, pp. 419–437; Norris, P., *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000; Van Spanje, J. H. P., and de Vreese, C. H., 'Europhile media and eurosceptic voting: Effects of news media coverage on eurosceptic voting in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections', *Political Communication*, Vol. 31, No 2, 2014, pp. 325–354; Brosius, A., van Elsas, E. J., and de Vreese, C. H., 'How media shape political trust: News coverage of immigration and its effects on trust in the European Union', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2019, pp. 447–467. Brosius, A., van Elsas, E. J., and de Vreese, C. H., 'Trust in the European Union: Effects of the information environment', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 34, No 1, 2019, pp. 57–73. Strömbäck, J., Djerf-Pierre, M. and Shehata, A., 'A question of time? A longitudinal analysis of the relationship between news media consumption and political trust', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 21, No 1, 2016, pp. 88–110. Vliegenthart, R., Schuck, A.R.T., Boomgaarden, H.G., 'News coverage and support for European integration, 1990–2006', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 20, No 4, 2008, pp. 415–439.

²⁰⁵ Nardis, Y., 'News, Trust in the European Parliament, and EP Election Voting: Moderated-Mediation Model Investigating Voting in Established and New Member States', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 20, 2015, pp. 45–66; Eisele, O., 'Falling on Deaf Ears? Exploring the Effects of Newspaper Coverage of the European Parliament on Public Support for It', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 73, No 1, 2020, 186–210.

²⁰⁶ Norris, P., *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

²⁰⁷ Wojcieszak, M., Azrout, R. and de Vreese, C.H., 'Waving the red cloth', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No 1, 2018, pp. 87–109.

²⁰⁸ Trenz, H.-J., *Narrating European Society – Toward a Sociology of European Integration*, Lexington Books, London, 2016.

²⁰⁹ Trenz, H.-J., *Narrating European Society – Toward a Sociology of European Integration*, Lexington Books, London, 2016, here p. 64.

whether the evaluation of EU issues, institutions or actors in the media is positive or negative.²¹⁰ Here, referring to Cappella and Jamieson's (1979) 'spiral of cynicism', there is also evidence for a 'spiral of Euroscepticism' in that 'Euroscepticism is, at least partially, a function of the diet of information that citizens consume about European affairs'²¹¹. Yet the effect is conditional on, inter alia, the pervasiveness of news that framed EU politics as strategic, e.g. as characterised by political battles with winners and losers. This may also partly explain why exposure to news on EU summits, for example, has been found to have a negative effect on citizens' evaluations of EU performance.²¹²

Analysing both the level of Europeanisation (i.e. the quantity of EU coverage) and the tonality (i.e. the evaluation of European integration) Pfetsch and colleagues²¹³ identified different patterns in the national press of six EU member states. In the UK and the Netherlands, they found comparatively low levels of Europeanisation with the press focussing on mostly national perspectives. Yet while this was combined with a distinctly negative tonality in the UK, Dutch newspapers were generally supportive of EU integration, at least moderately so. In Germany, France, Italy and Spain, by contrast, the author found the press opening up debates to European angles, thus exhibiting higher levels of Europeanisation. While this was coupled with outspoken support for European integration in the former cases, however, the press in Spain remained indifferent or only moderately positive. Six years later, in 2014, Galpin and Trenz confirmed the hostile media environment in the UK but found the German media overall more balanced. Yet even in Germany, a tendency to select 'bad' news leads to the EU being reported in terms of 'crisis' or 'failure' and a high visibility of Eurosceptic actors.²¹⁴

'Instead of emphasizing the EU's ability to achieve consensus, journalists prefer to focus on disputes; instead of praising the increased problem-solving ability of European regulations, they complain about over-regulation and crisis; and instead of portraying the complex legitimacy of the EU in a multi-level structure, the media reduce legitimacy to simple yes-no patterns in the quasi-intuitive approval or rejection of European authority'.²¹⁵

In part, such a 'negativity bias' is a result of the general media logic according to which 'the only good news are bad news'²¹⁶ due to public preferences and a demand for sensational stories: 'media reportage about politics increasingly follows a commercial logic championing sensationalism and the personalization of politics, whereby elections are commonly framed as battles resulting in winners and

²¹⁰ De Vreese, C. H. and Boomgaarden, H. G., 'Media Message Flows and Interpersonal Communication: The Conditional Nature of Effects on Public Opinion', *Communication Research*, Vol. 33, 2006, pp. 19–37; Kleinnijenhuis, J., van Hoof, A.M.J. and Oegema, D., Negative news and the sleeper effect of distrust, *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2006, pp. 86–104; Hartevelde, E., van der Meer, T. and de Vries, C.E., 'In Europe we trust? Exploring three logics of trust in the European Union', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 14, No 4, pp. 542–565.

²¹¹ De Vreese, C.H., 'A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?', *Acta Politica*, Vol. 42, 2007, pp. 271–86, here p. 280.

²¹² Marquart, F., Goldberg, A.C., van Elsas, E.J., Brosius, A. and de Vreese, C.H., 'Knowing is not loving: media effects on knowledge about and attitudes toward the EU', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 41, No 5, 2019, pp. 641–655.

²¹³ Pfetsch, B., 'Agents of Transnational Debate Across Europe', *Javnost - The Public*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2008, pp. 21–40, Pfetsch, B., Adam, S., and Eschner, B., 'The contribution of the press to Europeanization of public debates: A comparative study of issue salience and conflict lines of European integration', *Journalism*, Vol. 9, No 4, 2008, pp. 463–490.

²¹⁴ Galpin, C. and Trenz, H.-J., 'Converging towards Euroscepticism? Negativity in News Coverage During the 2014 European Parliament Elections in Germany and the UK', *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2019, pp. 260–276; see also Galpin, C. and Trenz, H.-J., 'The Spiral of Euroscepticism: Media Negativity, Framing and Opposition to the EU', in Caiani, M. and Guerra, S. (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media. Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017, pp. 49–72.

²¹⁵ Galpin, C. and Trenz, H.-J., 'Die Euroskeptizismus-Spirale: EU-Berichterstattung und Medien-Negativität', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 43, 2018, pp. 147–172, here p. 155 (translation from German by the authors).

²¹⁶ Harcup, T. and O'Neill, D., 'What Is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 2, No 2, 2001, pp. 261–80, here p. 272.

losers.²¹⁷ Research²¹⁸ has shown that the media tend to paint a conflict-driven picture of competitive democratic elements, with the degree of conflict between parties being among the key determinants for coverage. Similarly, the coverage of the eurozone crisis in the print media was often framed in a martial and aggressive language, using metaphors alluding to war ('battle for the future of the Euro', 'the last line of defence of the Euro'), construction (alluding, for example, to the 'broken system of the EU') or disease ('sick banks', 'fear of contagion') or natural disaster (the crisis as a 'storm' or 'whirlpool').²¹⁹ In addition, journalists are expected to emphasise national interests to make EU politics more salient for their readers.²²⁰ Under such conditions, a 'spiral of Euroscepticism' is thus driven by both the supply and demand of negative news about the EU.

3.4.4. Europeanised Media Coverage of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Here, the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic will be an interesting subject for future media analyses. On the one hand, the pandemic had not just an EU-wide but global impact; it has also, this is at least our perception, led to a rather strong linkage between national public discourses. Although much of the media coverage was focused on the domestic handling of the crisis, the media updated the national public not only daily on the number of infections or new political measures at home, but also, albeit selectively, on developments in other EU member states and beyond. The terrible plight of the quarantined Italian northern regions made the headlines everywhere in the EU; media outlets widely reported on the initial so-called 'herd immunity approach' by the UK government or discussed the possible advantages and disadvantages of the 'Swedish model', to give just some examples. Without having conducted a media content analysis, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the intensity and scope of such horizontal linkages between the national public spheres, but there seems little doubt that the pandemic constitutes a genuine issue on which we can observe a horizontal trans-nationalisation of media coverage in the sense that many related issues were discussed at the same time, with similar intensity and with fairly frequent references to actors outside the domestic arena.

At the same time, this trans-nationalisation was not necessarily a *Europeanisation* in the sense that EU issues were highly visible, at least not during the earlier stage of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, pressing EU issues, such as the negotiations on the future relationship of the EU with the UK following Brexit or the negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework vanished almost completely from the headlines, at least for some time. Yet early EU initiatives and actions, such as the joint procurement of personal protective equipment, increased funding for vaccine research, the establishment of 'green lanes' to ensure the free circulation of goods across member states' closed borders, the proposal for the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) to be funded by unused financial resources of the Cohesion Fund or the European Central Bank's Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme also

²¹⁷ Dutceac Segesten, A. and Bossetta, M., 'The Eurosceptic Europeanization of public spheres: print and social media reactions to the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 17, 2019, pp. 361–379, here p. 364.

²¹⁸ Semetko, H. A. and Valkenburg, P.M., 'Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News', *Journal of Communication* Vol. 50, No 2, 2000, pp. 93–109; Boomgaarden, H.G., De Vreese, C.H., Schuck, A., Azrout, R., Elenbaas, M., Van Spanje, J.H.P. and Vliegenthart, R., 'Across Time and Space: Explaining Variation in News Coverage of the European Union', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 52, No 5, 2013, pp. 608–29. Van der Pas, D. and Vliegenthart, R., 'Do Media Respond to Party Conflict? Debates on European Integration in British, Dutch and German Party Manifestos and Newspapers, 1987–2006', *Political Studies*, Vol. 64, No 2, 2015, pp. 260–78.

²¹⁹ Joris, W., Puustinen, L. and d'Haenens, L., 'More news from the Euro front: How the press has been framing the Euro crisis in five EU countries', *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 80, No 6, 2018, 532–550.

²²⁰ Örnebring, H., 'Questioning European Journalism', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2013, pp. 2–17, Heikki Heikkilä, H. and Kunelius, R., 'Journalists Imagining the European Public Sphere', *Javnost - The Public*, Vol. 13, No 4, 2006, pp. 63–79.

received, in our impression, relatively little national media coverage. Instead, if the EU was subject of media and public discourses at all, common frames seemed to have been the lack of European solidarity and that the EU's response had been too little, too late.²²¹

*'In the media debate, the EU either seemed to take a back seat or to be seen as unsound and dysfunctional. The media reported extensively on aid offers from China, Cuba or Russia, while at the same time complaining about the lack of European solidarity.'*²²²

In part, this did, of course, mirror the how the EU was framed by national leaders in their discourses. In the Czech Republic, for example, President Zeman openly condemned the 'inaction' of the Ursula von der Leyen Commission²²³; in Hungary, prime minister Victor Orban, criticised that the 'coronavirus crisis has exposed the EU's "weaknesses" and failure to help in times of need'²²⁴; in Austria, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz warned that the 'EU will have to face a critical discussion and debate once the Corona crisis is over'²²⁵ and in Estonia the 'EU received little attention [...] in the early phase of the Covid-19 crisis. If the Union was talked about at all, the focus was on its failures and fragmentation.'²²⁶

Other member states' governments, by contrast, did not openly criticise the EU, they simply did not mention it:

*'Perhaps the most notable EU story to emerge from the early tackling of the COVID-19 crisis in Denmark is the absence of EU-related commentary from the national authorities. Since crisis response efforts gathered speed in early March, the focus of the social democratic government has been almost exclusively national. For instance, there has been virtually no reference to EU-cooperation in the many official press conferences held in recent weeks.'*²²⁷

*The [Swedish] government's public health measures are nationally framed, and discussions or allusions to common EU responses to the challenges are absent from public debate.'*²²⁸

This is partly mirrored in the results of the Kantar survey for Parliament²²⁹ mentioned above, according to which only a minority of European citizens knew in late April 2020 how the EU was involved in managing the Covid-19 crisis. While close to three quarters (74 per cent) stated to have heard of, seen or read about measures or actions initiated by the EU in response to the pandemic, a similar share of

²²¹ Russak, S. and Blockmans, S., 'How is EU cooperation in tackling the Covid-19 crisis perceived in member states?', in S. Russak (ed.), EU crisis response in tackling Covid-19 - Views from the member states, EPIN Report, 20 April 2020, p. 1-3, here p. 2.

²²² Pausch, M., Europa in und nach der Corona-Krise, ÖGfE Policy Brief 10, 16. April 2020, translation from German by the authors.

²²³ Lassen, C. K. and Kovář, J., 'Czech Republic: political elites and citizens view EU cooperation with scepticism' in S. Russak (ed.), EU crisis response in tackling Covid-19 - Views from the member states, EPIN Report, 20 April 2020, p. 5.

²²⁴ Bayer, L., 'Viktor Orbán criticizes EU's coronavirus crisis response', Politico Europe, 27.03.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-viktor-orban-criticizes-eu-crisis-response/>

²²⁵ Graf, E., 'Krisenmanager Kurz: „Es war ein Kraftakt“', Kronen Zeitung, 29.03.2020, available at: <https://www.krone.at/2126254>, translation from German by the authors.

²²⁶ Raik, K., 'For Estonia, the EU is fragile but indispensable', in S. Russak (ed.), EU crisis response in tackling Covid-19: Views from the member states, EPIN Report, 20 April 2020, p. 6-7.

²²⁷ Sørensen, C., Success or failure? For Denmark, the jury is still out on the EU's handling of Covid-19', in S. Russak (ed.), EU crisis response in tackling Covid-19 - Views from the member states, EPIN Report, 20 April 2020, p. 6.

²²⁸ Lewander, J., 'The case of Sweden – keep calm and trust the system', in S. Russak (ed.), EU crisis response in tackling Covid-19: Views from the member states, EPIN Report, 20 April 2020, p. 14

²²⁹ European Parliament, Public Opinion in the EU in Time of Coronavirus Crisis, survey conducted by Kantar, 2020, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20200527RES79925/20200527RES79925.pdf>.

respondents (67 per cent) across the EU declared that they did not really know what any of these measures were.

Media attention increased substantially, however, over the debate between the member states regarding different options to finance the Union's economic recovery, and the so-called 'corona bonds', in particular. The media framing was, according to our impression, still often national, and attention concentrated mostly on a relatively small number of individual heads of governments on both sides of the debate, namely on the heads of governments of Spain or Italy, of the so-called 'frugal four' (Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands) as well as of Germany and France. The EU Institutions, and Parliament in particular (see also section 3.6.2 below), continued to play a more minor role. One notable exception here was the 'Commission's embarrassing U-turn' after it 'was forced by angry EU governments [...] to drop plans to present a "roadmap" for ending the coronavirus lockdowns'²³⁰ in early April. Again, a proper media analysis is needed to draw more comprehensive and empirically sound conclusions. Yet overall, our impression is that the media coverage around the pandemic mirrors findings from the academic literature so far, namely that important EU issues or events do get fairly broad coverage, both in terms of vertical and, albeit limited, horizontal Europeanisation, but that it is especially conflicts or battles between political actors that make for 'good', and thus often negative news.

3.5. Parliaments as Europeanised Public Spheres

When it comes to the question to that extent national parliaments contribute to providing a Europeanised public space, empirical research focussing on parliamentary communication prior to 2010 gave little reason to be very optimistic. 'Europe' seemed rarely a topic in the plenaries²³¹ outside of debates about Treaty changes or on sessions of the European Council²³². Similarly, a comparison of EU debates in four national parliaments during 2002 and 2010 confirmed that, with the exception of the German Bundestag, especially day-to-day EU matters were rarely debated²³³. Debates did, occasionally, take place on high profile EU decisions, such as the Service Directive, but often only after an ex-ante politicisation of the issue by actors outside the parliamentary arena and intensive reporting in the media²³⁴. Parliaments were similarly reluctant to communicate EU matters regarding policy issues integrated under the Open Method of Coordination – even though OMCs deal with policy issues that are highly relevant from an electoral point of view, such as employment or social policy.²³⁵ An analysis of budget and investiture debates in Italy and Spain, finally, showed that

²³⁰ Bayer, L., 'Brussels drops lockdown exit plan after anger from capitals', Politico Europe, 08.04.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-to-unveil-exit-strategy-as-countries-push-to-lift-corona-measures/>.

²³¹ Bergman, T., Müller, W.C., Strøm, K. and Blomgren, M., 'Democratic delegation and accountability: cross-national patterns', in K. Strøm, W.C. Müller and T. Bergman (eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, 109-220, here p. 175.

²³² Van de Steeg, M., 'The European Council's Evolving Political Accountability', in M. Bovens, D. Curtin and P. 't Hart (eds.), *The Real World of EU Accountability: What Deficit?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp. 117-149.

²³³ Auel, K. and Raunio, T., 'Debating the State of the Union? Comparing Parliamentary Debates on EU Issues in Finland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 13-28.

²³⁴ Miklin, E., 'EU Politicisation and National Parliaments: Visibility of Choices and Better Aligned Ministers?', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 78-92.

²³⁵ De Ruiter, R., 'Public Parliamentary Activities and Open Methods of Coordination', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 62-77.

*'there is not a real debate on European issues in general parliamentary debates. This de-politicization can [...] produce a clear deficit in the relation between the parliamentary debate, political competition and the voters.'*²³⁶

Indeed, domestic governing actors - and mainstream parties, in particular - have incentives to de-emphasise issues of European integration²³⁷. First, party positions on European integration deviate from the left-right dimension, which is the main basic structure of party competition in Europe. In addition, national mainstream parties across the EU are ideologically less cohesive on integration than on traditional socio-economic issues that dominate the domestic political discourse. Unsurprisingly, party leaders are reluctant to emphasise an issue that threatens to divide their party since disunity may reduce a party's electoral popularity²³⁸.

Second, despite intra-party dissent, mainstream parties, and governing parties in particular, are generally more Europhile than their voters²³⁹. While opposition towards the EU is mainly found at the extreme left and right, parties in the political centre are usually more supportive of European integration, although this partisan structuring of EU integration is less pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴⁰ Politicising European issues may make this gap more obvious and may lead to an alienation of part of the electorate.

For most mainstream parties, EU issues are therefore more of a liability than an asset²⁴¹ - the British Conservative Party being the most notable exception²⁴². Yet the de-politicisation of EU issues also meant that European citizens had few opportunities to voice their opinion, let alone their opposition to further integration or specific European policies unless they are willing to vote for parties at the political fringes. According to Van der Eijk and Franklin²⁴³ the EU issue therefore presented a 'sleeping giant' to the extent that it divided voters without giving them an immediate outlet in party competition.

Yet national parliaments have become more aware of their communicative role in EU affairs, as recent COSAC meetings or reports show²⁴⁴, and have, albeit to a varying degree, increased their efforts to

²³⁶ García Lupato, F., 'Talking Europe, Using Europe - The EU and Parliamentary Competition in Italy and Spain', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 29-45.

²³⁷ Green-Pedersen, C., 'A Giant Fast Asleep? Party Incentives and Politicisation of European Integration', *Political Studies*, Vol. 60, No 1, 2012, pp. 115-130.

²³⁸ Ferrara, F. and Weishaupt, J. T., 'Get Your Act Together. Party Performance in European Parliament Elections', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 5, No 3, 2004, pp. 283-306.

²³⁹ Mattila, M. and Raunio, T., 'Cautious Voters - Supportive Parties: Opinion Congruence between Voters and Parties on the EU Dimension', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 7, No 4, 2006, pp. 427-449; Mattila, M. and Raunio, T., 'Drifting further apart: national parties and their electorates on the EU dimension', *West European Politics*, Vol. 35, No 3, 2012, pp. 589-606; Hobolt, S., Spoon, J.-J. and Tilley, J., 'A Vote Against Europe? Explaining Defection at the 1999 and 2004 European Parliament Elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 93-115.

²⁴⁰ Hutter, S. and Kriesi, H., 'Politicizing Europe in times of crisis', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 7, 2019, pp. 996-1017.

²⁴¹ De Vries, C., 'EU Issue Voting: Asset or Liability? How European Integration Affects Parties' Electoral Fortunes', *European Union Politics* Vol. 11, No 1, 2010, pp. 89-117.

²⁴² Hellström, J. and Blomgren, M., 'Party debate over Europe in national election, campaigns and party cohesion', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 55, 2016, pp. 265-82.

²⁴³ Van der Eijk, C. and Franklin, M. N., 'Potential for contestation on European matters at national elections in Europe', in G. Marks and M. R. Steenbergen (eds.), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 32-50.

²⁴⁴ Available at <http://www.cosac.eu>.

communicate EU politics to their citizens via plenary debates²⁴⁵. In the German Bundestag, for example, the degree to which the EU, its politics and its policies are mentioned in plenary debates has significantly and substantially increased over the last 23 years.²⁴⁶ Other studies suggest that especially the eurozone crisis had a rather strong effect in terms of parliamentary communication: Across all 27 national parliaments of the EU between 2010 and 2012, on average more than 40 per cent of all EU debates focused on crisis-related issues²⁴⁷. Still, despite the impact of the eurozone crisis - and great variation between national parliaments - parliaments still spent, on average, only about 8 per cent of their debating time in the plenary on EU debates.²⁴⁸

Studies have also found an increased polarisation over EU issues in the plenaries due to the crisis, although the findings differ with regard to the dividing lines along which polarisation took place. Dividing lines usually opened between governing and opposition parties, highlighting the importance of party ideological factors: Opposition fiercely contested 'the socio-economic orientation of the policies (e.g. social European market order vs. neoliberal) as well as the advocacy of allegedly inevitable accompanying measures (e.g. further austerity measures), and demanded a different direction for policies (e.g. a financial transaction tax; more equitable distribution of tax burdens)'.²⁴⁹ In addition, parliamentary Euroscepticism had an impact on parties' positioning in debates on anti-crisis measures.²⁵⁰ Overall, these findings suggest that the growing politicisation of EU politics was, at least as far as eurozone crisis issues were concerned, mirrored within domestic parliamentary arenas.

Finally, some studies have also looked into the question of whether parliaments contribute to a Europeanised public space in both a horizontal and vertical sense. Here, the Lisbon Treaty not only mentions interparliamentary cooperation as one of the means by which parliaments contribute to the 'good functioning of the Union', it also introduced the so-called Early Warning Mechanism²⁵¹

²⁴⁵ Auel, K., Eisele, O. and Kinski, L., 'From Constraining to Catalysing Dissensus? The Impact of Political Contestation on Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2016, pp. 154–176.; Auel, K., and Raunio, T. (eds.), Connecting with the Electorate? Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs, special issue of *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014; Rauh, C. and De Wilde, P., 'The opposition deficit in EU accountability: Evidence from over 20 years of plenary debate in four member states', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 57, No 1, 2018, pp. 194–216; Wendler, F., *Debating Europe in national parliaments: Public justification and political polarization*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016; Winzen, T., de Ruiter, R., Rocabert, J., 'Is parliamentary attention to the EU strongest when it is needed the most? National parliaments and the selective debate of EU policies', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2018, pp. 481–501; Wonka, A., 'The Party Politics of the Euro Crisis in the German Bundestag: Frames, Positions and Salience', *West European Politics*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2015, pp. 125–144.

²⁴⁶ Rauh, C., 'Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991–2013', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 16, No 1, 2015, pp. 116–138.

²⁴⁷ Auel, K. and Höing, Ö., 'National Parliaments and the Eurozone Crisis: Taking Ownership in Difficult Times?', *West European Politics*, Vol. 38, No 2, 2015, pp. 375–395.

²⁴⁸ Auel, K., Eisele, O. and Kinski, L., 'From Constraining to Catalysing Dissensus? The Impact of Political Contestation on Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2016, pp. 154–176, here p. 164.

²⁴⁹ Puntischer Riekmann, S. and Wydra, D., 'Representation in the European State of Emergency: Parliaments against Governments?', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 35, No 5, 2013, pp. 565–582, see also Wendler, F., 'Debating Europe in National Parliaments: Justification and Political Polarization in Debates on the EU in Austria, France, Germany and the United Kingdom', *OPAL Online Paper*, No 17, 2014.

²⁵⁰ Closa, C. and Maatsch, M., 'In a Spirit of Solidarity? Justifying the European Financial Stability Facilities (EFSF) in National Parliamentary Debates', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 4, 2014, pp. 826–842.

²⁵¹ According to the Protocol (Nr. 2) on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, national parliaments can submit a reasoned opinion within eight weeks of receipt of a legislative proposal if they consider the proposal to violate the principle of subsidiarity. These opinions are counted as votes, two per parliament, one per chamber in bicameral systems – and if certain thresholds are reached (one quarter of votes for freedom, security and justice proposals and one third for all other proposals), the proposal must be reviewed. If a threshold

(EWM) which gives national parliaments a direct, collective, role in the EU legislative process. While the EWM as a means for parliamentary influence at the EU level has come under criticism²⁵², others have pointed out its potential for strengthening inter-parliamentary discourses²⁵³ and the establishment of *structure of communication* among national demoi²⁵⁴. The involvement of national parliaments within the EWS has been interpreted as the establishment of a 'virtual third chamber' for the EU²⁵⁵: Although they do not meet in a physical space, they form a collective body that can, inter alia, perform a deliberative function.

While the 'virtual chamber' may be far from being fully realised, the idea does point to the fact that inter-parliamentary cooperation both within the institutional structures and through new collective instruments such as the EWS can 'contribute to generate a European public space for discussing policies and link these discussions to the multilingual national public'²⁵⁶. And indeed, while smaller inter-parliamentary meetings are usually closed to the public, most inter-parliamentary conferences²⁵⁷ now provide live streams and/or publish videos of their plenary meetings. They also provide information on all meetings including a summary of the meetings, statements, resolutions and reports, adding to the information provided by individual parliaments and, especially, the European Parliament.²⁵⁸

By contrast, internal parliamentary rules have so far mainly prevented the organisation of inter-parliamentary communication *within the plenaries*. In many parliaments, only MEPs have the right to speak in meetings of the European Affairs committees – rights they rarely use in practice – while MEPs' speaking rights in plenary debates are much rarer. Up to now, only the Austrian Nationalrat and the Dutch Tweede Kamer have made regular use of the opportunity.²⁵⁹

A more indirect means of extending the scope of parliamentary deliberation beyond national borders is the transnationalisation of parliamentary debate. While not direct inter-parliamentary communication, transnationalisation here refers to processes of mutual attention to parliamentary debates in other member states or the European Parliament as well as the incorporation of views

of over 50 per cent of votes is reached, the so-called 'orange card' not only forces the Commission to review the proposal, but also allows the European Parliament or the Council, acting by defined majorities, to reject the proposal.

²⁵² De Wilde, P. and Raunio, T., 'Redirecting National Parliaments: Setting Priorities for Involvement in EU Affairs', *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 16, No 2, 2018, pp. 310-329; Fromage, D. and Kreiling, K., 'National Parliaments' Third Yellow Card and the Struggle over the Revision of the Posted Workers Directive', *European Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2017, 125-160.

²⁵³ Benz, A., 'Linking Multiple Demoi - Inter-Parliamentary Relations in the EU'. *IEV-Online* 2011-Nr. 1, available at: <https://d-nb.info/1025758382/34>.

²⁵⁴ Benz, A., 'The strength of weak ties or weakening of strong ties? Multilevel parliamentary democracy in the Euro crisis', *Paper presented at the ECPR Standing Group EU Conference*, Trento, 2016, here p. 6, emphasis added.

²⁵⁵ Cooper, I., 'A "Virtual Third Chamber" for the European Union? National Parliaments after the Treaty of Lisbon', *West European Politics*, Vol. 35, No 3, 2012, pp. 441-465.

²⁵⁶ Benz, A., 'Linking Multiple Demoi - Inter-Parliamentary Relations in the EU'. *IEV-Online* 2011-Nr. 1, available at: <https://d-nb.info/1025758382/34>, here p. 12)

²⁵⁷ Kreiling, V., 'The New Inter-parliamentary Conference for Economic and Financial Governance', *Notre Europe Policy Paper* 100, 2013; Lupo, N. and Fasone, C., (eds.), *Interparliamentary cooperation in the composite European Constitution*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2016.

²⁵⁸ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/relnatparl/en/news/news.html>.

²⁵⁹ In Austria, one MEP, invited by the party group responsible by rotation for choosing the topic of the debate, can speak during the so-called quarterly 'topical EU hours'. Dutch MEPs, in turn, have the opportunity to speak in the Tweede Kamer once a year, on the occasion of the debate on the Staat van de Europese Unie (State of the European Union), see Valentin, C., 'MEPs in national parliaments: bringing the EU closer to home?', *PADEMIA Research Note* 18, 2016, available at: http://www.pademia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Research-Note_18_2016.pdf.

expressed therein into the domestic debates²⁶⁰. As a result, it can create a communicative link between parliaments, and by extension, their domestic publics.

Here, a recent study on policy diffusion²⁶¹ does indicate that references in plenary speeches to policies in other member states are not uncommon, especially in strongly Europeanised policy areas. The authors find no evidence, however, that increased cross-national contacts between MPs in the last decade resulted in an overall increase in cross-border references. By contrast, research on 'Europeanised'²⁶² or 'transnational'²⁶³ representation, defined as national parliamentarians raising claims on behalf of citizens of other national constituencies²⁶⁴, shows more promising signs. An in-depth study of parliamentary debates in Austria, Germany, Ireland and the UK²⁶⁵ finds that while the majority of parliamentary representative statements made in plenary debates focus on national citizens, there is also ample evidence for transnational representation: More than a third of all statements extend beyond national constituencies, half of which are even made purely on behalf of constituencies outside of the nation state (i.e. foreign EU nationals and/or the European citizens)²⁶⁶. This confirms the findings of an earlier study on plenary debates on the EU budget in Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands²⁶⁷, which also found, albeit fewer, representative references to other EU member states and even non-EU countries. Such transnational representation brings the interests of other EU nationals into parliamentary debate and, by initiating a dialogue between their and domestic interests, may force democratic representatives to justify their decisions with reference to them.

3.6. Relationship Between Strong and Weak Publics: Media Coverage of Parliaments in EU Affairs

Whether the developments sketched above do indeed allow the assessment that national parliaments 'become the most important and visible arena for public political debate about the state and future of European integration'²⁶⁸ remains debatable, but there is little doubt that they are fulfilling their communication to a greater degree than before. At the same time, it can be argued that whether or not parliaments can provide for a Europeanised *public* space depends crucially on whether they are

²⁶⁰ Crum, B. and Fossum, J.E., 'A Democratic Backbone for International Organisations: The Multilevel Parliamentary Field', in T. Evas, U. Liebert, and C. Lord (eds.), *Multilayered Representation in the European Union*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2012, here p. 102.

²⁶¹ De Ruiter, R. and Schalk, S., 'Explaining cross-national policy diffusion in national parliaments: A longitudinal case study of plenary debates in the Dutch parliament', *Acta Politica*, Vol. 52, No 1, 2012, pp. 133–155.

²⁶² Kinski, L., *European Representation in EU National Parliaments*, Routledge, London, 2020 (forthcoming); Kinski L., 'Whom to Represent? National Parliamentary Representation during the Eurozone Crisis', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No 3, 2018, pp. 346–368.

²⁶³ Kinski, L. and Crum, B., 'Transnational Representation in EU National Parliaments. Concept, Case Study, Research Agenda', *Political Studies*, Vol. 68, No 2, 2020, pp. 370–388.

²⁶⁴ Kinski, L. and Crum, B., 'Transnational Representation in EU National Parliaments. Concept, Case Study, Research Agenda', *Political Studies*, Vol. 68, No 2, 2020, pp. 370–388, here p. 370.

²⁶⁵ Kinski, L., *European Representation in EU National Parliaments*, Routledge, London, 2020 (forthcoming); Kinski L., 'Whom to Represent? National Parliamentary Representation during the Eurozone Crisis', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No 3, 2018, pp. 346–368.

²⁶⁶ Kinski, L., *European Representation in EU National Parliaments*, Routledge, London, 2020 (forthcoming).

²⁶⁷ De Wilde, P., 'The plural representative space: How mass media and national parliaments stimulate pluralism through competition', in S. Kröger and D. Friedrich (eds.), *The challenge of democratic representation in the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, pp. 117–134.

²⁶⁸ Wendler, F., *Debating Europe in national parliaments: Public justification and political polarization*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016, here p. 1.

actually able to reach the citizens. Parliaments can, and do, provide information via their websites or parliamentary TV channels²⁶⁹. Without coverage in the mass media, however, parliaments can provide transparency, which requires that information is publicly available, but they will find it difficult to attain publicity, which is only achieved if citizens are actually aware of the information.²⁷⁰

3.6.1. National Parliaments In The Media

Despite the salience of national parliaments' role in legitimizing EU politics and the increased attention of both scholars and parliamentarians to their communicative function, we know surprisingly little about the publicity of parliamentary involvement in EU affairs. Existing studies suggest, that overall parliamentary actors tend to play a minor role in EU news compared to domestic executives or EU actors.²⁷¹ In fact, media visibility of national parliaments has generally declined over time²⁷², which has been connected to the decrease of national parliaments' influence over decisions that are taken outside of, but still impact on, the national context.²⁷³ Yet media still report regularly²⁷⁴, albeit selectively²⁷⁵, on national parliaments. This is especially true for plenary EU debates, which receive coverage fairly routinely, especially by broadsheets²⁷⁶. The visibility of the German Bundestag in the media coverage of EU monetary policy actually even increased significantly in recent years.²⁷⁷ Other parliamentary activities in EU affairs, in turn, usually escape the attention of the press.

These findings contradict at least to some extent laments by MPs over the lack of media interest in parliamentary EU affairs²⁷⁸. Rather, they demonstrate the media relevance of national parliaments even in supranational politics where, in contrast to the transposition of EU legislation, they have at best the power to control and influence the government.

²⁶⁹ Auel, K. and Neuhold, C., *Europeanisation of National Parliaments: Experiences and Best-Practices*, study for the European Parliament's Greens/EFA Group, 2018, available at: https://reinhardbuetikofer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study_Europeanisation_June-2018.pdf.

²⁷⁰ On the distinction, Hüller, T., 'Assessing EU strategies for publicity', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 14, No 4, 2007, pp. 563–581.

²⁷¹ De Wilde, P., 'The Operating Logics of National Parliaments and Mass Media in the Politicisation of Europe', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 46–61; Koopmans, R., 'Who Inhabits the European Public Sphere? Winners and Losers, Supporters and Opponents in Europeanized Political Debates', in R. Koopmans and P. Statham (eds.), *The Making of a European Public Sphere. Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 63–96.

²⁷² Van Aelst, P. and Vlieghe, R., 'Studying the Tango. An Analysis of Parliamentary Questions and Press Coverage in the Netherlands', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2014, pp. 392–410; Riddell, P., 'Members and Millbank: The Media and Parliament', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No B, 1998, pp. 88–18.

²⁷³ Negrine, R. M., 'Parliaments and the Media: A Changing Relationship?', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 14, No 3, 1999, pp. 325–352.

²⁷⁴ Tresch, A., 'Politicians in the Media: Determinants of Legislators' Presence and Prominence in Swiss Newspapers', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 14, No 1, 2009, pp. 67–90, here p. 86.

²⁷⁵ E.g. Van Aelst, P., Melenhorst, L., van Holsteyn, J. and Veen, J., 'Lawmaking and News Making: Different Worlds After All? A Study on News Coverage of Legislative Processes in the Netherlands', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 21, No 4, 2015, pp. 534–52.

²⁷⁶ Auel, K., Eisele, O. and Kinski, L., 'What Happens in Parliament Stays in Parliament? Newspaper Coverage of National Parliaments in EU Affairs', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 56, No 3, 2018, pp. 628–645.

²⁷⁷ Koopmans, R., 'How Advanced is the Europeanization of Public Spheres? Comparing German and European Structures of Political Communication', in T. Risse (ed.), *European Public Spheres. Politics Is Back*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 53–83.

²⁷⁸ Pollak, J. and Slominski, P., 'The Silence of the Shepherds: How the Austrian Parliament Informs its Citizens on European Issues', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, 2014, pp. 109–124.

3.6.2. News Coverage of the European Parliament

Analyses focussing on the news coverage of the European Parliament are even rarer. While many studies focus on media coverage of European elections or include Parliament as one EU institution within a broader range of actors analysed, very few contributions focus on Parliament and its members specifically.

In the early decades of European integration, Parliament seems to have been salient for the media only in relation to larger events such as the first direct elections in 1979 or whenever Parliament asserted its powers in an unexpected way, such as rejecting the Community's budget for the first time.²⁷⁹ The main obstacle for greater media salience was seen in the limited legislative powers of Parliament and the lack of political battles in its plenary.²⁸⁰ In addition, the absence of a professional European communication strategy and support for journalists to cover EU affairs²⁸¹, but also the general lack of interest of MEPs in cooperating with the media²⁸² played a role. Accordingly, Parliament was labelled 'the great non-communicator'²⁸³, and the expectation was that the media coverage would even decrease further over time.

Regarding the latter, new EU communication strategies²⁸⁴ seem not to have made much difference, at least for the EP. Despite the modernisation of Parliament's website in 2005 and the introduction of EuroParlTV²⁸⁵, or the so called 'Plan D'²⁸⁶ implemented by the Commission in 2005, followed by the White Paper on Communication²⁸⁷ in 2006, press coverage remained very low until the Lisbon Treaty. Although Parliament had been considerably strengthened in earlier Treaty amendments, it was not always taken seriously: 'For me, it is a "serious joke". It is still improving, gaining powers, has some interesting MEPs and speakers, playing a real role, but sometimes not as serious as national parliaments, like the Bundestag, the House of Commons or Assemblée Nationale'.²⁸⁸

This changed with the Lisbon Treaty which, hailed as the 'Treaty of Parliaments', triggered greater media salience. This is due to the fact that Parliament obtained decision-making powers in a number of important new areas, but also to the fact that it used its new powers regarding international Treaties

²⁷⁹ Sonntag, N., 'Media coverage of the European Parliament: A comparative study', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 11, No 2, 1983, pp. 215–222; Morgan, D., *The European Parliament, Mass Media and the Search for Power and Influence*. Ashgate, Aldershot. 1999.

²⁸⁰ Gavin, N.T., 'British journalists in the spotlight: Europe and media research', *Journalism*, Vol. 2, No 3, 2001, pp. 299–314.

²⁸¹ Baisnée, E. O., 'The (non-)coverage of the European Parliament', in M. Bond (ed.), *Europe, Parliament and the Media*, The Federal Trust for Education and Research, London, 2003, pp. 77–104. Anderson, P.J. and McLeod, A., 'The great non-communicator? The mass communication deficit of the European Parliament and its press directorate', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 42, No 5, 2004, pp. 897–917.

²⁸² Anderson, P.J. and McLeod, A., 'The great non-communicator? The mass communication deficit of the European Parliament and its press directorate', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 42, No 5, 2004, pp. 897–917.

²⁸³ Anderson, P.J. and McLeod, A., 'The great non-communicator? The mass communication deficit of the European Parliament and its press directorate', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 42, No 5, 2004, pp. 897–917.

²⁸⁴ Bijsmans, P., *Debating Europe: Reflections on EU Affairs in the Public Sphere*. Maastricht University Press, Maastricht, 2011, here pp. 73–82; Bijsmans, P. and Altides, C., 'Bridging the Gap' between EU Politics and Citizens? The European Commission, National Media and EU Affairs in the Public Sphere', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 29, No 3, 2007, pp. 323–340.

²⁸⁵ Shackleton, M., 'The European Parliament "on air"', in T. Blom and S. Vanhoonacker (eds.), *The Politics of Information. The Case of the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, pp. 193–207.

²⁸⁶ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, COM (2005) 494 final. Brussels, 13 October 2005.

²⁸⁷ European Commission, White Paper on a European Communication Policy, COM (2006) 35 final. Brussels, 1 February 2006.

²⁸⁸ National correspondent, cited from Gattermann, K., *News about the European Parliament: Patterns and Drivers of Broadsheet Coverage*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2011, here p. 234.

almost immediately by rejecting the SWIFT Agreement with the USA – a highly salient issue at the national level as well.²⁸⁹ As one correspondent stated: 'Just the fact the EP takes a decision, doesn't mean I write about it [...] I get interested when the institutional balance between the Council and the EP is changing'.²⁹⁰ Similarly, as Barisione and Michailidou point out, the news media have their own perspective, namely:

*'EU politics do get sufficient coverage, just not quite the type of friendly, uncritical coverage that EU officials are after. If EU Commissioners or European Parliament representatives do not get much air time on national television, or the national press ignores them over statements by national parliamentarians, this does not imply biased reporting on behalf of the media but rather reflects the degree of recognisability (or lack thereof) that different representatives possess.'*²⁹¹

Since the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament receives more regular coverage, and the reports generally follow the calendar of the Plenary. Yet it still competes with national parliaments for media attention. Indeed, 'while parliaments become visible as independent, complementary branches of parliamentary EU affairs, the EP is overall less successful than its national counterparts in receiving media attention': Outside of European elections, national parliaments' EU activities seem to be more relevant for the media than those of the European Parliament.²⁹²

Again, recognisability is an important factor, as correspondents seem to struggle with presenting Parliament in a way that their readers can understand: 'The EP is different from its national counterparts. Correspondents are aware of that and do in fact draw comparisons to the national parliamentary culture to make it more perceptible for their readers'.²⁹³ Even worse, 'newsmakers' evaluations illustrate that the European Parliament is being criticised for not being like the respective national counterpart.²⁹⁴ This may, in turn, explain why support for Parliament has been found to be mainly influenced by developments within the EU as a whole as well as by attitudes towards the national parliament – and not by information provided in the media about the parliament itself.²⁹⁵

In fact, legislative activity seems to matter little when it comes to the media visibility of individual MEPs. MEPs who more frequently attend plenary sessions seem to be *less* visible in the news, while other legislative activities such as reports or parliamentary questions have no impact.²⁹⁶ Important in terms of visibility are seniority, a parliamentary office or holding the national party leadership. In addition, Eurosceptic MEPs, especially from right wing parties, tend to get more coverage. This not only suggests

²⁸⁹ Gattermann, K., *News about the European Parliament: Patterns and Drivers of Broadsheet Coverage*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2011, here 189 ff.

²⁹⁰ Cited from Gattermann, K., *News about the European Parliament: Patterns and Drivers of Broadsheet Coverage*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2011, here p. 196.

²⁹¹ Barisione, M. and Michailidou, A., 'Do We Need to Rethink EU Politics in the Social Media Era? An Introduction to the Volume', in M. Barisione and A. Michailidou (eds.), *Social Media and European Politics. Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017, pp. 1-23, here p. 6.

²⁹² Eisele, O., 'Complementing, competing, or co-operating? Exploring newspapers' portrayals of the European Parliament and national parliaments in EU affairs', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 39, No 4, 2017, pp. 435–451, here p. 449.

²⁹³ Gattermann, K., *News about the European Parliament: Patterns and Drivers of Broadsheet Coverage*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2011, here p. 219.

²⁹⁴ Gattermann, K., *News about the European Parliament: Patterns and Drivers of Broadsheet Coverage*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2011, here p. 26.

²⁹⁵ Eisele, O., 'Falling on Deaf Ears? Exploring the Effects of Newspaper Coverage of the European Parliament on Public Support for It', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 73, No 1, 2020, pp. 186-210, here, p. 104.

²⁹⁶ Gattermann, K. and Vasilopoulou, S., 'Absent yet popular? Explaining news visibility of Members of the European Parliament', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 54, No 1, 2015, pp. 121–140.

that the press pays more attention to activities of MEPs outside of rather than within Parliament, but also that ‘citizens’ familiarity with their representatives’ legislative work becomes constrained by journalists’ choices’.²⁹⁷

This is also apparent in the media coverage of Parliament during the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, we are unable to draw any generalised conclusions without an extensive media analysis. We did, however, conduct a short analysis of the Politico Europe coverage of Parliament between 1 March and 25 May 2020.²⁹⁸ Most of the Politico Europe articles covering Parliament specifically focused on technical or organisational changes made due to the pandemic, such as the suspension of events²⁹⁹, changes to the plenary sessions³⁰⁰ and their eventual move to Brussels³⁰¹, the move to e-voting³⁰², work from home measures³⁰³ and the introduction of mandatory face masks³⁰⁴, on more personal stories such as President Sassoli’s self-isolation³⁰⁵ and MEPs who had - actually or possibly - contracted the virus³⁰⁶, as well as the conflicts that arose over the participation of climate activist Greta Thunberg in a meeting of the environment committee in early March³⁰⁷. As the short overview illustrates, Politico Europe did keep EU citizens rather systematically updated on developments in their Parliament. Articles covering political positions, debates or decisions of and within the EP, by contrast, were far rarer. Here, Politico Europe covered Parliament’s vote on the amendments necessary for the Commission’s Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative³⁰⁸, Parliament’s resolution on the new multiannual financial framework,

²⁹⁷ Gattermann, K. and Vasilopoulou, S., ‘Absent yet popular? Explaining news visibility of Members of the European Parliament’, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 54, No 1, 2015, pp. 121–140, here p. 135.

²⁹⁸ We searched for the key term ‘European Parliament’ using politico.eu’s own search engine with results listed by relevance. This allowed us to identify – roughly – the articles that focused on the EP or MEPs as the main topic.

²⁹⁹ De La Baume, M., ‘EU Parliament cancels events over coronavirus, but Strasbourg trip goes ahead’, Politico Europe, 2.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-parliament-cancels-events-over-coronavirus-but-strasbourg-trip-goes-ahead/>.

³⁰⁰ De La Baume, M., ‘EU Parliament cuts length of plenary and scraps votes due to coronavirus’, Politico Europe, 9.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-eu-parliament-cuts-length-of-plenary-and-scraps-votes/>.

³⁰¹ De La Baume, M., ‘European Parliament to switch plenaries to Brussels due to coronavirus’, Politico Europe, 19.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-european-parliament-limited-session/>.

³⁰² De la Baume, M., ‘Corona-era European Parliament: Empty chamber and e-voting’, Politico Europe, 26.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/corona-era-european-parliament-empty-chamber-and-e-voting/>.

³⁰³ Cerulus, L., ‘EU Parliament’s work from home measures are flawed, says vice president’, Politico Europe, 10.4.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-eu-parliament-work-from-home-measures-expose-meps-to-manipulation-risks-says-vice-president/>.

³⁰⁴ De la Baume, M., ‘European Parliament to make wearing of face masks mandatory’, Politico Europe, 28.4.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-to-make-wearing-of-face-masks-mandatory/>.

³⁰⁵ De la Baume, M., ‘European Parliament’s Sassoli to work from home as coronavirus precaution’, Politico Europe, 10.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliaments-sassoli-to-work-from-home-as-coronavirus-precaution/>.

³⁰⁶ Wanat, Z. and De la Baume, M., ‘Polish MEP Tests positive for coronavirus’, Politico Europe, 20.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-mep-tests-positive-for-coronavirus/>; De la Baume, M., ‘Weber’s absence from European Parliament raises questions’, Politico Europe, 28.4.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/manfred-weber-absence-from-european-parliament-prompts-questions/>; Von der Burchard, H., ‘Manfred Weber back in Parliament after health-related absence’, Politico Europe, 5.5.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/manfred-weber-back-in-european-parliament-after-health-related-absence/>.

³⁰⁷ De La Baume, M. and Smith- Meyer, B., ‘MEPs ask: Does coronavirus not apply to Greta?’, Politico Europe, 3.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/meps-ask-does-coronavirus-not-apply-to-greta-thunberg/>.

³⁰⁸ Bayer, L., ‘European Parliament greenlights coronavirus funding plan’, Politico Europe, 26.3.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-greenlights-coronavirus-funding-plan/>.

own resources and the recovery plan³⁰⁹, and published excerpts of an interview with President Sassoli³¹⁰ on the role of Parliament in the Union's recovery plan. Yet overall, the impression from the Politico Europe coverage is that the Parliament did not play a significant role during the pandemic. One of the articles, in early April, even explicitly addressed the struggle for influence during the crisis, reporting on MEPs feeling that Parliament had 'pressed the mute button'³¹¹.

3.6.3. Interparliamentary Cooperation in the Media

Interparliamentary cooperation, finally, be it between national parliaments or between national parliaments and the European Parliament, hardly ever makes it into the media, who do not seem to consider even the most prominent IPC meetings as newsworthy enough to cover them. Of well over 10,000 newspaper articles on parliamentary EU involvement in the dataset³¹² of Auel et al.³¹³ fewer than 50 even mention some form of IPC.

A different form of transnationalisation of parliamentary debates can, however, be observed in the media: national newspapers cover *other member states' parliaments* in the context of EU affairs rather frequently – and in some cases more frequently than their own parliament.³¹⁴ Since the only data so far available covers the years 2010 – 2013, and thus the most turbulent period of the eurozone crisis, it is hardly surprising that the coverage was mainly limited to crisis-related issues and most intense for parliaments that were significant within this context. This was the case for the parliaments of the five so-called 'programme states' Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus that received financial aid through instruments such as the EFSF and the ESM. Here, the Greek, Portuguese and Cypriot parliament were covered far more often than the other two, which was mainly due to parliamentary opposition to austerity legislation demanded by the Memorandums of Understanding. The parliaments of Finland, France, the Netherlands and Slovakia, in turn, mainly received coverage due to strong parliamentary opposition to the economic governance reforms that threatened the implementation. The intense press attention to the German Bundestag, finally, is likely due to the powerful position of the German Bundestag regarding EU economic governance measures – boosted by a number of highly publicised decisions of the German Constitutional Court, but also, and probably more importantly, to the powerful position of Germany and Chancellor Merkel in the economic governance reform process. The latter resulted in extensive coverage of parliamentary debates on Merkel's government declarations as well as her (potential lack of) parliamentary support for various crisis measures in the Bundestag. By contrast, most parliaments in countries outside the eurozone were ignored by the press.

The only parliaments that received notable attention on issues unrelated to the eurozone crisis were the British, the Hungarian and the Romanian Parliament and – to a lesser degree, the French Assemblée

³⁰⁹ De La Baume, M., 'MEPs back €2T coronavirus recovery plan', Politico Europe, 15.5.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/meps-back-2-trillion-euros-coronavirus-recovery-plan-funding/>.

³¹⁰ De La Baume, M., 'Sassoli demands bigger European Parliament role in recovery plan', Politico Europe, 8.5.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/david-sassoli-demands-bigger-european-parliament-role-coronavirus-economic-recovery-plan/>.

³¹¹ De la Baume, M. and Manancourt, V., 'EU Parliament struggles for influence due to coronavirus', Politico Europe, 16.4.2020, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-parliament-struggles-for-influence-due-to-coronavirus/>.

³¹² The dataset consists of all articles on parliamentary involvement in EU affairs over a period of four years (2010 – 2013) in seven member states (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK) and three newspapers each.

³¹³ Auel, K., Eisele, O. and Kinski, L., 'What Happens in Parliament Stays in Parliament? Newspaper Coverage of National Parliaments in EU Affairs', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 56, No 3, 2018, pp. 628-645.

³¹⁴ Auel, K., Eisele, O. and Kinski, L., *Newspaper Coverage of National Parliaments in EU Affairs*, Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Montréal, 26-29 August 2015.

Nationale and the Dutch Tweede Kamer. Regarding the House of Commons, articles mostly focused on parliamentary activities related to the, then, planned EU referendum and a possible 'Brexit', while parliamentary activities related to constitutional changes criticised by the EU dominated the coverage of the Hungarian and the Romanian Parliament. The – much smaller – number of articles on the Assemblée Nationale and the Tweede Kamer focused mainly on the French Roma policies and the EU training mission in Mali as well as on the opposition of the Geert Wilders' PVV parliamentary party group to EU immigration policy and enlargement, especially with regard to Turkey, respectively. Thus, with very few exceptions, the media covered parliaments of other member states, if their activities had the potential to have a, mainly negative, impact on citizens at home. Yet they still facilitate the communication of parliamentary EU politics beyond the domestic context.

3.7. The cultural European public sphere

What most contributions to the debate on the European public sphere(s) have in common is that they mainly refer to the European *political* public sphere as the space for visible 'European political communication [...] loosely defined as any form of communication which refers to European governance in the wide sense, expressing consensus or dissent with regard to particular issues and debates in a European decision-making context'³¹⁵. While our study also focuses on the political public sphere, we do believe it is important to at least highlight that the public sphere consists of both a political and a cultural part, where the latter is also of fundamental importance: 'Any quality newspaper demonstrates in its contents how the public sphere encompasses both politics and culture, and the same can certainly be said about broadcasting, at least the sort known as public service broadcasting (PSB) – devoted [...] not only to the provision of information and education, but also of entertainment'³¹⁶.

This aspect has received far less attention in both academic and political debate. What is often overlooked, for example, is the fact that the very limited development of a European public space through truly European media is mainly true for the political European public space. As the short overview in section 3.4.1 illustrated, there are a number of successful European or pan-European media focused on cultural content, such as sports, music, etc., which 'to a perhaps surprising degree reflect the highly complex map of Europe when it comes to ethnicity, taste and traditions – i.e. culture – and [...] contribute in some interesting ways to a partially shared European audiovisual space'³¹⁷.

Similarly, European cinema or TV series, both domestic and co-produced across different member states constitute an important part of the transnational media in Europe and speak to a broad European audience³¹⁸. Here, TV series, such as the Danish series *Borgen* (2010–2013) or *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007–2012), to mention just two examples, not only became mediated cultural encounters in

³¹⁵ Trenz, H.-J., 'Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2004, pp. 291–319, here p. 293.

³¹⁶ Gripsrud, J., 'Television and the European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 22, No 4, 2007, pp. 479–492, here p. 481.

³¹⁷ Gripsrud, J., 'Television and the European Public Sphere', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 22, No 4, 2007, pp. 479–492, here p. 487, see also Tomlinson, A., Christopher, Y. and Holt R. (eds.), *Sport and the Transformation of Modern Europe 1950-2010*, Routledge, London, 2011; Sassatelli, M., *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009.

³¹⁸ For an in-depth discussion, see the contributions in Bondebjerg, I., Novrup Rendall, E., and Higson, A. (eds), *European Cinema and Television – Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.

Denmark cutting across audience segments and social and cultural differences, they also had a rather broad, European distribution and success.³¹⁹ As such, they may have contributed more to the development of a European public space than they receive credit for:

*'mediated cultural encounters matter, and they matter more and more in our transforming world of globalisation and European integration. [...] Europeans more often than before 2000 now have mediated cultural encounters with each other through drama series from other European countries. A new kind of creative, transnational Europe is bringing original and often local stories to us, as a result of national strategies, European media policies and structural changes in the production and distribution networks of Europe.'*³²⁰

³¹⁹ Bondebjerg, I., *'Transnational Europe: TV-drama, co- production networks and mediated cultural encounters'*, Palgrave Communications, 2016, 2:15034 doi: 10.1057/palcomms.2016.34.

³²⁰ Bondebjerg, I., *'Transnational Europe: TV-drama, co- production networks and mediated cultural encounters'*, Palgrave Communications, 2016, 2:15034 doi: 10.1057/palcomms.2016.34, here p. 11.

4. EUROPEANISATION OF THE EP ELECTORAL PROCESS – FROM SECOND- TO FIRST-ORDER ELECTIONS?

One, if not *the*, most intensely discussed question in the study of electoral politics at the EU level is whether European elections are nothing but second-order (national) elections, or whether there is profound and increasing evidence for a politicisation of politics and an (increasing) salience of genuinely European political issues in these Europe-wide political contests. Before taking a closer look at the 2019 EP elections in section 5, this section provides an outline and evaluation of academic contributions on both the second-order election model and on EU issue voting. We then discuss whether and to what extent European elections have over time become Europeanised.

4.1. The Established Wisdom: Second-Order Elections

The dominant perspective, which is assumed both by political practitioners and by political scientists, concludes that elections to the European Parliament are effectively and predominantly second-order national elections. Building upon preceding analyses of U.S. midterm elections³²¹ or German state elections³²², Karlheinz Reif und Hermann Schmitt³²³ referred to considerable asymmetries of EP elections. Formally, European and national electorates and elites considered the first direct elections to the EP in 1979 to be contests about and organised within a less important, second-order political arena. Substantively, however, EP elections were nevertheless dominated by and fought about the established cleavages and salient issues of first-order, national political competition. Therefore, any meaningful analysis of vote choice in EP elections needs to consider national, but not European motives of voter behaviour.

The second-order election (SOE) model solely relies on established patterns in aggregate-level electoral returns of EP elections. It is therefore supported by a number of robust empirical regularities: (1) low(er) levels of turnout, (2) significant losses for centrist, large, incumbent parties, but gains for smaller, oppositional actors, (3) cyclical patterns when the intensity of gains and losses is embedded with national electoral cycles and the alleged popularity of national governments, and (4) the overwhelming focus on domestic issues in EP election campaigns and the, compared with first-order elections to the respective national parliaments, very low salience of European elections:

1. Turnout: In elections to the European Parliament, turnout is regularly lower than in the respective national elections. Since potential voters conceive the first arena, i.e. elections to the respective national parliaments, as significantly more important, many of them do not actually show up at the polls. There is also the risk of a turnout differential when, for instance, disaffected supporters of parties in government turn out to a much lower degree. Naturally, EP elections are not directly linked with the selection of the government and/ the chief executive

³²¹ Tufte, E. R., 'Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 69, No 3, 1975, pp. 812-826.

³²² Dinkel, R., 'Der Zusammenhang zwischen Bundes- und Landtagswahlergebnissen', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Vol. 18, No 2, 1977, pp. 348-359.

³²³ Reif, K., 'European Elections as Member State Second-Order Elections Revisited', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 31, No 1-2, 1997, pp. 115-124.

so that parties shy away from fully mobilizing their campaign resources and voters often do not bother to gather and process meaningful information.

2. **Winners and Losers:** Most significantly, parties in government tend to lose electoral support in EP elections, while opposition parties, especially small and/ or ideologically extreme platforms, tend to systematically gain votes. As considerably less seems at stake in EP elections, voters are more concerned with pivotal issues dominating the first arena (read: national politics) than with the political substance governing the secondary arena (read: European politics). As a consequence, first-order issues also tend to dominate second-order elections. Generally, nationally oriented, disaffected voters frequently use EP elections as an opportunity to cast a protest vote, thereby providing ideologically extreme, populist, or newly founded political parties a potential reservoir of electoral support. And ultimately, since European Parliament elections, notwithstanding the fate of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, do not directly make voters select a government and thus remove a number of strategic incentives directed at coalition building, but rather institute incentives to cast a 'sincere' instead of a strategic vote.³²⁴
3. **Cyclical Temporal Patterns:** These patterns of vote gains and losses seem to follow a cyclical pattern that is governed by the temporal dynamics of the national electoral cycle. In EP elections, large government parties tend to systematically lose electoral support, while small ideologically extreme parties tend to gain vote shares. These vote shifts between national and European elections tend to be more abrupt when EP elections are held at a domestic midterm. Supporters of the SOE concept take this as evidence that voting behaviour tends to closely follow the approval ratings of domestic governments which, after a short 'honeymoon' period, tend to decline towards the midterm and tend to improve in the run-up to the subsequent national elections. Thus, empirical analyses of alleged second-order election effects typically include predictors capturing the electoral cycle.³²⁵
4. **Low campaign intensity:** Evidently, parties are less motivated and less inclined to mobilise similar resources for national (first-order) and European (second-order) elections. With reference to financial resources, political parties usually invest about fifty to eighty percent less in European than in national elections.³²⁶ Almost naturally, low investments by political elites are met and mirrored by reduced and restricted media attention. Detailed studies have demonstrated that second-order elections are usually, if at all, covered in the second half of the main TV news. While there are vast national differences concerning the coverage of EP

³²⁴ Marsh, M., 'European Parliament elections as second-order national elections', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London; Hobolt, S. and Wittrock, J., 'The second-order election model revisited: An experimental test of vote choices in European Parliament elections', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 30, No 1, 2011, pp. 29-40; Marsh, M., 'Testing the second-order election model after four European elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28, No 4, 2008, pp. 591-607; Hobolt, S. and Spoon, J.J., 'Motivating the European voter: Parties, issues and campaigns in European Parliament elections', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 51, No 6, 2012, pp. 701-727.

³²⁵ For some complex curve-fitting exercise cf. Schmitt, H., 'The European Parliament Elections of June 2004: Still Second-Order?', *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, No 3, 2007, pp. 650-679.

³²⁶ Sudulich, M.L., Wall, M., Farrell, D. M., 'Why bother campaigning? Campaign effectiveness in the 2009 European Parliament Elections', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 32, No 4, 2013, pp. 768-778. Note, however, that the 27 national election laws differ significantly in the provision of spending rules and spending limits. Raw spending data is therefore a problematic source for comparisons among national and EP elections, over different waves of the EP elections, and among different member states. Some of these provisions are discussed in the country chapters of Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, Brussels, 2019.

elections, there is only a slow upward trend in campaign intensity and coverage in the national news media. Substantively, some studies found that more than eighty percent of these reports are concerned with national actors and national issues, while only twenty percent cogently focus on the European level.

These empirical findings have been shown to be robust and are regarded as support for the SOE model. Indeed, there is substantive and convincing empirical evidence for any of the above-mentioned observational regularities. However, conclusions based upon aggregate data were not well-positioned to disentangle whether these patterns cited in favour of the SOE model emanated from vote switching or from turnout differentials, i.e. whether similar voters turned out and changed their vote choice, or whether different strata of the electorate were mobilised in the European elections, but stuck with their national-level preference. Over time, some studies presented empirical evidence that European issues were negligible in the first European Parliament elections in 1979 and indeed continued to be of minor importance at least until 2004. Focusing on somewhat similar data, other accounts however found that European issues did indeed exert an increasing impact on vote choice³²⁷ and/ or even motivated voters to defect from their 'normal' vote towards more Eurosceptic³²⁸ or towards more environmentally progressive platforms.³²⁹

Turning towards more recent EP elections, the disagreement about the second-order nature of these contests continues in scientific contributions by the adverse camps: Schmitt and Toygür³³⁰ argue that the 2014 European elections were still marked by all key features of the SOE election model: even in the (direct aftermath of the) Euro-crisis, turnout continued to be low, governing parties declined, small and Eurosceptic parties gained votes, thereby increasing trends towards dysfunctional levels of electoral fragmentation, and, at least outside of the post-communist states, these patterns of gains and losses were embedded with the respective national electoral cycles. Adversely, Hobolt³³¹ and Hobolt and de Vries³³² forcefully argued that the simultaneous economic, political, and social crises reinforced both the role and the scrutiny of the EU and, therefore, allegedly reduced the second-order nature of the 2014 EP elections.

The most recent EP elections in 2019 produced some additional challenges for the SOE model. Almost across the board (Italy being one crucial exception), electoral turnout increased within the member states, although it still fell significantly short of participation rates registered for first-order elections to national parliaments and/ or executives. In 2019, numerous established features of the SOE model also were replaced by more complex features. Strikingly, incumbent parties did not universally lose votes. Except for France and Germany, the party of the chief executive gained votes, while throughout the board, junior coalition partners declined.

³²⁷ Hobolt, S., Spoon, J.-J., and Tilley, J., 'A vote against Europe? Explaining defection at the 1999 and 2004 European Parliament elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2008, pp. 93-115.

³²⁸ Hobolt, S., Spoon, J.-J., and Tilley, J., 'A vote against Europe? Explaining defection at the 1999 and 2004 European Parliament elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 93-115.

³²⁹ Carrubba, C. and Timponi, R. J., 'Explaining Vote Switching Across First- and Second-Order Elections. Evidence from Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 38, No 3, 2005, pp. 260-281.

³³⁰ Schmitt, H. and Toygür, I., 'European Parliament Elections of May 2014: Driven by National Politics or EU Policy Making?', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 167-181.

³³¹ Hobolt, S., 'The 2014 European Parliament Elections: Divided in Unity?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 51, No S1, 2015, 6-21.

³³² Hobolt, S. and de Vries, C., 'Turning against the union? The impact of the crisis on the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 44, 2016, pp. 504-514.

While the underlying regularities, which are canonised and codified in the second-order election model, refer to a number of systematic features which characterise EP elections, it is important to note that this strand of the literature did not and cannot propose fully-fledged theories of electoral behaviour and/ or competition. Ultimately, vote choice is determined by each individual voter, and any meaningful attempt to account for its underlying motives need to directly address the level of individual voters.

4.2. Bringing Europe Back In: EU Issue Voting

From a methodological point of view, any analyses based on aggregate-level empirical generalisations, such as the SOE model, do not and cannot provide any conclusive evidence for of individual behaviour, since they concentrate on contextual, ecological data and do not sufficiently take into account the long-term determinants and short-term drivers of actual vote choice at the individual level. Thus, inferring individual behaviour from aggregate electoral returns is problematic from a methodological point of view. Instead, any substantively meaningful analysis of voting behaviour has to turn towards the micro-level of the individual voter and the driving forces that guide his/ her voting decision.

Both methodologically and substantively, the literature on EU issue voting provides a marked counterpoint to the SOE model. Performance differentials among different parties or party families among national and European elections are not attributed to salience differentials among alleged first- and second-order contests, but both differ, because EP elections are supposed to actually be about Europe.

So as to establish the significance of genuine European matters in both national and European elections, electoral studies have focused on the salience of European (the) issue dimension(s) for the explanation of individual-level vote choice. This approach is firmly rooted within the general rational choice paradigm in political science and the more specific spatial voting theory in electoral research. In a nutshell, these models presume that both voters and parties may be meaningfully represented by dots in an n -dimensional political space and that the relation of voter ideal points and party positions impacts on party evaluation and vote choice. Specifically, the Downsian³³³ model of vote choice assumes that voters are short-term rational, self-interested, and fully informed actors and posits that they will prefer those candidates, parties, or platforms which are most proximate to their personal ideal point. As an example, consider the simplest political space at hand, a unidimensional space ranging from the ideological left to the right. The proximity model cogently hypothesises that leftist voters like leftist platforms, rightist voters prefer rightist platforms and those who hold centrist political convictions opt for centrist parties.

Models that aim to assess EU issue voting, are usually organised within a two-dimensional 'European Political Space'. (Note that the label 'European Political Space' has a different and much more simplistic meaning in this section than in the previous.) The first dimension captures and integrates bundles of specific political issues within a more encompassing ideological dimension ranging from left to right. These ideological labels pick up a number of political matters which are not only relevant for national politics, but increasingly define and structure politics within the European Parliament and the other core institutions of the EU.³³⁴ The second dimension of the 'European Political Space', the contrast of

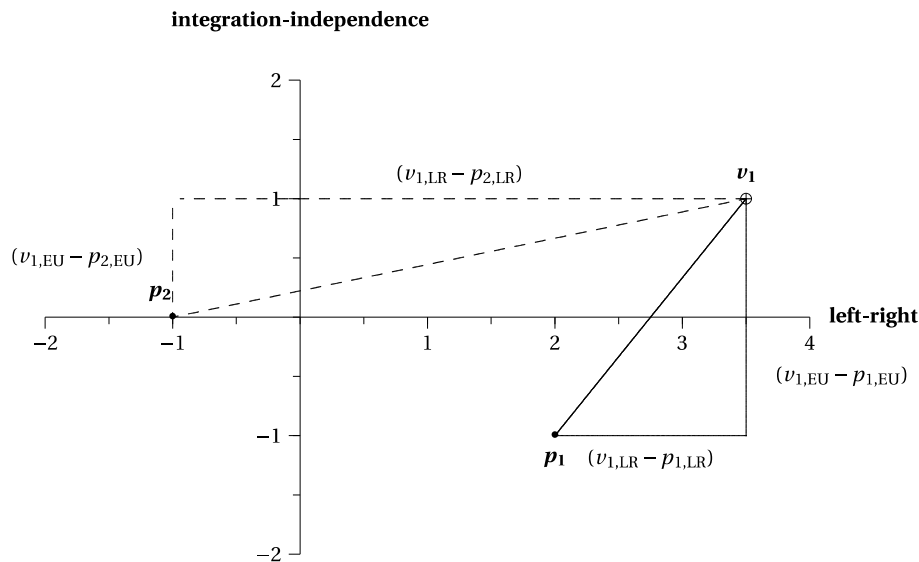
³³³ Downs, A., *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper, New York, 1957.

³³⁴ Hix, S., Noury, A. G. and Roland, G., *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007; Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008; Hooghe, L., Marks, G.

independence and integration, addresses more specific aspects of European integration and taps whether actors, either voters or parties, prefer both a widening and deepening of European integration or favour a cut-back and think the economic and/ or political integration has already proceeded 'too far'.

Conceptually, Figure 1 depicts a voter v_1 who strongly leans to the right in domestic politics and is slightly in favour of European integration. The choice is between two competing parties (p_1 and p_2) that offer contrasting positions on both dimensions that span the 'European political space': p_1 is a moderately left platform that lays out slightly Eurosceptic positions, while p_2 links moderately leftist positions with a neutral stance on European integration. For voter v_1 , the rightist party p_1 supplies far more attractive positions on the overarching left-right scale, while the rival platform p_2 is somewhat more in line with her preferences concerning European integration. The decision-making of v_1 will thus depend on the weight that she assigns to both dimensions of the policy space. If general left-right is the more salient dimension, the voter will choose p_1 , but if European integration by far outweighs other policy dimensions, she may also select p_2 .

Figure 1: The European Political Space



Notes: There is one voter v_1 (\oplus) and there are two parties p_1 and p_2 (\cdot) in a two-dimensional issue space. Policy distances are noted in parentheses; for instance $(v_{1,EU} - p_{1,EU})$ denotes the distance of v_1 and p_1 in the European integration dimension, while $(v_{1,LR} - p_{2,LR})$ denotes the distance of v_1 and p_2 on the left-right scale.

The spatial model of voting supplies a decision-theoretic core, and the 'European political space' provides an analytical grid for the analysis of EU issue voting. This perspective focuses on the salience and salience differentials of the (allegedly national) left-right and the (allegedly European) integration-independence dimensions. That said, we hasten to add some caveats to all too simple comparisons of

and Wilson, C. J., 'Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No 8, 2002, pp. 965-989.

these two supposed key dimensions. Steenbergen and Marks³³⁵ quote at least four different models that relate allegedly domestic with allegedly European issues.

1. The one-dimensional 'international relations model', represented by prominent scholars such as Andrew Moravcsik³³⁶ posits that actor preferences towards European integration are entirely determined by the conflict among those who favour more and those who want less integration.
2. Hix and Lord³³⁷ construct a two-dimensional grid with a left-right and an integration-independence dimension and suggest that both axes are entirely and principally unrelated. From their perspective, issues like left vs. right and integration vs. independence cannot easily and simply collapsed into a single dimension but require cross-cutting party coalitions and also tend to internally divide key players within the national party systems.
3. The regulation model, as advocated by George Tsebelis and Geoffrey Garrett³³⁸, assumes that both issue dimensions are fused, and issues of European integration may be subsumed to the core economic conflict of left vs. right. When both dimensions are fused, the left pushes for economic regulation by deeper European integration, while the right favours less regulation and, thus, less integration.
4. Hooghe, Marks and Wilson³³⁹, finally, have proposed a revised model of an inverted U-curve that pits integrationist actors in the political centre against Eurosceptic challengers at the extreme left and/ or right. Successful parties in the centre or incumbent government parties have little reason 'to rock the boat', while fringe parties at the margins of the ideological scales often face incentives to restructure political competition.

The concept of EU issue voting has been applied to both national and European elections, and voter preferences on European integration issues may be fed into both the intergovernmental and the supranational channels of political representation. Therefore, it is key to examine the impact of voter preferences towards European integration on both domestic and European elections. Notably, as long as key decisions concerning the EU politics, polity, and policy are taken by the Council, European voters should express their support of or their frustration with the EU in national elections.³⁴⁰ Early analysis of European issues in domestic elections arrived at a mixed picture: de Vries³⁴¹ adopted the notion by van der Eijk and Franklin and considered conflict over European integration a 'sleeping giant' and a potentially pivotal issue in national campaigns. Her analysis, however, demonstrated profound consequences of the EU dimension in British and Danish national elections. In these member states European integration was a very salient consideration that was picked up by the media and polarised the national party systems. However, she did not find similar evidence in Dutch and German elections,

³³⁵ Steenbergen, M. R. and Marks, G., 'Introduction: Models of political conflict in the European Union', G. Marks and M. R. Steenbergen (eds.), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 1-12.

³³⁶ Moravcsik, A., *The Choice for Europe*, Routledge, London, 1998.

³³⁷ Hix, S. and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, Palgrave, London, 1997.

³³⁸ Tsebelis, G. and Garrett, G., 'Legislative Politics in the European Union', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 1, No 1, 2000, pp. 9-36.

³³⁹ Hooghe, L., Marks, G. and Wilson, C. J., 'Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No 8, 2002, pp. 965-989.

³⁴⁰ Gabel, M. J., 'European integration, voters, and national politics', *West European Politics*, Vol. 23, No 4, 2000, pp. 52-72; Mair, P., 'Political opposition and the European Union', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No 1, 2007, pp. 1-17.

³⁴¹ De Vries, C., 'Sleeping giant: Fact or fairytale? How European integration affects vote choice in national elections', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 8, No 3, 2007, pp. 363-85.

where European integration was a de facto *raison d'être* and unequivocally supported by any major player in the party systems.

Only subsequently, after the significant strengthening of the Parliament's institutional position, studies of EU issue voting shifted their focus from the study of elections to national parliaments towards elections to the European Parliament. Over the last decades a growing body of empirical work has demonstrated that preferences towards European integration and/or the EU do matter for vote choice in European elections.³⁴² Focussing on vote switching among national and European elections, Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley³⁴³ find that Eurosceptic voters are considerably and robustly more likely to desert national incumbent parties than integrationist voters. This study also finds that tendencies to defect from government parties are conditional on and reinforced by the polarisation of electoral campaigns and the provision of Eurosceptic messages.

Citing individual data taken from the 2009 European Election Studies, de Vries et al. cogently demonstrate that proximity of voter ideal points and perceived party positions on the 'European dimension' (independently) matters for vote choice in about any EU member state and that these effects are sizeable in 25 and statistically significant in 17 out of 28.³⁴⁴ Only for Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain, and the United Kingdom the analysis fails to show the effectiveness of EU issue voting. Adversely, the European conflict dimension is particularly salient in, for instance, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. Moreover, de Vries et al. find that politically sophisticated voters are particularly likely to engage in EU issue voting.³⁴⁵ Ultimately, the authors also find that EU issue voting becomes more prevalent when media attention on EU politics is high, and substantial levels of party system polarisation render European integration a salient and controversial topic.

Below the line, we can evaluate both aggregate data in support of the second-order election model and individual-level data in support of the EU issue voting mechanism. Generally, comparative reviews of these models most frequently find that European elections are still somewhat 'second-order', while there is also evidence for some degree of EU issue voting. Focusing on the timeline from the first European elections in 1979 to the most recent iteration in 2019, the usual consensus is that European elections have gradually become more European. However, this development appears far from a common, monotonous trend. Essentially, as shown for the 2009 and 2014 elections, common crises which produce common (or at least similar) political problems and campaign issues appear to push for increasing Europeanisation. The lack thereof, as in 2019, often allows for a re-nationalisation of political campaigns (top-down) and of the determinants of vote choice (bottom-up).

Judgements on whether EP elections have become first-order European or continue to be second-order national elections are crucial for the legitimacy concerns and future perspectives of the European project and its current institutional form, the European Union. But the second-order and EU issue

³⁴² Rohrschneider R. and Clark, N., 'Second-Order Elections versus First-Order Thinking: How Voters Perceive the Representation Process in a Multi-Layered System of Governance', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 31, No 5, 2019, pp. 645-664; van der Brug, W. and van der Eijk, C., *European Elections and Domestic Politics: Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2007.

³⁴³ Hobolt, S., Spoon, J.-J., and Tilley, J., 'A vote against Europe? Explaining defection at the 1999 and 2004 European Parliament elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No 1, 2009, pp. 93-115.

³⁴⁴ De Vries, C., van der Brug, W., van Egmond, M. H. and van der Eijk, C., 'Individual and contextual variation in EU issue voting: The role of political information', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 30, No 1, 2011, pp. 16-28.

³⁴⁵ De Vries, C., van der Brug, W., van Egmond, M. H. and van der Eijk, C., 'Individual and contextual variation in EU issue voting: The role of political information', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 30, No 1, 2011, pp. 16-28.

voting concepts provide more than just analytical yardsticks for the evaluation of EP elections. If the SOE model still applies and national voters use European elections to send signals to or to punish national incumbent governments, this may well result in different parties and groups holding majorities in national parliaments and in the European Parliament and thus create institutionally loaded conflict between national and European actors. Likewise, if an increasing consideration of genuinely European matters in European elections leads to the selection of different majorities in national and European elections, similar functional problems may be the result.³⁴⁶

4.3. Party Signals and European Election Manifestos

In the imminent literature, parties are rightfully supposed to be strategic actors. Within the EU, they are also supposed to act at multiple levels of the political system. Therefore, party strategy and the design of partisan political campaigns are supposed to be closely linked to the dominant impacts on vote choice and reflect whether the party rank and file believe that EP elections are either salient contests driven by European affairs or second-order (if not second-rate) elections effectively dominated by first-order national concerns.

Party manifestos are utilised as a means to communicate both issue salience and issue positions to the wider electorate. Unfortunately, very few people read manifestos, because they are often lengthy and complicated, their obligingness differs across the Member States, they tend to be the outcome of lengthy intra-party negotiations, and, most importantly, very few people tend to trust campaign messages issued by political parties. Nevertheless, manifestos are often used to formalize intra-party compromise, to communicate with party activists, to signal the salience of alternative issue dimensions, and to broadcast party positions upon these dimensions. However, political scientists are avid readers and recipients of party manifestos. This does not solely apply to substantive analyses of political campaigns, issue salience, and movements in ideological or programmatic party positions. Instead, in addition to expert surveys and the analyses of roll-call votes, the qualitative hand-coding exercises or quantitative scaling endeavours have now among the principle tools to measure the positions of party elites within n -dimensional political spaces.³⁴⁷

Because parties in Europe usually need to compete on all levels of the EU multilevel system, they are required to draft and present election manifestos for elections to, inter alia, the national parliaments and to the European Parliament.³⁴⁸ EP election manifestos are gathered, coded, analysed, and documented by the Euromanifesto project that has been an integral part of the European Election

³⁴⁶ Manow, P. and Döring, H., 'Electoral and Mechanical Causes of Divided Government in the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 41, No 10, 2007, pp. 1349-1370.

³⁴⁷ For classical, hand-coded party manifesto studies cf. the webpage of the Comparative Manifesto/ MARPOR project at <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>. An overview of salient topics has been presented in three thematic volumes: Budge, I., Klingemann, H.-D., Volkens, A., Bara, J. and Tanenbaum, E., *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945-1998*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; Klingemann, H.-D., Volkens, A., Bara, J., Budge, I. and McDonald, M. D., *Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates for Parties, Electors And Governments in Central And Eastern Europe, European Union and OECD 1990-2003*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006; Volkens, A., Bara, J., Budge, I., McDonald, M. D. and Klingemann, H.-D., *Mapping Policy Preferences from Texts. Statistical Solutions for Manifesto Analysis*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

³⁴⁸ Golder, S., Lago, I., Blais, A., Gidengil, E. and Gschwend, T., *Multi-Level Electoral Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017.

Studies from 1979 to 2014.³⁴⁹ The provision of high-quality data on election manifestos in both national and European electoral arenas facilitates easy and simple comparisons of campaign signals, issue emphasis, and party positions across alleged first- and second-order elections.

In a recent paper, Daniela Braun and Hermann Schmitt have compared issue salience of and party positions on European integration within the West European countries that formed the previous EU-15 from 1979 to 2014.³⁵⁰ Salience theory posits that political parties pick up issues and policies in which they are considered competent and credible.³⁵¹ This does not necessarily imply that all political parties decided to increase their emphasis on European issues in European elections. In principle, higher salience of European integration could be linked with both the second-order and the EU issue voting models. First, when less is at stake in second-order elections parties lack incentives to play down and de-emphasize potentially conflictive European issues. Secondly, empirical tendencies towards an ongoing politicisation of European integration have rendered this dimension more salient, and most likely strategic actors are expected to pick up and integrate these considerations into their overall agenda.

In the empirical analysis, Braun and Schmitt indeed found that European affairs are considerably more prominent in EP elections. Generally, from a birds-eye perspective upon more than 500 parties, only 3.2% of all statements in manifestos for national elections pick up issues of European integration. For European elections, the Euromanifesto data reveals that 18.3% of all statements relate to European integration and EU politics. For the supply side of the electoral connection, we can thus conclude that campaign signals in European elections are considerably more Europeanized. However, a comparison of issue positions on European integration arrives at another set of conclusions. Both in national and in European elections, political parties present very similar issue positions concerning European integration and the EU. Actors neither represent more integrationist nor more Eurosceptic stances when they compete at the EU level.

In previous European elections, strategic choices by the (national) party rank and file frequently corroborate key ideas of the second-order election model. So as to motivate likely voters to turn out on their behalf, party elites regularly emphasised key issues in national politics and, if at all, did as was absolutely essential to send some compulsory or obligatory signals in the field of European (Union) politics.

Ultimately, electoral studies have focused on the perception of political manifestos and, thus, the consequences of laying out one or the other policy. Focusing on national elections to European Parliaments, Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu found that voters do not systematically react to policy shifts by political parties.³⁵² Across the board, European voters tend to react to their static perceptions of ideological or policy positions assumed by alternative parties. If, however, parties attempt to switch their policy positions, voters usually do not change their own ideal points and do not revise specific

³⁴⁹ See the website at <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/ees-study-components/euromanifesto-study> to access datasets, codebooks, and further documentation.

³⁵⁰ Braun, D. and Schmitt, H., 'Different emphases, same positions? The election manifestos of political parties in the EU multilevel electoral system compared', *Party Politics*, online first, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068818805248>

³⁵¹ For a summary of salience theory see Budge, I., Farlie, D. J., *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1983.

³⁵² Adams, J., Ezrow, L. and Somer-Topcu, Y., 'Is Anybody Listening? Evidence That Voters Do Not Respond to European Parties' Policy Statements During Elections', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No 2, 2011, pp. 370-382.

party loyalties. In a parallel study, Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu³⁵³ explore the responsible party model and voter-party linkages on the European integration dimension. Policy shifts on European integration, as reflected in their specific manifestos, usually go unnoticed by the voters and do not produce any viable consequences. Instead, policy shifts may be successfully communicated by political "experts" and/or highly informed and networked, so-called "rank-and-file citizens", who do not only react to canvassing material, but are also able to capture and digest the wider informational environment.

³⁵³ Adams, J., Ezrow, L. and Somer-Topcu, Y., 'Do voters respond to party manifestos or to a wider information environment? An analysis of mass-elite linkages on European integration', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58, No 4, 2014, pp. 967-978.

5. THE EP ELECTION 2019: EUROPEANISED CAMPAIGNS?

In the previous sections, we have already touched upon some issues related to the question of whether and to what extent the 2019 EP elections can be considered as Europeanised – or at least more Europeanised compared to earlier elections. In this section, we take a closer look at the election campaigns within the member states, focusing on the European Parliament's proposals regarding the visibility of European parties in the campaign, the intensity of the national campaigns and degree to which they focused on European instead of national issues, and on the campaigns in the national media and on social media.

5.1. Parliament Proposals on Electoral Reform

The 28, now 27, national segments of European elections differ regarding their institutional frameworks and with reference to the formal and legal regulations that govern them. The European Election Act, which dates back to 1976³⁵⁴, stipulates a common framework for the election laws, but the specific organisation of the national EP election segments is still decided and implemented by each individual member state. Consequently, all EP election segments are characterised by some common principles such as the EU-wide introduction of proportional representation, but many (and many important) details continue to differ considerably from one country to another.

In early 2015, the centrist EP groups aimed at harmonising these divergent procedures³⁵⁵. Parliament leadership authorised the drawing up of a legislative initiative report on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union, based upon Article 223(1) TFEU. In November 2015, Parliament adopted a resolution³⁵⁶ based on a legislative initiative report³⁵⁷ prepared by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) (the Rapporteurs were Danuta Hübner, EPP, and Jo Leinen, S&D). The resolution proposed a number of measures to address aspects of political legitimacy at the European level and to strengthen the electoral connection within and across the member states. The report proposed, inter alia, two fundamental reforms of the European Electoral Act that will be discussed in detail in the two following sections:

1. *The quasi-formalisation of the lead-candidate process*: Introduction of a common deadline of 12 weeks for the nomination of lead candidates by the European political parties: European elections should be fought with formally endorsed, EU-wide lead candidates ('Spitzenkandidaten') for the Commission presidency
2. *Establishment of transnational lists*: Creation of a cross-border joint European constituency, in which lists are headed by each political family's nominee for the post of president of the

³⁵⁴ Act of 20 September 1976 concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, OJ L 278, 8.10.1976.

³⁵⁵ For the following, cf. European Parliament, The Legislative Train Schedule, Reform of the Electoral Law of the EU, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-union-of-democratic-change/file-reform-of-the-electoral-law-of-the-eu>.

³⁵⁶ European Parliament resolution of 11 November 2015 on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union (2015/2035(INL)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0395_EN.html.

³⁵⁷ European Parliament, 'Report on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union' of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Co-rapporteurs Danuta Hübner and Jo Leinen, 2.10.2015, (A8-0286/2015), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0286_EN.pdf

Commission, is supposed to lift European Parliament elections from the national arenas towards a genuinely European level.

In addition to these signature proposals, the resolution also proposed a number of additional changes, *inter alia*:

- *Visibility of European political parties, their labels, their programs, and their personnel*: Ballot papers used in the European elections should provide equal visibility to the names and logos of national parties and the European parties to which they are affiliated, and further to make the affiliation of national parties to European political parties visible during the electoral campaign on television and radio or in electoral material.
- *Common nomination procedures and deadlines*: introduction of a deadline of 12 weeks before the elections for the nomination of candidates/establishment of lists at national level.
- *Mandatory formal threshold for bigger EU Member States*; barriers from the entry of small parties are supposed to lie between 3% and 5% for the either the allocation of seats in single constituency or for constituencies comprising more than 26 seats in Parliament.³⁵⁸
- *A right to vote in European elections for all EU citizens living outside the EU*: however, so as to avoid prevent citizens who hold two or multiple European citizenships from casting two or multiple votes, Parliament wants the member states to exchange data on voters to guard against election fraud.
- EU-wide introduction of e-voting and postal voting.

The catalogue of reform suggestions elaborated by Hübner and Leinen has faced severe criticism from both the member states and national parliaments, and discussions among diverse political institutions and ideological groups were dragged out over five (!) consecutive presidencies. As will be discussed in more detail below, the EP groups, the Council, and the member states could not agree on the proposals concerning the formalisation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the introduction of transnational lists for ideological, political, and legal reasons.

However, a number of more modest proposals made it into a compromise motion to reform and modernise the 1976 European Electoral Act. After reinforced pressure, on 7 June 2018 the Council adopted a draft decision amending the Electoral Act, and this motion was accepted by Parliament on 4 July and adopted by the Council on 13 July 2018.³⁵⁹ While the key proposals have not been enacted, a number of the more technical stipulations, albeit somewhat alleviated, made it into the compromise: (ad 3) the revised Electoral Act encourages the visibility of party political parties on ballot papers, (ad 4) establishes an EU-wide deadline of three (but not 12) weeks before election day for the submission

³⁵⁸ The 2002 Council Decision, amending the 1976 Act, authorises Member States to establish thresholds of up to 5 %. Fourteen Member States have set such thresholds by law. Yet, in two decisions (2011 and 2014), the German Federal Constitutional Court declared the country's existing thresholds for EU elections (5 %, then 3 %) to be unconstitutional. The decisions of the Court can be accessed online at:

https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2011/11/cs201111109_2bvc000410.html (for the 2011 decision) and at:

https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2014/02/es20140226_2bve000213.html (for the 2014 decision; this is also available in English).

³⁵⁹ Council Decision (EU, Euratom) 2018/994 of 13 July 2018 amending the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Council Decision 76/787/EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976.

of party lists, (ad 5) introduces legal thresholds between 2% and 5% for constituencies that allocate more than 35 seats, (ad 6) formally recognises the right to vote in other Member States or in third countries, and (ad 7) introduces options of postal and internet voting. Given that the revised Electoral Act had not been ratified by all member states in time, the 2019 European elections were conducted within the pre-existing framework of the Electoral Act as amended in 2002.

5.2. Implementation of Parliament Proposals within the Member States

Since the last elections in 2014, a number of member states have amended their national legal framework for European elections. According to a report of Election-Watch.eu³⁶⁰, these mainly consisted of amendments regarding political party and campaign finance regulation³⁶¹, the use of alternative voting methods and related regulations³⁶², national voter registration and data management processes³⁶³ as well as measures to facilitate the electoral participation of persons with disabilities³⁶⁴.

In addition, as a comparison of the national electoral rules in 2014 and 2019 provided by the European Parliamentary Research Service³⁶⁵ shows, a number of member states have expanded the options for EU citizens to vote from abroad, for example via voting at embassies (Austria, Belgium, Latvia, the Netherlands), postal voting (Denmark, Finland, Hungary) or proxy voting (Belgium). Others have, according to the same analysis, changed (Portugal: from postal vote to vote at embassy) or limited (Poland: postal voting no longer possible) the options. Electronic voting is still only possible in Estonia, while in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy voting is not possible from third countries and in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia, participation in the elections continues to be completely impossible from abroad.

Many of the other proposals, however, were not implemented. This applies, for example, to the lowering of the voting age to sixteen, which was only applied in Austria and Malta (it is 17 in Greece) in both 2014 and 2019, the election day which remained the same, and thus different, as in 2014, or the application of thresholds. Regarding the latter, a number of member states already apply thresholds between 1.8 (Cyprus) and 5 per cent, but half of the member states have not implemented threshold at all.

In the following, given the context of the study, focus on Parliament proposals related to the visibility of European political parties in the campaign. Article 10 (TEU) states that European parties 'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union'. Yet 'Europarties are still unknown to most European voters. Few will have heard their names, or would

³⁶⁰ Election-Watch.EU, Elections to the European Parliament 13 – 26 May 2019, final report, 16.9.2019, available at: <https://www.wahlbeobachtung.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/election-watch-eu-eam-ep-2019-final-report-160919.pdf>.

³⁶¹ Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Romania and Slovakia.

³⁶² Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Portugal.

³⁶³ Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, France, Portugal and Romania.

³⁶⁴ France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia.

³⁶⁵ Anosovs, E., Poptcheva, E.-M. and Sabbati, G., '2014 European elections: national rules', European Parliamentary Research Service, 10.4.2014; Sabbati, G., Sgueo, G. and Dobrev, A., '2019 European elections: national rules', European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2019.

recognize their symbols'³⁶⁶. As one remedy, Parliament had proposed a binding obligation to make the names and logos of European parties on national ballot papers equally visible as those of the national parties, and further to make the affiliation of national parties to European political parties visible during the electoral campaign on television and radio or in electoral material. Such a display on ballot papers and in campaign publications is vital to make citizens aware of the fact that the national party or candidate they are voting for, is a member of a European political party, and that their vote will have an impact on the size of the respective European political group.

5.2.1. Ballot papers

During the legislative process on the 2018 amendment of the European Electoral Act, the Council changed the Parliament proposal on the obligatory placing of the European parties' names or logos on ballot papers to a an optional one for the member states: according to Article 3b of the Council Decision³⁶⁷ Member States '*may allow for the display, on ballot papers, of the name or logo of the European political party to which the national political party or individual candidate is affiliated*'. The proposal also triggered opposition from a number of national parliaments that submitted reasoned opinions under the Early Warning Mechanism or opinions under the Political Dialogue³⁶⁸ stating, for example, that:

they did not agree 'with the proposed obligation of the Member States to present the affiliation of the national parties with the European political parties, because informing the voters about this affiliation is primarily a matter of interest of the national party itself' (Czech Senate);

'political parties should determine their campaign strategy independently and that the government has no role to play' (Dutch Tweede Kamer);

'several of the proposals seem difficult to reconcile with regulations relating to freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the Swedish Constitution. This applies to the proposals on an obligation to reproduce logos on ballot papers, the contents of national parties' election campaign materials and how election materials should be published' (Swedish Riksdag).

According to a report by the Commission³⁶⁹ in 2014, based on a questionnaire sent to the member states³⁷⁰ and expert consultations, only a minority of member states allowed the display of names

³⁶⁶ Hertner, I., 'Europarties and their grassroots members: an opportunity to reach out and mobilize', in Reconnecting European Political Parties with European Union Citizens, International IDEA Discussion Paper No 6/2018 (<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2018.71>), Lead author: Steven van Hecke, pp. 33-35, here p. 33.

³⁶⁷ Council Decision (EU, Euratom) 2018/994 of 13 July 2018 amending the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976, emphasis added.

³⁶⁸ The opinions can be found on IPEX: <https://secure.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/dossier/document/PE20152035.do#dossier-APP20150907>.

³⁶⁹ European Commission, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Towards more democratic European Parliament elections, Report on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations of 12 March 2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, COM(2014) 196.

³⁷⁰ Eighteen Member States submitted information in reply to the letter of the Commission of 13 September 2013: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Finland, Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. In addition, the Commission requested information from experts on Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania and Sweden; see European Commission, ANNEX - Replies by the Member States on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations regarding the European Parliament elections to the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Towards more democratic European Parliament elections Report on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations of 12

and/or logos of European political parties on the voting ballot for the 2014 EP election. This was the case in Austria, Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom. In turn, such a display was not allowed by national law in 15 member states (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece³⁷¹, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden).

Interestingly, however, a study commissioned by Parliament in 2015³⁷², comes to, at least at first sight, rather different conclusions. Based on an analysis of the legal provisions for the EU elections in the member states, the authors of the study found that:

*'in the vast majority of cases (68%) there is no provision for the inclusion of such information [European party names and/or logos, the authors]. The only problematic case could be that of the United Kingdom, where the part of the electoral law that regulates the ballot structure explicitly forbids the addition of any information that is not specifically included in this law, thus excluding the possibility of any "Europeanisation" of the ballot without changing the electoral law itself. Denmark provides a similar case, in which this explicit provision is not in the electoral law, but in an executive order, instead, so not change of the law would be necessary. Finally, only Greece's electoral law explicitly mentions the possibility of including European symbols.'*³⁷³

The differences may well be due to a different presentation of the existing legal provisions. In fact, the absence of legal rules concerning European information on the ballot identified by Bardi and Chicchi does imply that the display of European party names and/or logos was not explicitly prohibited - and thus allowed as identified by the Commission report - in a number of member states. Table 1 provides a direct comparison of the findings of both reports and shows that this explanation seems to hold in a number of cases. Other inconsistencies between both reports, however, remain. In the case of the UK, in particular, the European election regulations 2013 indeed rule out anything 'to be printed on the ballot paper except in accordance with these regulations', the latter including, inter alia, 'the names followed by the descriptions, if any, of registered political parties...' ³⁷⁴. Yet the rules do not specify whether the 'descriptions' of the parties may or may not include the European party affiliation.

March 2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, COM(2014) 196.

³⁷¹ Greece changed the electoral law to allow the display before the EP election, see European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections', COM(2015) 206 final.

³⁷² Bardi, L. and Chicchi, L., Electoral rules and electoral participation in the European elections: the ballot format and structure, Study commissioned by the policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament at the request of the AFCO Committee, 2015, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536464_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU(2015)536464_EN.pdf).

³⁷³ Bardi, L. and Chicchi, L., Electoral rules and electoral participation in the European elections: the ballot format and structure, Study commissioned by the policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament at the request of the AFCO Committee, 2015, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536464_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU(2015)536464_EN.pdf), here p. 25, emphasis added.

³⁷⁴ The European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 2013. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2013/2876/schedule/2/made>.

Table 1: Comparison Findings on Legal Provisions re. European Party Names and/or Logos on Ballot

	European Commission 2014 ³⁷⁵	Bardi and Chicchi 2015 ³⁷⁶
Austria	National law allows for the names of the European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Belgium	National law allows for the logo of the European political group/party to be added to the logo of the national political party.	No indication in law
Bulgaria	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Croatia	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. The relevant authorities are considering changes to the current rules on displaying names and logos on the voting ballots.*	No indication in law
Cyprus	No Reply	No ballot regulation
Czech Republic	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	No indication in law
Denmark	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	Prohibited
Estonia	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	No ballot regulation
Finland	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	No lists printed on ballot

³⁷⁵ European Commission, Annex - Replies by the Member States on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations regarding the European Parliament elections to the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee Of The Regions 'Towards more democratic European Parliament elections Report on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations of 12 March 2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, COM(2014) 196.

³⁷⁶ Bardi, L. and Chicchi, L., Electoral rules and electoral participation in the European elections: the ballot format and structure, Study commissioned by the policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament at the request of the AFCO Committee, 2015, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536464_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU(2015)536464_EN.pdf), here p. 25.

France	National law allows for the logos of the European political parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. *.	No ballot regulation
Germany	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law.
Greece	Current national law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the ballots. However, a new provision will be enacted to allow national parties to specifically indicate their affiliations to European parties on the voting ballots.	Permitted
Hungary	Current national law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. It is up to the parties to share information on European affiliation during the campaign.	No indication in law
Ireland	National law allows for the names of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Italy	The national authorities called on national political parties to inform about their affiliation to European parties, by displaying this affiliation in their logos to be used on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Latvia	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	No indication in law
Lithuania	National law does not allow for the names or the logos of the European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Luxembourg	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Malta	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. Issue being discussed with the main national parties.	No indication in law
The Netherlands	National law allows for the name (not the logo) of the European party to be displayed on the voting ballots. However, this at the discretion of national parties and only made available if the national party registers their European affiliation with their Dutch party name.	No ballot regulation
Poland	[empty]	No ballot regulation

Portugal	[empty]	No indication in law
Romania	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. Measures are being taken to allow the information to be provided on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
Slovakia	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots. Slovakia disagrees with the recommendation, as it believes the disclosure of this information would discriminate against national parties who are not affiliated with European parties.	No indication in law
Slovenia	Following a recent amendment to the national legislation, it is allowed to display names and logos of European Parties on the voting ballots (Slovenia notified the Commission of the legislation adopted for this purpose on 20 February 2014).	No indication in law
Spain	National law allows for the logos of the European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	No indication in law
Sweden	National law does not allow names and/or logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots*.	No indication in law
United Kingdom	National law allows names and logos of European parties to be displayed on the voting ballots.	Prohibited

Source: Authors' compilation based on data provided by the European Commission and Bardi and Chicchi Data directly imported from European Commission 2014b and Bardi and Chicchi 2015: 30-31. Note: data for European Commission 2014 is based on information submitted by the member states or, where indicated with *, by national experts on elections.

There is, however, rather broad agreement between the report by Bardi and Chicchi and a follow-up report by the Commission³⁷⁷ on the fact that the recommendation to display the affiliation to European parties on ballot papers was followed only exceptionally for the 2014 EP election. While Bardi and Chicchi found that Italy and Slovenia were the only member states where some parties featured their European party affiliation on the ballot, either within their national party logo (Italy) or separately

³⁷⁷ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections', COM (2015) 206 final.

(Slovenia)³⁷⁸, according to the report of the Commission only ‘some parties in France, one coalition party in Greece, four in Italy and three in the Netherlands made use of this right’³⁷⁹.

Unfortunately, no comparative data is yet available for the 2019 election. A survey of available ballot papers suggests, however, that the situation in 2019 remained essentially the same. In most member states, e.g. in Denmark³⁸⁰, Germany³⁸¹ or the UK³⁸², ballot papers still featured only the domestic party names and, more rarely, logos. Exceptions were found³⁸³ in Austria³⁸⁴, Italy³⁸⁵ or Luxembourg³⁸⁶, where individual parties did include the European party name and /or logo in some way on the ballot paper.

5.2.2. Visibility of the European Parties on Campaign Material

Regarding the more general recommendation by Parliament to make the European party affiliation visible on campaign material, the situation is similar. As an analysis of the rich online archive of canvassing material of the European Election Monitoring Centre (EEMC) shows³⁸⁷, national parties also very rarely followed the recommendation to make the European political parties they are affiliated with more visible: European party or political group logos can be identified³⁸⁸ on a very small minority of individual posters in the archive (see table 2).

In Austria, for example, the right-wing nationalist Freedom Party (FPÖ), naturally, did not advertise the logo of the European Party, and its posters used the European flag only as an attachment to a much larger Austrian flag. The social-democratic SPÖ featured, inter alia, a photo of its national leader Pamela Rendi-Wagner, who did not stand for election, showed a European instead of an Austrian flag, yet also failed to refer to its European parties, i.e. to PES. Unsurprisingly, the ‘new’ Austrian Peoples Party (ÖVP) showed the face of party leader and then ex-chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who also was not on the ballot, but neither displayed the EU flag nor referred to the EPP. This pattern may serve as a common example effectively reproduced largely across the board: national parties appealed to national politics, advertised national party leaders that usually did not stand for election, printed their national party logos, but most frequently did not show the name or logo of the respective European Party. The

³⁷⁸ Bardi, L. and Chicchi, L., Electoral rules and electoral participation in the European elections: the ballot format and structure, Study commissioned by the policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament at the request of the AFCO Committee, 2015, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536464_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536464/IPOL_STU(2015)536464_EN.pdf), here pp. 25, 34, 72.

³⁷⁹ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, ‘Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections’, COM (2015) 206 final. For the data, the Commission report draws on a commissioned ‘Study on the Conduct of the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament’, conducted by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES) in March 2015, which is, unfortunately, unavailable.

³⁸⁰ <https://www.bt.dk/politik/faerre-smed-en-blank-stemmeseddel-i-boksen-ved-eu-valget>.

³⁸¹ https://www.europawahl-bw.de/fileadmin/europawahl-bw/2019/musterstimmzettel_europawahl_2019.pdf.

³⁸² <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1127376/european-elections-2019-full-guide-how-to-vote-how-Eu-election-works-candidates>.

³⁸³ Unfortunately, we were not able to find the ballot papers used in all member states. The findings are therefore not exhaustive.

³⁸⁴ https://www.bmi.gv.at/412/Europawahlen/Europawahl_2019/files/Amtlicher_Stimmzettel_MUSTER.pdf.

³⁸⁵ Calossi, E., Gianfreda, S. and Pizzimenti, E., ‘Do europarties matter? The (scarce) level of europartization of the Italian parties, in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 67.

³⁸⁶ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/European_Parliament_election_2019_in_Luxembourg%2C_Ballot_paper.jpg

³⁸⁷ <http://www.electionsmonitoringcenter.eu>.

³⁸⁸ Please note that the EEMC does not claim to have archived all elections posters, that a number of posters were no longer available or not displayed correctly and that some photographs of posters made the content very difficult to read.

utilisation of European flags, however, either as a stand-alone or in some way attached to or merged with the national colours was quite common.

Table 2: Parties on Whose Campaign Posters the European Party or EPG Logo Could Be Identified

Member state	Party	European Party/EPG logo displayed
Cyprus	Kinima Sosialdimokraton, EDEK (Social Democrats)	both PES and S&D
Cyprus	Dimokratikos Sinagermos (DISY)	EPP
Estonia	Isamaa	EPP
Germany	CDU&CSU ³⁸⁹	EPP
Italy	La Sinistra	both GUE/NGL and European Left
Italy	Partito Democratico	PES
Ireland	Fianna Fáil (Dublin)	ALDE
Slovakia	MOST – HÍD (MOST)	EPP

Overall, these empirical records transport quite sobering news for those who aim to turn national EP elections into first-order contests: in EP canvassing, national parties by and large do not advertise their links with the European parties, but instead frequently feature the personalities of national leaders who do not stand for election. Similarly, political advertisements either tend to focus on solely national concerns and feature EU politics mainly in order to show that it benefits some kind of 'national interest'. The style and contents of EP election campaigns are thus picked strategically among personalities and issues that are thought to increase national-level vote shares.

³⁸⁹ Posters featuring the German EPP *Spitzenkandidat* Manfred Weber (EPP). Posters by the CSU alone featuring Weber omitted it.

5.3. Finally a European Election?

Overall, the European Election Monitoring Centre³⁹⁰ found what they term a 'low-intensity campaign' for the European elections in 2019: 'Only in a few countries, was it possible to talk of an intense electoral campaign, while in the majority of others the European campaign was barely perceptible'.³⁹¹ A common trend of the election campaigns across Europe identified by the EEMC was the continued dominance of domestic over European issues (Figure 3). Across all member states, on average around two thirds of the campaign content focused on distinctively national politics (36.3 per cent) or blended domestic and European affairs (32.9 per cent). Only around a fifth of the campaign appeals centred on Europe or purely European topics and perspectives (20.5 per cent). A very small percentage finally featured topics beyond the EU such as climate change as a global issue (1.5 per cent).

While we do not have similarly rich data on the 2009 and 2014 campaign material, research³⁹² suggests that these campaigns were more intense. Both EP election campaigns were very thoroughly impacted by the financial crisis, the eurozone crisis, and the refugee 'crisis'. On the one hand, this coincidence of multiple crisis, which were considered to be highly relevant for EU politics, led to a significant harmonisation and parallelisation of political canvassing upon related, highly salient economic, social, and cultural issue dimensions. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with European and, even more, national politics also led to an ever-increasing polarisation within national party systems and among the European parties, and also enabled some significant success and strengthening of populist and, predominantly, far-right parties.

The 2019 EP elections brought about a reversal of these trends. The previously all-important economic (financial crisis, eurozone crisis) and cultural conflicts (refugee 'crisis') certainly did not suddenly disappear, but their salience declined considerably. Instead, each segment of the 2019 elections was fought about different sets of national cleavages. This is also reflected in key issues that encouraged citizens to vote in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Overall, according to the Parliament's post-election survey³⁹³, economy and growth (44%), combating climate change and protecting the environment (37%), promoting human rights and democracy (37%), the way the EU should be working in the future (36%) and immigration (34%) were the most often stated issues. 'The economy and growth' was the biggest issue for voters in 16 Member States, while climate change and the environment was the main issue in eight countries.

³⁹⁰ Co-funded by the EP, the 'European Elections Monitoring Center' (EEMC; <http://www.electionsmonitoringcenter.eu>) has produced a vast collection of campaign-relevant material from more than 400 political parties in 28 member states. The project gathered and analysed almost 200 Facebook accounts, more than 1000 posters and press ads, and almost 500 television commercials in the run-up to the 2019 EP elections.

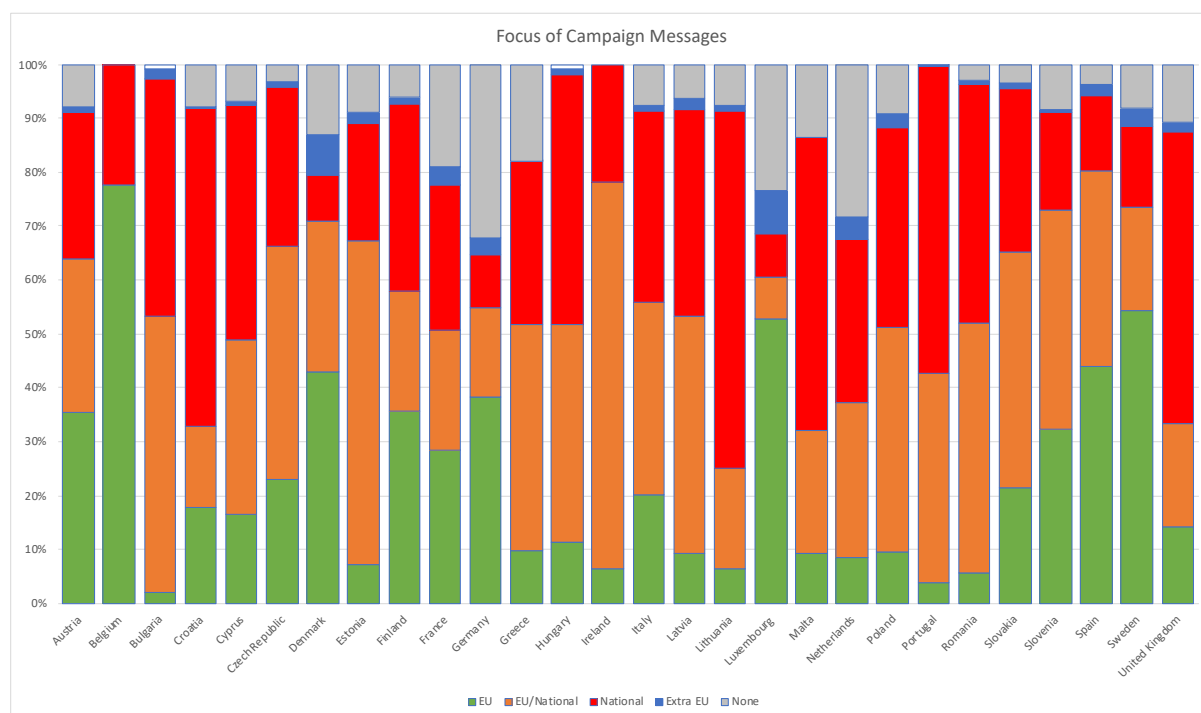
³⁹¹ Novelli, E. and Johansson, B., 'Introduction', in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, Brussels, 2019, pp. 15-30, here p. 15.

³⁹² De Wilde, P., 'The fall of the Spitzenkandidaten: political parties and conflict in the 2019 European elections', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020. Issue salience within the member states can be accessed via the 'most important problem' item in the European Election Studies for both 2014 and 2019. The European Election Studies (here: the voter survey) are available via <http://europeanelectionstudies.net>.

³⁹³ European Parliament, 'The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey - Have European Elections Entered A New Dimension?', Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament commissioned by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, 2019. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>, here p. 9. See also the full results for question QG7.

As figure 2 indicates, domestic issues dominated in Southern and Eastern Europe, while campaigns in Western and, albeit to a lower extent, Northern Europe were more focused on European issues. To some extent, this mirrors different main topics communicated by the parties. For example, immigration-related issues were more present in election campaigns in Eastern Europe and often framed as a domestic issue. Environmental issues, and climate change in particular, in turn, were campaign issues almost exclusively in Northern and Western Europe – and mostly framed as an EU or global concern.

Figure 2 Relative Shares of Campaign Messages According to the Main Dimension by Member State³⁹⁴



At the same time, it also needs to be noted that the graph shows the relative shares, which are, in some cases, based on relatively small numbers. One example is Belgium, with a relatively high share of EU-related campaign messages, but a very low absolute number of campaign messages overall. Thus, while the campaign was to a high degree focused on EU issues, it was a very low-intensity campaign due to federal and regional elections taking place on the same day (see also below).³⁹⁵

As a number of commentators point out, even where EU issues were relevant for the campaign, they were very often formulated in a simple binary choice for or against (more) EU integration.

The debates held at the national level largely followed this fault line, as did the few debates held between the top candidates (Spitzenkandidaten). In Emmanuel Macron's France, the contest was between the pro-European campaign of his Renaissance list and the nationalist agenda of the far

³⁹⁴ Data provided in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B., 'Introduction', in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, Brussels, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, Brussels, 2019, pp. 15-30, here p. 18.

³⁹⁵ Hoon, L., 'Belgium: Least salient, but very European', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 91-96, here p. 95.

*right; in Italy, Matteo Salvini portrayed the election as a referendum between the Europe of elites and the Europe of peoples; in Poland, the ruling nationalist Law and Justice Party faced off against a pro-European coalition of parties calling themselves the European Coalition; and in Sweden, the prime minister dubbed the European election a referendum on right-wing extremism. Although framed to reflect domestic conditions, the question was largely the same across the Union: namely, what is the future of the EU to be?*³⁹⁶

For Finland, a country where the overall turnout increased only slightly (from 41 per cent in 2014 to 42.7 per cent in 2019), Vesa Koskimaa comes to a similar conclusion: 'In the few party leader interviews and debates, domestic issues mixed with EU matters and discussion on EU politics often deflated to abstract debates on the existence of the Union.'³⁹⁷ Raunio³⁹⁸ as well as Christensen and Svensson la Rosa³⁹⁹, by contrast, argue that much of the Finnish campaign focused indeed on genuine European topics, rather than national issues.

For the Czech Republic, Vaclav Stetka assesses the election campaign as 'fairly lacklustre and predominantly relying upon empty slogans devoid of references to specific issues (i.e. "For fairer Europe", "For better Europe", "We are the heart of Europe, we want to be heard!")'.⁴⁰⁰

For Portugal, Carlos Jalali notes 'rumours of the death of the second-order election model may be exaggerated in Portugal. [...] This is perhaps best reflected in the prime minister's appeal for the EP vote to be cast as a means to support his government'.⁴⁰¹

In Slovenia, Deželan and Vombergar observed an overall, albeit unenthusiastically, pro European campaign, in which parties competed on, inter alia, their preferred vision for Europe. Still, overall 'these EP elections sadly went by as another second-or-order race with actors preparing or saving themselves for the "real" battle and voters observing fake debates instead of the meaningful ones, particularly the ones that are set and solved in Brussels'.⁴⁰²

Commenting on the elections in Sweden, Blomgren summarises a dilemma that is present in a large number of member states where party systems are still largely organised along the traditional left-right cleavage, namely the two sided nature of EU politics: one side concerns the policy as such, the other the question of whether the EU should have legislative competencies in the specific area. 'From a voter's point of view, this constitutes a dilemma. A party might oppose a certain policy either because

³⁹⁶ Persson, T., 'How the elections to the European parliament fell short of providing alternatives', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 16.

³⁹⁷ Koskimaa, V., 'No democracy without parties? The absence of EU-level agendas in the Finnish campaign', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 22.

³⁹⁸ Raunio, T., 'Finland: European elections in the shadow of national politics', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 35.

³⁹⁹ Christensen, H. S. and Svensson la Rosa, M., 'Finland: European Elections in the aftermath of national elections', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 133-139.

⁴⁰⁰ Stetka, V., 'The imitation game? EP election campaign in the Czech Republic', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 32.

⁴⁰¹ Jalali, C., 'Dispatches from the EU's 'poster boy': The EP 2019 elections in Portugal', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 40.

⁴⁰² Deželan, T. and Vombergar, N., 'Did we just do it again? A summary of the Slovenian EP elections', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 32.

it does not agree on the specific political measure or because it is reluctant to delegate power to Brussels. It is often hard for the voter to assess which arguments are most relevant in the debate'.⁴⁰³

Thus, a general politicisation of Europe and a growing polarisation in domestic debates may have contributed to increasing voters' willingness to go to the polls, especially under the impression of Brexit⁴⁰⁴ or the Trump presidency in the US. At the same time, lacklustre campaigns and the reduction of campaign messages - or public discourses on the EU more generally - to a simple dichotomous choice not only deprives citizens of a meaningful electoral choice, it contributes very little to giving EU citizens ownership over EU politics and thus to overcoming the 'democratic disconnect'.

Here, a survey of EU citizens in eight countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain) conducted five weeks before and immediately after the election provides interesting insights into the question of how 'European' the 2019 EP elections were from the perspective of citizens.⁴⁰⁵ Focussing on the topics citizens discussed with family, friends or colleagues, the results show that, perhaps rather unsurprisingly, that EU topics (here: 'European integration' and 'euro') were hardly the most discussed topics, either before or after the election. Even on the election day, the share of respondents who named both EU issues as the most important remained at 4 per cent (Italy and Poland) or less. Rather, citizens' discussions focused on climate change (10%), immigration (9.5%), health care (9.5%), pensions (6.9%), inequality in society (5.6%), environment (5.1), unemployment (4.3%), education (4.2%) or taxation (4.2%). And while some of these are clearly policies where the EU has far reaching competencies, the question remains to what extent citizens are aware of this. Somewhat more surprising is the large share of respondents who stated that they had not discussed EU topics at all during the last month. Before the election, the share of respondents ranged from slightly over 50 per cent in Denmark, where, as mentioned above, the EP campaign partially overlapped with the general election held on 5 June 2019, to 25 per cent in Italy. Immediately after the election, the shares are overall lower, ranging from over 30 per cent in Austria, Denmark, Germany France and Spain to about 25 per cent in Hungary and Poland and just under 20 per cent in Italy. Also, as the authors point out, where respondents did, in turn, discuss EU topics, this 'only indicates *some* level of discussion', and as their findings suggest, EU topics tended 'to be "squeezed out" by other issues'.⁴⁰⁶

5.4. The 2019 Campaign in the Media

Unfortunately, so far we do not have any in-depth media analyses of the 2019 elections to draw on. Yet it seems that in most member states, one or more tv debates between the main national party candidates took place before the election, for example in Denmark on 25 April and 22 May 2019, in

⁴⁰³ Blomgren, M., 'More or less EU – still the fundamental conflict in Sweden', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 42)

⁴⁰⁴ According the EP post-election survey, 22 per cent of the respondent across Europe stated that media coverage and discussions about Brexit impacted their decision whether to vote or not to vote, at least 'to some extent'. Unsurprisingly, the shares are highest in the UK (52 per cent) and Ireland (38 per cent), see European Parliament, 'The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey - Have European Elections Entered A New Dimension?', Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament commissioned by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, 2019. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>, here p. 73f.

⁴⁰⁵ Partheymüller, J., Plescia, C., Wilhelm, J. and Kritzing, S., 'Let's talk about Europe! Political discussion during the EP 2019 election campaign', *ÖGfE Policy Brief* 19, 6 August 2019.

⁴⁰⁶ Partheymüller, J., Plescia, C., Wilhelm, J. and Kritzing, S., 'Let's talk about Europe! Political discussion during the EP 2019 election campaign', *ÖGfE Policy Brief* 19, 6 August 2019, here p. 4.

France on 22 May, in Germany on 15 and on 21 May and in the Netherlands on 23 May. In most cases, the debates were broadcast on at least one main public TV channel, usually livestreamed on the internet and often accompanied by a live ticker or the possibility for viewers to post questions in the chat. In Germany, the main public TV channel ARD also broadcast a debate between two of the European *Spitzenkandidaten* Frans Timmermans and Manfred Weber on 7 May 2019. In Finland, Raunio credits the public broadcasting company Yle for 'running a series of informative stories and debates on Europe and the EP as the elections approached'.⁴⁰⁷ In addition, '[u]nder pressure from the nationalist-populist challenge, which was leveled by The Finns Party, pro-EU pundits in the social, and sometimes in the traditional media too, made a considerable effort to defend the EU and advocate voting with "pep talks" that centered on EU achievements, especially its role as a maintainer of peace and open trade.⁴⁰⁸ There were, however, also some exceptions. In Croatia, for example, no central debates with the national candidates were organised, and only one of the European *Spitzenkandidaten* debate was broadcast on TV, via cable news channel N1 television Zagreb.⁴⁰⁹

One important aspect that may have influenced the intensity of the EP election campaign, and the media coverage thereof, in some member states was the proximity of national (parliamentary or presidential) elections, which were likely to divert public attention at least to some extent.

In Estonia, parliamentary elections took place on 3 March 2019, and thus almost two months before European elections. Still, the unexpected coalition formation of the Centre Party with the right-wing populist Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) meant that domestic politics played a dominant role during the EP election campaign: 'Including the populists in government sparked a wave of protest among certain segments of the public and framed much of the EP election campaign for the opposition parties as they were trying to capitalise on this discontent, but also influence the conservative vote'⁴¹⁰.

In Finland, the parliamentary elections held more than a month before the European elections, on 14 April 2019, resulted in an unusually fragmented legislature (no party gained more than 18% of the votes). The new government led by SDP Chairman Antti Rinne took office on June 6. Negotiations on the government formation thus overlapped with the EP election campaign. As a result, European political parties or the EP party groups were hardly visible in the Finnish media - outside of nationally salient topics such as Finnish MEP Alexander Stubbs candidacy to become the EPP's *Spitzenkandidat*.⁴¹¹ Instead, media attention focused on individual candidates, especially on 'well-known hopefuls' such as incumbent MEPs parties' rising stars, but also on MPs retiring from the Finnish national parliament, the Eduskunta. Also covered extensively was the fact that 14 MPs who had won seats in the Eduskunta in the national election also stood for the EP election - 'sometimes just to increase the total vote share of

⁴⁰⁷ Raunio, T., 'Finland: European elections in the shadow of national politics', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 35.

⁴⁰⁸ Koskimaa, V., 'No democracy without parties? The absence of EU-level agendas in the Finnish campaign', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁹ Peruško, Z., 'The challenge of building a public connection', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 85.

⁴¹⁰ Mölder, M., 'Estonia: Europe on the agenda but not at the core of the campaign', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 34.

⁴¹¹ Koskimaa, V., 'No democracy without parties? The absence of EU-level agendas in the Finnish campaign', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 22.

their party's list, without any intention to enter the EP after the election.⁴¹² The strong media focus on individual candidates can also be explained by Finland's 'open list' electoral system. Within a national-wide electoral district, citizens vote for individual candidates who are not ranked on their party lists.

In Belgium and Lithuania, the European elections took place on 26 May, and thus on the same day as the Belgian federal and regional elections, and the second round of the Lithuanian presidential election, respectively. In Greece, local and regional elections were held one week later, on 2 June 2019 – and just a few weeks before the national parliamentary election on 7 July. In Denmark, finally, parliamentary elections were held 10 days after the European elections, on 5 June 2019. In all these cases, the hot phase of the electoral campaigns overlapped completely or at least partially, which more than likely influenced the parties' election campaigns, focussing messages more on domestic issues.

In Belgium, the concurrent elections resulted in the near absence of European campaigns and candidates from public debate and media: 'While national politicians took turns showing up in daily political shows on the Belgian national channels, there was little attention given to the EP candidates.'⁴¹³ According to Hoon one 'rather low-profile debate' between candidates was broadcast on Flemish television, and 'two or three slightly more ambitious debates' in Walloon media. This was slightly different in 2014, when - despite elections also taking place at the same day - the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt for the Presidency of the Commission did attract more attention to the European election.⁴¹⁴

For Greece, the close succession of elections 'clearly favoured national politics over the EU, [and] turnout at the EP election was relatively low (31 per cent). In addition, [...] the political leaders of the government and opposition made clear that the European elections were really about gauging the popular sentiment a few months prior to the national ones'.⁴¹⁵

In Denmark, finally, turnout at the national election remained essentially the same (84.5 per cent in 2019 compared to 85.9 per cent in 2015), while the turnout of 66.1 per cent at the EP election was a record-high for European elections, the increase in turnout by 9.9 percentage points and higher than the EU average. Still, exit polls show that an 'unexpectedly low proportion of voters' deviated from their national preference in their EP vote (24 per cent), 'suggesting a more nationalized vote than at previous Swedish EP elections'.⁴¹⁶

In other member states, by contrast, the campaign was overshadowed by domestic scandals.

In Austria, release of the infamous 'Ibiza video'⁴¹⁷ on the evening of 17 May 2019 not only led to the resignation of FPÖ party leader and vice chancellor H.C. Strache and his deputy, Johann Gudenus, but

⁴¹² Koskimaa, V., 'No democracy without parties? The absence of EU-level agendas in the Finnish campaign', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, pp. 22.

⁴¹³ Hoon, L., 'Belgium: Least salient, but very European', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 91-96, here p. 95.

⁴¹⁴ Kelbel, C., Van Ingelgom, V., and Verhaegen, S., 'Looking for the European voter: Split-ticket voting in the Belgian Regional and European Elections of 2009 and 2014', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 116-129.

⁴¹⁵ Papathanassopoulos, S., 'Dealing with the Outliers', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 38.

⁴¹⁶ Berg, L. and Ekengren Oscarsson, H., 'The Swedish European parliament election 2019', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, pp. 50-51, here p. 50.

⁴¹⁷ The secretly filmed video, released simultaneously by the German newspapers Sueddeutsche Zeitung and Der Spiegel, appears to show Strache and Gudenus offering access to public contracts at inflated prices to the alleged niece of a

also to the collapse of the governing coalition of the Austrian Peoples Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party (FPÖ). As a result of the scandal, the attention of the media as well as the citizens was almost completely focused on the national level, 'making the European Parliament election *per se*, as well as parties' positions on European integration, politically irrelevant'⁴¹⁸. Still, turnout at the EP election increased by 14.4 per cent (from 45.4 per cent to 59.8 per cent). To a large part this is due to the fact that the EP election turned into a pre-test for the national snap election scheduled for September 2019. In addition, by stylising itself as the victim in the scandal, the FPÖ was able to mobilise its voters – including voters who normally do not vote in EP elections⁴¹⁹. While the FPÖ was largely able to maintain its vote share, losing around 2.5 percentage points compared to the 2014 election, the ÖVP was able to realise its largest vote share in EP elections to date, with 34.6 per cent (plus 7.6 percentage points). Despite being ranked – symbolically – last on the FPÖ list for the elections, Strache even received enough preferential votes to gain a seat in the new EP.

In Bulgaria, public debates throughout April and May 2019 were dominated by corruptions scandals involving members of the government⁴²⁰. Especially the so-called 'apartment-gate'⁴²¹ infuriated voters: according to media reports, prominent Bulgarian politicians and state officials had purchased luxury apartments in Sofia at prices way below market value. One outcome of the scandal was, according to Yordanova, increased apathy among the electorate: 'The public grew tired of the electoral political propaganda'⁴²². The share of voters viewing the EP election as important dropped from 51 per cent in April 2019 to 38 per cent in May, the final turnout was 33.3 per cent – despite compulsory voting. Still, due to the personal engagement by its popular leader, Boyko Borisov, the main governing party Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) was able to recover and emerge as the winner of the Elections.

In Germany, finally, a so far 'rather underwhelming and unexciting electoral campaign'⁴²³ gained quite some momentum due to a rather different event, namely when on 18 May 2019 a young youtuber released an hour-long video⁴²⁴ on the German mainstream parties, and the CDU in particular, under the title 'the destruction of the CDU' (Die Zerstörung der CDU', translation by the author). In the video, youtuber Rezo strongly criticised the failure of the mainstream parties to address acute problems focussing especially on climate change but also on income inequality, foreign and security policy, drug policy or the recent EU copyright law. The proclaimed 'personal rant' ended with a plea to vote in the EU elections – just not for the mainstream parties or, especially, the extremist right wing AfD. The video

wealthy Russian oligarch in return for campaign support for the FPÖ including illegal funding for the then upcoming general elections in 2017. See <https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/politik/das-strache-video-e335766/> for details.

⁴¹⁸ Kritzinger, S. and Plescia, C., 'Austria: the 2019 European Parliament election overshadowed by Ibiza-gate', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 85-89, here p. 85, emphasis in original.

⁴¹⁹ Kritzinger, S. and Plescia, C., 'Austria: the 2019 European Parliament election overshadowed by Ibiza-gate', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 85-89, here p. 87.

⁴²⁰ Yordanova, N., 'Bulgaria: neither a protest, nor a European vote', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 97-102.

⁴²¹ Financial Times, 'Bulgaria's "apartment gate" infuriates struggling citizens, 25.04.2019. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/30083814-5ea0-11e9-a27a-fdd51850994c>.

⁴²² Yordanova, N., 'Bulgaria: neither a protest, nor a European vote', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 97-102, here p. 98.

⁴²³ Giebler, H., 'Germany: Second order but still groundbreaking?', in L. De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 147-153, here p. 149.

⁴²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y1IZQsyuSQ>.

quickly went viral in Germany and even abroad, reaching over 12 million views⁴²⁵ in the week before the election. Two days before the election, Rezo released an additional video⁴²⁶ featuring an 'open letter' by a large number of young German youtubers, again asking viewers to participate in the elections, but not to vote for the large mainstream parties or the AfD. While both videos are focused rather on domestic than EU politics or the European elections as such, it is more than likely that the videos, and the ensuing debates on them⁴²⁷, had a substantial impact on the turnout as well as the success of the Greens especially among the young electorate.

5.5. #EP2019 - A Campaign fought on Social Media

Social media played not only a role in Germany, with the campaign gaining much of its dynamics through a controversial YouTube video. According to the data of the European election Monitoring Centre ⁴²⁸ campaigning via social networks and platforms surpassed more traditional campaigning via posters or TV commercials in most member states.

Here, Germany stands out as the member state with the highest share of traditional posters and press advertisements, followed by Slovakia, Denmark, Slovenia, Lithuania or Estonia. TV advertisements also still played a larger role in Germany, Denmark, Estonia and Lithuania, but also in Greece, Malta and Luxemburg. In absolute numbers, Greek parties took the lead with 87 TV commercials, followed by Portugal (n=63), Germany (n=40), Poland (n=32) and Hungary (n=31).

In turn, the campaigns in other member states were fought to a much larger degree on social media platforms, with Facebook posts reaching a share of 85 per cent and higher out of all campaign messages. In terms of absolute numbers, Southern European member states, and especially Italy and Portugal, took the lead in terms of the intensity of social media campaigns, while the differences between Eastern, Western and Northern European member states are less pronounced. Looking at the overall shares, the picture changes somewhat, with the highest share of Facebook posts out of all messages found in the UK, France, Cyprus, Croatia, Belgium, Italy, and Latvia.

When comparing the different campaign outlets, it needs to be taken into account that the shares are based on the absolute numbers of campaign messages. In other words, a message in a post on Facebook was counted with the same weight as a message in a television advertisement or on a campaign poster but may have a very different impact in terms of intensity and duration of reach. Still, the shares clearly reflect the growing importance of social media for political communication.

Differences between the countries in terms of campaign outlets used can be partly explained by domestic legal regulations.⁴²⁹ In Estonia, for example the use of campaign posters during the election campaign is prohibited. In some member states parties have, tightly regulated, access to free airtime

⁴²⁵ As of May 2020, the video has over 17 million views.

⁴²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xpg84NjCr9c>.

⁴²⁷ For a good summary, see Kuras, P., 'German Politics Discovers YouTube', *Foreign Policy*, 4 June 2019, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/04/german-politics-discovers-youtube/>.

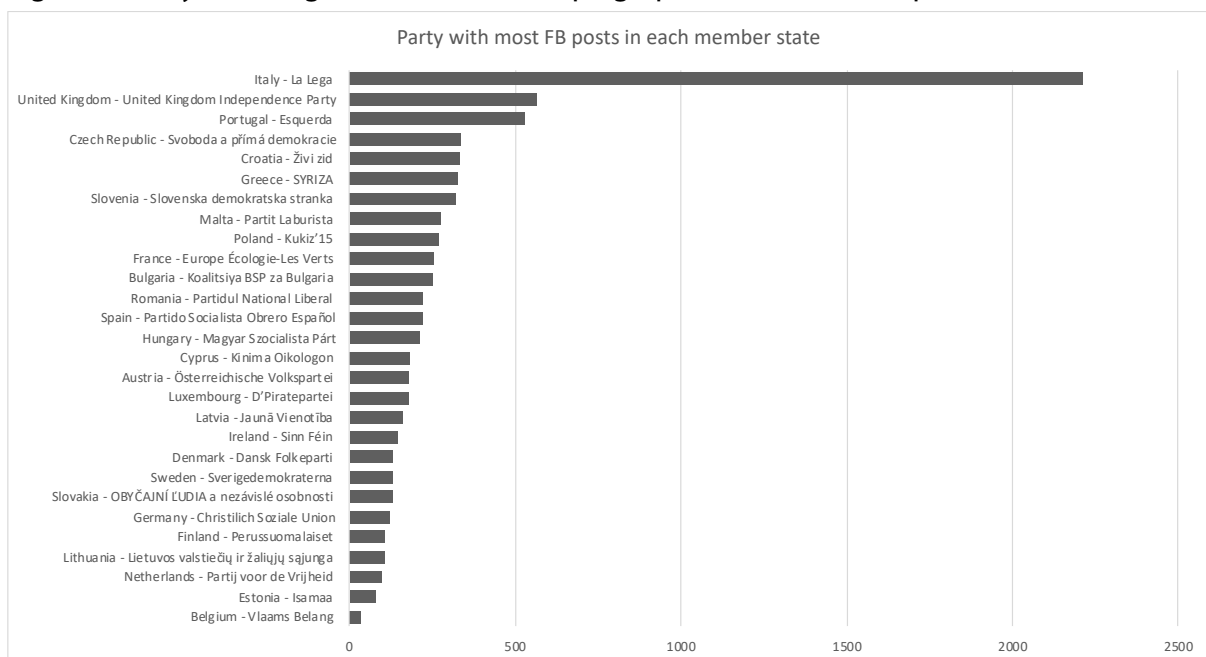
⁴²⁸ For the following, Novelli, E. and Johansson, B., 'Introduction', in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, Brussels, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, 2019, pp. 15-30.

⁴²⁹ On the following, see the country reports in Cappello, M. (ed.), *Media coverage of elections: the legal framework in Europe*, IRIS Special, European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg, 2017; and in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, Brussels, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, 2019.

for campaign broadcasts (albeit in some cases limited to public broadcasters), such as in the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland or Spain. In turn, paid political advertisements are generally prohibited in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Spain, and the UK, but permitted in Poland (albeit with price regulations) and in the Netherlands. Finally, only few member states have rules on political advertising online, which may also explain the intensity of the online campaign. In the UK, finally, the late decision to hold European elections meant that only few TV commercials could be produced in time, and print material such as posters was not used at all.

In addition, differences between party families seemed to play a role. Figure 3 shows the party with the largest number of campaign posts on Facebook during the campaign for each member state. Although the numbers differ widely even for the most active parties, the figure indicates that Eurosceptic and/or populist parties at the extreme ends of the political spectrum were especially active on social media.

Figure 3: Party with largest number of campaign posts on Facebook per member state



Finally, campaigning via posts on parties' or candidates' own Facebook pages, twitter messages or Instagram posts need to be distinguished from paid political advertisements placed on Facebook, twitter or Instagram. According to Facebook's publicly available ad library⁴³⁰, EU institutions and European political parties spent 3.9 million euro for a total of 6,686 political advertisements on Facebook between the beginning of March and the end of May 2019.⁴³¹ Of these, the Commission spent just 105,000 euro, Parliament 3.3 million euro on advertisements related to the 'This Time I'm Voting' campaign aimed at encouraging EU citizens to vote. By contrast, spending by European political parties on Facebook advertisements was much lower, amounting to 449,000 euro on Facebook ads in the three months leading up to the election – a figure that pales in comparison to the amounts spent by some individual national parties over the same period. Drawing on data compiled by the European

⁴³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library>.

⁴³¹ VoxEurope, 'EU institutions and parties paid millions on Facebook ads', 18.06.2019, <https://voxeurope.eu/en/2019/european-elections-5123411>.

Data Journalism Network (EDJN)⁴³², Table 3 provides an overview over the 25 'top spenders' among the national political parties. The only European party with a comparable amount spent on Facebook advertisements were the European Greens.

Table 3: Top 25 National Parties in Terms of Amount Spent on Political Facebook Advertisements

Name	Amount Spent
Unidos Podemos (ES)	751,344
Vlaams Belang (BE)	707,737
Ciudadanos (ES)	364,595
SPD (DE)	314,745
CDU (DE)	300,010
The Liberal Democrats (UK)	274,919.96
European Greens	255,058.06
Partido Popular (ES)	251,252
The Labour Party (UK)	248,877.15
Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (BE)	247,321
BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN (DE)	214,910
Fidesz (HU)	182,576.29
Socialdemokraterna (SE)	171,042.02
FPÖ (AT)	161,311
Change UK - The Independent Group (UK)	154,708.3
sp.a (BE)	154,443
FDP (DE)	145,871
SPÖ (AT)	145,171
The Brexit Party (UK)	143,169.87
Open Vld (BE)	134,946

⁴³² <https://edjn.localfocus.nl/#/details/758e3d8107b317b09d39d62031188dfb6c8a6a39b821dd2b6605ecc6047cb79a/>.

The Conservative Party (UK)	132,247.29
Moderaterna (SE)	129,853.01
Lega - Salvini Premier (IT)	128,782
Uniunea Salvați România – USR (RO)	125,869.15
Centerpartiet (DK)	124,085.36
Partidul Social Democrat (RO)	108,937.92

Source: European Data Journalism Network⁴³³. Note: Data covers amounts in euro spent between 1 March and 26 May excluding advertisements without a disclaimer.

Whether or not campaigning and advertising on social media platforms such as Facebook is also an *effective* means of informing, mobilising and engaging with voters in EP elections is difficult to assess. Here, the literature generally suggests that online communication with voters can indeed be a successful strategy to secure re-election.⁴³⁴ Whether the *content* of political communication in terms of positions or justifications matters for the generation of electoral support is less clear. While some show that (some) content matters⁴³⁵, others have argued that any communication might be good communication, and that electoral benefits depend more on the frequency of communication than the content⁴³⁶. Regarding communication via social media, studies have shown that following a prominent candidate's Twitter feed, for example, is not necessarily connected to increases in political learning⁴³⁷, but can lead to more positive attitudes towards tweeting candidates⁴³⁸, generate feelings of greater connectedness to the tweeting personality⁴³⁹, and can have a strong effect on recognition, recall and imagined intimacy, especially in the case of personalised messages by candidates⁴⁴⁰.

⁴³³ <https://edjn.localfocus.nl/#/details/758e3d8107b317b09d39d62031188dfb6c8a6a39b821dd2b6605ecc6047cb79a/>.

⁴³⁴ Jackson, N., 'Perception or reality: How MPs believe the internet helps them win votes', *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol. 10, No 3, 2011, pp. 230–250.; Jackson, N. and Lilleker, D., 'Just public relations or an attempt at interaction? British MPs in the press, on the web and "in your face"', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 19, No 4, 2004, pp. 507–533; Kruikemeier, S., 'How Political Candidates Use Twitter and the Impact on Votes', *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 34, 2014, pp. 131–39; Marcinkowski, F. and Metag, J., 'Why do candidates use online media in constituency campaigning? An application of the theory of planned behavior', *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2014, pp. 151–68.

⁴³⁵ Grose, C.R., Malhotra, N. and Parks Van Houweling, R., 'Explaining Explanations: How Legislators Explain Their Policy Positions and How Citizens React', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 59, No 3, 2015, pp. 724–43; McGraw, K.M., Timponi, R., and Bruck, G., 'Justifying Controversial Political Decisions: Home Style in the Laboratory', *Political Behavior*, Vol. 15, No 3, 1993, pp. 289–308; Peterson, E. and Simonovits, G., 'Costly Values: The Limited Benefits and Potential Costs of Targeted Policy Justifications', *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, Vol. 4, No 2, 2017, pp. 95–106.

⁴³⁶ Matsubayashi, T., 'Do Politicians Shape Public Opinion?', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No 2, 2013, pp. 451–478.

⁴³⁷ Dimitrova, D.V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J. and Nord, L.W., 'The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns', *Communication Research*, Vol. 41, No 1, 2014, pp. 95–118.

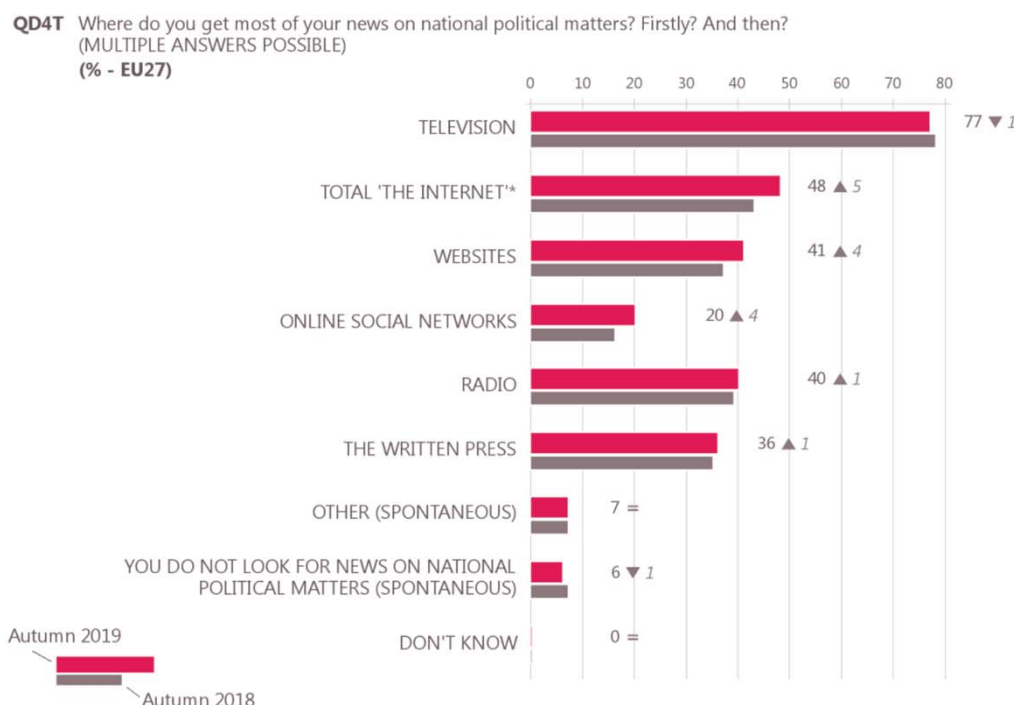
⁴³⁸ Kobayashi, T. and Ichifuji, Y., 'Tweets That Matter: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment in Japan', *Political Communication*, Vol. 32, No 4, 2015, pp. 574–593.

⁴³⁹ Lee, E.J. and Jang, J.W., 'Not so imaginary interpersonal contact with public figures on social network sites: how affiliative tendency moderates its effects', *Communication Research*, Vol. 40, No 1, 2013, pp. 27–51

⁴⁴⁰ Lee, E.J. and Oh, S. Y., 'Seek and You Shall Find? How Need for Orientation Moderates Knowledge Gain from Twitter Use', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 63, No 4, 2013, 745–65.

In addition, the potential reach of campaign messages is increasing. As figure 4 drawing on data from the Standard Eurobarometer from Autumn 2019⁴⁴¹ shows, online social networks have by no means surpassed classic sources such as television or the print media but have still become fairly important sources for political news for EU citizens.

Figure 4: Sources for Political News

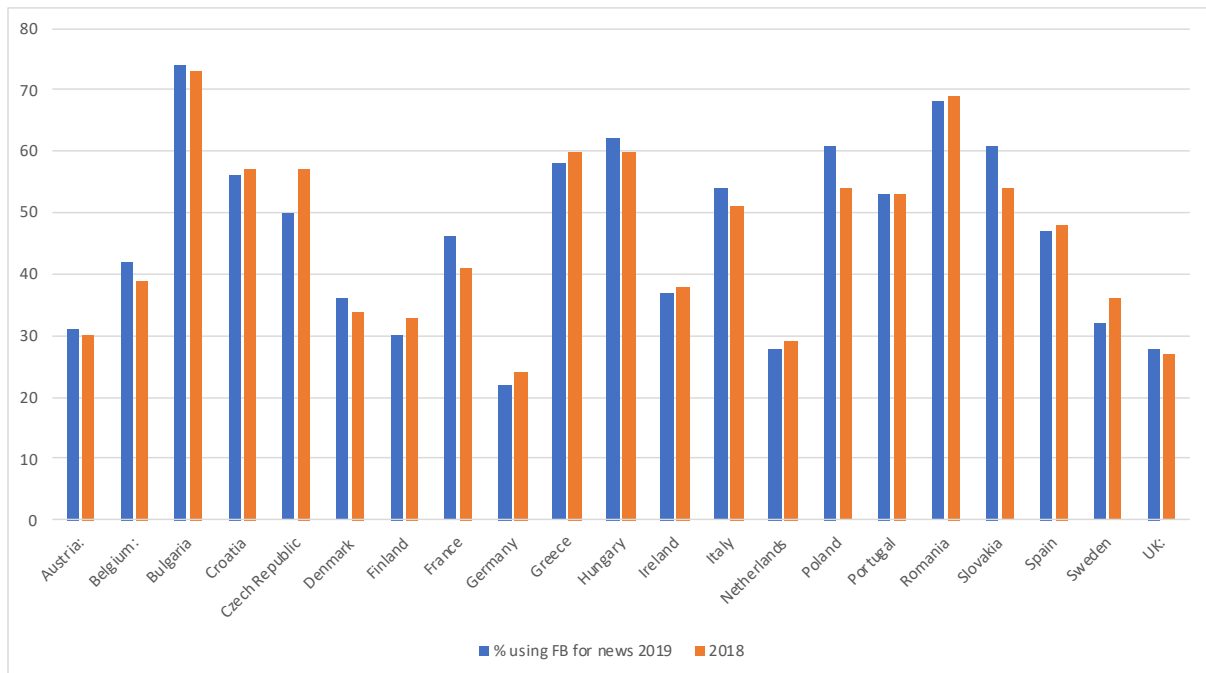


It remains unclear, however, to what extent the data indicates that online campaigning via *Facebook* during the 2019 EP elections actually reached the citizens. First, the term social media network encompasses, of course, a broader range of platforms than just Facebook. According to the Reuters Digital News Report, Facebook was indeed the most important source among the social media networks for news in all surveyed member states in 2019 (figure 5) – at least for online populations who read news at least once a month⁴⁴² – although its importance seems to decline in a number of member states especially among younger people. Still, even a greater use of online social networks as sources of political news does not mean that Facebook pages of political parties or candidates (as well as their Twitter, Instagram or YouTube accounts) are indeed among these sources.

⁴⁴¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2255>.

⁴⁴² The Survey was conducted online, thus underrepresenting 'the consumption habits of people who are not online (typically older, less affluent, and with limited formal education)'. In addition, all respondents stating they that they had not consumed any news in the past month were filtered out. See Newman, N. with Fletcher, R, Kalogeropoulos, and Nielsen R., K., Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford, 2019, here p. 5, available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf.

Figure 5: Share of respondents using Facebook as a source for political news 2018/19

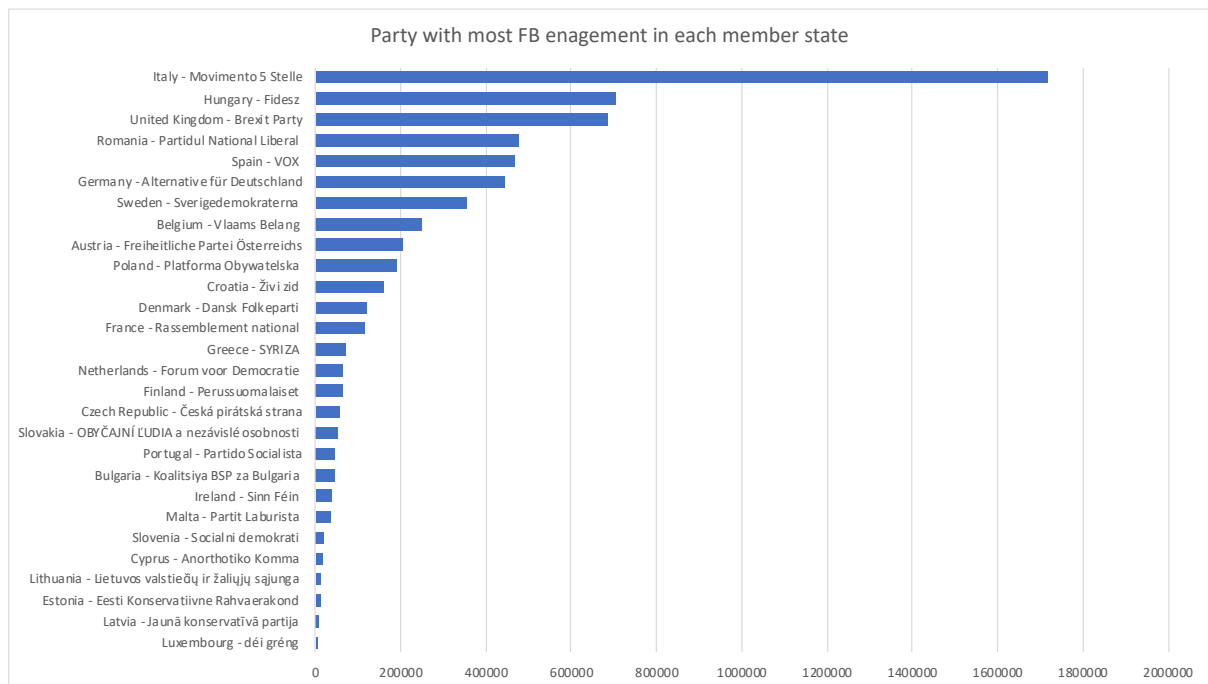


Source: see the country chapters in Reuters Digital News Report 2019⁴⁴³

Indeed, the data from the EEMC indicates great variation when it comes to the engagement of users with the FB pages of the political parties (figure 6). Again, and even more pronounced than regarding the use of Facebook as a campaign message outlet, mainly Eurosceptic populist parties drew user engagement.

⁴⁴³ Newman, N. with Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, and Nielsen R., K., Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford, 2019, available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf. Unfortunately, the survey does not cover all EU member states.

Figure 6: Party with most user engagement on Facebook in each member state



Source: European Election Monitoring Centre⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. the country reports in Novelli, E. and Johansson, B. (eds.), *European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, European Parliament, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit Directorate-General for Communication, Brussels, 2019.

6. RISE AND FALL OF THE SPITZENKANDIDATEN

There is a long-standing debate in the academic literature on the democratic deficit of the EU: authors continue to disagree whether this alleged legitimacy issue does actually exist⁴⁴⁵ or not⁴⁴⁶, and, if yes, what remedies are at hand to address it. Some contributions suggest focusing on democratic input to re-model mechanisms of delegation and strengthen democratic accountability. Other authors, by contrast, believe the EU should (and can only) be legitimised by its technocratic output, its effectiveness, performance, and ability to produce optimal solutions for common problems of the member states.⁴⁴⁷

This section exclusively focusses on the input dimension. As indicated before, the programmatic contribution by Simon Hix⁴⁴⁸ did a lot to feed political science research back into political and public discussions on deficits of the EU's political system as well as on potential remedies and institutional reforms to address these problems and to introduce 'limited democratic politics' at the EU level. A key proposal by Hix to bolster the legitimacy of decision-making at the EU level was to engineer an open contest for the presidency of the Commission. Publicly visible, rival candidates were considered to be suitable vehicles to better aggregate and present the political programs of the European political parties, to focus political attention towards the levels of EU politics, and to communicate directly with the European public. The introduction of lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*) also represented an attempt to strip EU politics of its bureaucratic, distant, and impersonal reputation, and instead to attach well-established personalities to the European level and thereby foster the links of European politicians with the European electorate(s) and to improve the perception of political accountability, competence, and leadership.⁴⁴⁹

The formal basis for the *Spitzenkandidaten* model in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), however, remains rather opaque and only links the selection of the candidate for the office of the Commission President somehow to the results of the preceding European elections. Article 17(7) states that

'7. Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure.'

While these provisions neither formally define the role of lead candidates nor institute any substantive claims, the revised formulation of Article 17(7) does establish an, albeit weak, link to the European

⁴⁴⁵ Føllesdal, A. and Hix, S., 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 44, No 3, 2006, pp. 533-562.

⁴⁴⁶ Majone, G., 'Europe's "democratic deficit": the question of standards', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 4, No 1, 1998, pp. 5-28; Moravcsik, A., 'In Defence of the "Democratic Deficit": Reassessing the Legitimacy of the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 4, 2002, pp. 603-634.

⁴⁴⁷ Majone, G., 'Europe's "democratic deficit": the question of standards', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 4, No 1, 1998, pp. 5-28; Scharpf, Fritz W., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

⁴⁴⁸ Hix, S., *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008.

⁴⁴⁹ Raube, K., 'From dawn to doom: the institutionalization of the Spitzenkandidaten process during European elections and its final negation', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

elections' results. The new wording opened up some leeway for the idea that the new chief executive of the EU could be, in some way or another, indirectly elected by the people. As a result, a greater formalisation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process was also one of the central proposals for Parliament for electoral reform in 2015.

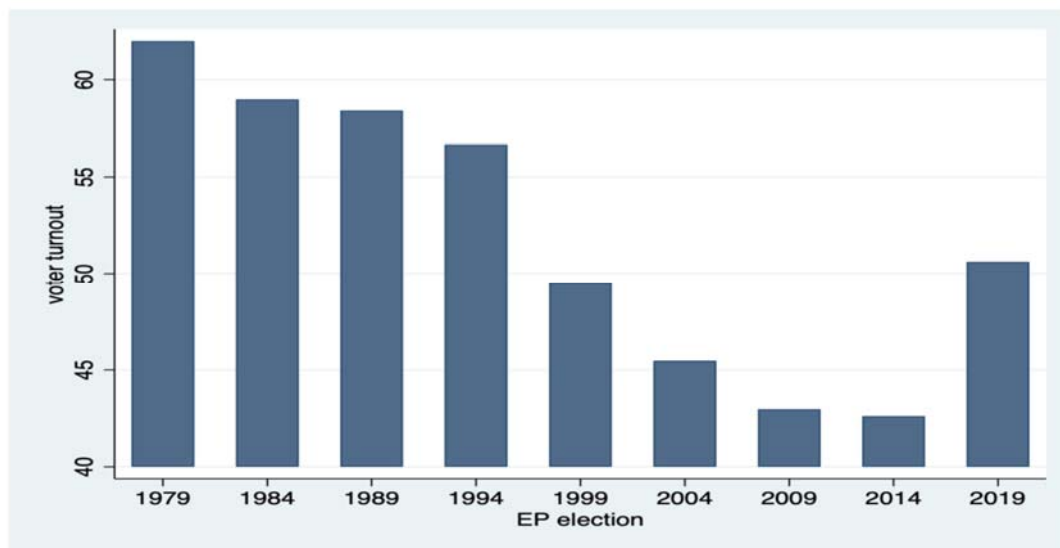
6.1. Dimensions of Evaluation

The introduction of the lead candidate system was motivated by a number of substantive goals which can also be applied as yardsticks to assess and critically evaluate its effectiveness. In the subsequent section, we select and discuss some key arguments that drive the academic debate. We argue that the institutional innovation of the lead candidate system is severely limited by a key problem that affects most attempts of constitutional or electoral 'engineering': measures aimed at influencing and modifying individual behaviour and preferences are by and large only successful when directed at well-informed, knowledgeable citizens, but they fail to successfully communicate and establish links with those parts of the electorates that hold little information, show little interest, and are generally alienated from the European project and/or the EU.

6.1.1. Effects on Voter Turnout

European Parliament elections have regularly been plagued by low levels of aggregate voter turnout. Voter participation in European elections was low in absolute terms, and in almost all member states tends to be systematically lower than turnout in previous or subsequent elections to national parliaments. In a more dynamical perspective, since the first EP elections in 1979 aggregate turnout has dropped continuously, steadily and sometimes rapidly. Representing the often anamorphic European parties by well-known personalities and reinforcing competition of rival parties and candidates for (the) key executive position(s) aim at rendering EP elections more visible and salient than before. The notion that future EP elections be 'different' may thus be provisionally assessed by comparing rates of voter turnout in European elections before and after the introduction of the lead candidate system. Figure 7 demonstrates that this simplistic perspective does not provide any straightforward perspective. Starting with a participation rate of almost 62 percent in the initial EP election 1979, the subsequent elections reveal a gradual, but steady decline of voter turnout. Participations rates fell below fifty percent in aftermath of the 2004 EP elections, and almost dropped to forty percent in the 2009 EP elections.

Figure 7: Turnout at EP Elections 1979 - 2019



Source: Data on turnout in EP elections from the ParlGov database (<http://www.parlgov.org>).

Taking these aggregate turnout data as a yardstick, the introduction of the lead candidate system in 2014 clearly did not contribute to stopping or reversing historical trends of low participation and declining interest in European elections, but instead coincided with an all-time low of less than 43 percent voter turnout. Studies did find, however, that the recognition of the candidates increased the propensity to turn out⁴⁵⁰ and that aggregate electoral turnout increased in those countries where public awareness of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was comparatively high.⁴⁵¹

The second installation of the lead candidate system coincided with an upspike in voter participation: with almost 51 per cent, the 2019 European elections brought about the highest turnout since 1994. Focusing on the member state level, turnout substantively increased in twenty member states and decreased in only eight. Moreover, Parliament's post-election survey⁴⁵² reveals that voter participation increased across all demographic groups but was especially driven by young and first-time voters. It also shows that a whole range of reasons motivated turnout, which include perceptions of civic duty, the desire to promote partisan interests, the expression of support for the EU, or the rejection of Brexit.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ Schmitt, H., Hobolt, S. and Popa, S. A., 'Does personalization increase turnout? Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 16, No 3, pp. 347-368.

⁴⁵¹ Hobolt, S., 'A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, pp. 1536.

⁴⁵² European Parliament, 'The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey - Have European Elections Entered A New Dimension?', Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament commissioned by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, 2019. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>, here p. 21f.

⁴⁵³ European Parliament, 'The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey - Have European Elections Entered A New Dimension?', Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament commissioned by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, 2019, pp 42ff; Plescia, C., Wilhelm J., Kritzing, S., Raube, K. and Wouters, J., 'Introduction: Assessing the 2019 European Parliament elections', in S. Kritzing, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.; Plescia, C., Wilhelm,

Note, however, that statistical association does not necessarily imply a causal link. We do not have any meaningful empirical evidence to claim causal effects of the lead candidate system either on the further decline of turnout in 2014 or on the increasing participation rates in 2019. Empirical findings across both rounds of the *Spitzenkandidaten* are ambiguous, the downturns and abrupt upspikes of voter participation may be accounted for by various potential causes, and effects of the lead candidate system on voter turnout, if there are any at all, appear to be minor, asymmetric and volatile.

6.1.2. Personalisation of European Elections

The introduction of the lead candidate system aimed at reinforcing or reviving interest in EU politics by personalising election campaigns and political competition. Evidently, the success of the lead candidate models requires that these personalities and the political programs they represent are clearly presented and visible not only for sophisticated and well-informed voters, but to a majority of the electorate. Therefore, a key yardstick for determining its success is to measure the levels of name recognition for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Empirical research on the 2014 elections has, however, demonstrated that both the supply and demand sides of political communication fell short of these optimistic assessments: the extent of overall media coverage was very low⁴⁵⁴, voter knowledge about the names of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, their political background, ideological profiles or European party attachments was very limited⁴⁵⁵, and even the televised debates among the lead candidates were followed only by a select few.⁴⁵⁶

Here, Sara Hobolt⁴⁵⁷ relied on the European Election Studies to measure the degree of public awareness of one or more lead candidates in 2014. As her analysis suggests, empirical variation between member states was most frequently explained by the rival candidates' countries of origin and sometimes also accounted for by their intensity of campaigning in a specific country and by their ability to communicate in the respective national language. As mentioned above, the analysis also found that aggregate electoral turnout increased in those countries where public awareness of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was comparatively high.⁴⁵⁸

Empirical assessments found that the visibility of the *Spitzenkandidaten* is effectively determined by the level of visibility granted to them by the national political parties. European lead candidates are only able to secure a place in the spotlight if granted by the national political parties, and national political parties will only personalise their campaigns around lead candidates when they have sufficient

J. and Kritzing S., 'First-order breakthrough or still second-order? An assessment of the 2019 EP elections, in S. Kritzing, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

⁴⁵⁴ Schulze, H., 'The Spitzenkandidaten in the European Parliament Election Campaign Coverage 2014 in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 23-36.

⁴⁵⁵ Gattermann, K., De Vreese, C.H. and Van der Brug, W., 'Evaluations of the Spitzenkandidaten: the role of information and news exposure in citizens' preference formation', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 37-54; Schmitt, H. and Toygür, I., 'European Parliament Elections of May 2014: Driven by National Politics or EU Policy Making?', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2016, pp. 167-181.

⁴⁵⁶ Maier, J. et al., 'This time it's different? Effects of the Eurovision debate on young citizens and its consequence for EU democracy - evidence from a quasi-experiment in 24 countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 24, No 4, 2017, pp. 606-629.

⁴⁵⁷ Hobolt, S., 'A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, pp. 1528-1540.

⁴⁵⁸ Hobolt, S., 'A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, pp. 1536.

strategic reason to do so.⁴⁵⁹ In a related study, Braun and Schwarzbözl⁴⁶⁰ found that the attention directed towards the *Spitzenkandidaten* in the campaigns of the political parties was on average very low, the role of the lead candidates only reluctantly addressed in the parties' European election manifestos. Instead of creating and opening up a truly pan-European perspective, lead candidates were, quite ironically, mainly put in the spotlight within their respective countries of origin and used for the benefit of national instead of European party interest.

Unfortunately, there are so far no complete and extensive analyses of the 2019 EP elections, and we therefore do not have an adequate empirical basis to compare these findings. The standard survey instrument within this field, the European Election Study, does not devote much space in its questionnaire to the lead candidate model. This also limits our ability to directly assess levels and changes of voter knowledge about the *Spitzenkandidaten* from the 2014 to the 2019 elections. However, both rounds of the EES cover an items battery which evaluates the voters' ability to link the name of three lead candidates with the supporting European parties. This is a key question to evaluate the lead candidate model, because it was not only designed to promote the key personnel and to engineer an open and transparent competition for the presidency of the Commission. Instead, a key goal of the exercise is to utilise the *Spitzenkandidaten* to promote distinctive and highly visible political programs at the European level.

Table 4: Correct Identification of *Spitzenkandidaten* Supporting European Parties

EP Elections 2014				EP Elections 2019			
	correct	wrong	do not know		correct	wrong	do not know
Jean-Claude-Juncker (EPP)	18.91%	8.88%	72.21%	Manfred Weber (EPP)	17.07%	13.87%	69.06%
Martin Schulz (S & D)	16.87%	8.65%	74.48%	Frans Timmermans (S&D)	12.85%	16.85%	70.30%
Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE)	8.78%	5.88%	85.34%	Jan Zahradil (ACRE)	7.39%	13.87%	78.74%

Source: Secondary Analysis of the 2014 and 2019 European Election Study (ESS); for 2014, the number of respondents is N=30,064, for 2019 it is N=26,538. Unfortunately, the two EES rounds provide data on the candidates listed here only. Data from all rounds of the EES can be accessed via <http://europeanelectionstudies.net>.

⁴⁵⁹ Braun, D. and Popa, S. A., 'This time it was different? The salience of the Spitzenkandidaten system among European parties', *West European Politics*, Vol. 41, No 5, 2018, pp. 1125-1145.

⁴⁶⁰ Braun, D. and Schwarzbözl, T., 'Put in the spotlight or largely ignored? Emphasis on the Spitzenkandidaten by political parties in their online campaigns for European elections', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No 3, 2019, pp. 428-445.

Table 4 provides a brief, descriptive wrap-up of correct answers, wrong answers, and respondents who indicated that they did not know the party affiliation of the respective lead candidate. For both the 2014 and the 2019 European elections, we find that the European electorates are in general rather uninformed about the links of the lead candidates with the sponsoring European parties. In 2014, the *Spitzenkandidaten* Jean-Claude Juncker (EPP), Martin Schulz (S&D), and Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE) were three long-standing, highly established, and allegedly well-known veterans of EU politics. Nevertheless, knowledge of their links with the European parties was, respectively, merely at 19, 17, and 9 per cent, in each case a sizeable part of the respondents presented a wrong guess, and the overwhelming majority simply indicated not to know the right answers. In 2019, the field of the lead candidates was overall somewhat less prominent (despite some more well-known personalities such as former Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, the candidate for S&D, or EU Commissioner Margarethe Vestager, who stood as a member of the ALDE 'Team Europe'), the recognition rates of candidate-party linkages were somewhat lower, voters were a little bit more willing to provide (wrong) guesses, and the overwhelming majority of survey respondents still indicated not to know the affiliation of Weber, Timmermans, and Zahradil with the European parties they stood for.

While these aggregate figures provide very little confidence in the lead candidate system as a means to advertise and communicate diverse sets of EU politics, the disaggregation towards the country level also creates issues concerning the origin and substantive meaning of linkages among lead candidates and European parties. In any case, survey respondents in the European Election Studies (only) tend to know more about the *Spitzenkandidaten* and their sponsoring parties in the respective lead candidate countries of origin or in neighbouring member states.

The comparison of the *Spitzenkandidaten* fields in 2014 and 2019 does thus not reveal any clear upward trend in voter knowledge about candidates, their party links, and, most likely, also their political visions and programs. On a slightly more positive note, the party recognition rates were not significantly lower, and even for EPP *Spitzenkandidat* Manfred Weber, who was consistently framed and criticised as an unknown lightweight in European politics, knowledge was not much worse than for the much more established Jean-Claude Juncker. We do believe that these figures are promising, because recognition rates do not appear to depend solely on the personality and publicity of a candidate, but may be affected and increased by electoral campaign messages, televised debates among the *Spitzenkandidaten*, and further advertisement efforts by European and by national political parties. This is also supported by the finding of Parliament's post-election survey, according to which a rather small but increased proportion of respondents stated to have voted in order to influence the choice of the Commission President (8 per cent, +3 percentage points compared to 2014).⁴⁶¹

At the same time, there is evidence suggesting that the lead candidate system mainly resonated with voter groups that were young, well-informed, and resolutely integrationist. As an attempt to personalise European elections, the process was most effective among those actors that had already been involved and politically aware before. However, it failed to impact on those strata of the European publics which had been alienated from EU politics before.

⁴⁶¹ European Parliament, 'The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey - Have European Elections Entered A New Dimension?', Eurobarometer Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament commissioned by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, 2019. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>, here p. 44.

6.1.3. Strengthening the Electoral Connection

So far, as characterised by the second-order election model, EP elections have been considered as low-intensity national contests.⁴⁶² However, in the aftermath of the failed Dutch and French Referendums on the Constitutional Treaty the discussion of an alleged gap between European political elites and national electorates in the domain of EU politics intensified.⁴⁶³ Weak linkages among voters and 'their' representatives have often been identified as another key feature of the EU's democratic deficit and as a cause for the Union's lack of both diffuse and specific support.

The lead candidate system was also designed to substantively modify the structure of political competition and reinforce personalistic and programmatic linkages among voters and the European parties. In a quasi-experimental study, Maier and his co-authors⁴⁶⁴ have demonstrated that the widely televised Eurovision debate among the main contenders for the presidency of the Commission led to increasing levels of cognitive and political involvement and to increased support levels for European integration and the EU. Related research by Popa et al.⁴⁶⁵ has, however, arrived at significantly less optimistic, more conditional and ambiguous conclusions. Utilizing observational data from the voter segment of the 2014 European Election Studies, the authors concluded that politicisation indeed meant polarisation: the lead candidate system and the election campaign did re-assure integrationist citizens in their assessments of the integration process. Concomitantly, however, the politicisation of European politics also hardened the stances of Eurosceptic citizens and voters. Effectively, these studies concluded that the overall levels of support for European integration and the EU stagnated, while politicisation merely helped to drive the integrationist and Eurosceptic camps further apart.

6.1.4. Europeanisation of EP Campaigns and Politics

Another pivotal goal expected from the nomination of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was to elevate electoral competition from the set of twenty-eight parallel, second-order national elections towards the European level and thus to emphasise key aspects and pivotal issues of EU politics and to directly appeal to a broader, pan-European audience. In a nutshell, the dramatisation and personalisation of European Parliament elections was meant to re-direct the electorate's attention from national competition, national issues, and national actors towards the level the European parties.

⁴⁶² Cf. Hix, S. and Marsh, M., 'Punishment or protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections', *Journal of Politics* Vol. 69, No 2, 2007, pp. 495-510; Marsh, M., 'Testing the Second-Order Election Model after Four European Elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28, No 4, 1998, pp. 591-607; Reif, K., 'European Elections as Member State Second-Order Elections Revisited', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 31, No 1-2, 1997, pp. 115-124; Reif, K. and Schmitt, H., 'Nine second-order national elections - a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 8, No 1, 1980, pp. 3-44; Schmitt, H., 'The European Parliament Elections of June 2004: Still Second-Order?', *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, No 3, 2007, pp. 650-679.

⁴⁶³ Gabel, M. J. and Scheve, K., 'Mixed Messages: Party Dissent and Mass Opinion on European Integration', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 8, No 1, 2007, pp. 37-59; Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 'Europe's Blues: Theoretical Soul-Searching after the Rejection of the European Constitution', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 39, No 2, 2006, pp. 247-250; Steenbergen, M. R., Edwards, E. and De Vries, C., 'Who's Cueing Whom? Mass-Elite Linkages and the Future of European Integration', *European Union Politics*, Vol. 8, No 1, pp. 13-35.

⁴⁶⁴ Maier, J. et al., 'This time it's different? Effects of the Eurovision debate on young citizens and its consequence for EU democracy - evidence from a quasi-experiment in 24 countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 24, No 4, 2017, pp. 606-629.

⁴⁶⁵ Popa, S. A., Rohrschneider, R., and Schmitt, H., 'Polarizing without legitimizing: the effect of lead candidates' campaigns on perceptions of the EU democracy', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 44, 2016, pp. 469-482.

Below the line, our selected dimensions and indicators clearly reveal that the high expectations attached to the lead candidate system were met with limited measurable success.⁴⁶⁶ The introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* did not increase aggregate electoral participation, but those citizens aware of them had a somewhat higher likelihood to turn out. Attempts to render the *Spitzenkandidaten* visible for larger parts of the European electorate(s) frequently collided with strategic interests of national parties and failed to effectively change the campaign. The lead candidate system successfully produced a politicisation of the EP election campaign(s), but predominantly by reinforcing and hardening previously existing polarisation among integrationists and Eurosceptics. Ultimately, the lead candidate system had limited impact on the salience of alternative issue dimensions and did not bring about a significantly increased impact of European vis-à-vis domestic political considerations.

This criticism along the four dimensions does not imply that the installation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was a complete failure. Dramatising and politicising EP elections by staging a competition among rival candidates has been suggested as an important remedy for the EU's democratic deficit for a considerable time, and the implementation of this system by Parliament did have some limited success. Yet, the measurable success in both rounds was too small to effectively rock the boat.

6.2. The Fall of the Spitzenkandidaten in 2019

While the idea of the lead candidate system has been celebrated as a meaningful step so as to not only dramatise, politicise, popularise the election process of the MEPs, but instead to directly tie the selection of the European Commission and Europe's top executive to a Europe-wide popular vote, the empirical reality has been sobering. In a nutshell, effects were absent or very limited, and measurable success was limited to cohorts of young, well-educated voters known to be unequivocal standard bearers of European integration. Thus, the institutional reform was most effective (and only effective) where it actually was not required at all.

As mentioned above, one of the key flaws of the vaguely defined lead candidate system has indeed been its vague basis in the Treaty: Article 17(7) of the TEU effectively states that the selection of the candidate for the post of Commission President should somehow reflect the results of the previous elections to the European Parliament. Nothing more. Nevertheless, in 2014, both the joint resolution of Parliament and the presentation of two of the most well-established and experienced politicians at the European level as the respective *Spitzenkandidaten* for the Socialists (Martin Schulz) and for the EPP (Jean-Claude Juncker), effectively enabled transnational actors to define and control the selection process. In the aftermath of the 2014 EP elections, Juncker, lead candidate of the strongest faction in the European Parliament, was approved and nominated by the European Council.

Yet before and after the subsequent EP elections in 2019, the selection process took a turn for the worse, and what was introduced five years before as an 'institutional revolution' led by the European Parliament, was most likely terminated by a 'counter revolution' led by the Council and supported by

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. the assessments by Corbett, R., "European elections are second-order elections". Is received wisdom Changing?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 6, 2014, pp. 1194-1208; Hobolt, S., 'A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, pp. 1528-1540; Treib, O., 'The voter say no, but nobody listens: causes and consequences of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European elections', *West European Politics*, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, pp. 1541-1554.

parts of Parliament. Pieter de Wilde⁴⁶⁷ lists several reasons which led to the lack of support for Manfred Weber (and also Frans Timmermans) and links ‘the fall of the Spitzenkandidaten’ to the rejection of the proposal by the British Liberal Democrat Andrew Duff to select a limited pool of 27 MEPs from a transnational list (see also section 7). Crucially, French President Emmanuel Macron’s criticism of the lead candidate process was widely recognised, and transnational lists were a key part of this reformist counter-proposal. Very generally, the run-up to the European elections had already been characterised by increasing polarisation among the cosmopolitan and communitarian camps in EU politics, and controversies about the ‘right’ measures to reform EP elections induced further cleavages within the integrationist camps. Notably, the rejection of the Duff proposal was engineered by the EPP, but the result of the vote further alienated the S&D and ALDE groups in the European Parliament, made it complicated for their parliamentarians to support EPP Spitzenkandidat Weber and produced increasing hostility towards the lead candidate process by the French President.

Concerning substantive issue dimensions, all of the *Spitzenkandidaten* proved unable to engineer a political campaign that focussed on common issues across the diverse European electorates. Previously dominant concerns such as the eurozone crisis and immigration continued to be controversial issues and salient cleavages across the board but ceased to be the only or even the two most-important conflicts within most national electorates.⁴⁶⁸ Instead, the national segments of the European elections were (again) dominated by diverse settings of national politics, which did not match well with the campaigns and rhetoric offered by the lead candidates. The failure of the *Spitzenkandidaten* to turn EP campaigns and elections into first-order contests was (once again) well in line with established patterns and regularities of EP elections and reinforced some of the conventional wisdom codified in the second-order election model. In addition, almost unprecedented public hostility between French President Macron and Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini pitted cosmopolitans against communitarians, centred debates on this cultural dimension of political contestation, and thereby reduced the salience and campaign efficiency of the EPP and PES *Spitzenkandidaten*, which were closely linked with traditional left-right politics.

These developments were mirrored by the results of the 2019 EP elections: both centrist key actors in Parliament, the EPP and S&D, that were used to settling democratic politics in the European Parliament among themselves, lost a crucial number of seats and their joint majority within Parliament. In turn, these mandates were picked up by green and liberal candidates and, to a lesser extent than many had feared, by actors from the far right. These results also underscored that Macron and Salvini may have actually been successful by redesigning and shifting the key axes of competition within the European political space. ‘Their’ respective European parties improved, while the positions of the ‘presidential hopefuls’ weakened and reduced the credibility of their claims for the Commission presidency.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ De Wilde, P., ‘The fall of the Spitzenkandidaten: political parties and conflict in the 2019 European elections’, in S. Kritzing, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

⁴⁶⁸ De Wilde, P., ‘The fall of the Spitzenkandidaten: political parties and conflict in the 2019 European elections’, in S. Kritzing, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020. Issue salience within the member states can be assessed via the “most important problem” item in the European Election Studies for both 2014 and 2019. The European Election Studies (here: the voter survey) are available via <http://europeanelectionstudies.net>.

⁴⁶⁹ General accounts of axis of political competition in (Western) Europe are provided by Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S. and Frey, T., *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008; and Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Dolezal, M., Helbling, M., Höglinger, D., Hutter, S. and West, B., *Political Conflict in Western Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012; a more recent update is contributed by de Wilde, P.,

In the aftermath of the 2019 EP elections, the precedent of 2014 and the EU politics playbook envisaged the selection of EPP lead candidate Manfred Weber as the incoming President of the European Commission. However, the complex melange of institutional gridlock, personal conflict, and the reinforced re-alignment of main dimensions of political contestation prevented EPP candidate Weber from obtaining unequivocal support from the relevant European parties and EPP factions. As mentioned before, Weber's rejection of the transnational lists weakened his claim to what many considered the highest prize of the European elections. His reluctance to forcefully condemn Victor Orban's strongman rule and to enact a quarantine or other measures regarding Hungary cost him further support among progressive and liberal groups and MEPs. Unlike Martin Schulz five years before, these issues prevented Frans Timmermans from backing Weber's claim, but at the same time he failed to attract sufficient support to claim the Commission Presidency for himself.

From this perspective, the European elections were still second-order national elections. The preservation of the lead candidate process would have required unified support from the centrist key actors within Parliament. Clearly, EPP Spitzenkandidat Manfred Weber lacked charisma and sufficiently deep roots within EU party politics to defend and uphold his claim to the Commission presidency. Even more importantly, a lack of experience in top executive positions rendered him vulnerable to attacks led by pivotal European Council actors such as French president Emmanuel Macron. Thus, multiple issues resulted in the failure of Weber's candidacy. Macron and Merkel, together with the heads of government of other West-European member states, notably the Netherlands and Spain, reacted by backing PES lead candidate Frans Timmermans, who had many of the required qualities, above all extensive executive experience at the national and European level. In the end, the PES lead candidate, who forcefully and vocally held up core democratic principles such as the rule of law and was a stringent critic of democratic backsliding in, for instance, Hungary and Poland, was rejected since he did not belong to the 'victorious' EPP group and faced bitter opposition from the ranks of the Visegrad Four (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia). Because the lead candidates fielded by the smaller European parties were not considered credible at all, these developments opened the way for the selection of Ursula von der Leyen in a classical backroom deal brokered among the heads of government.

As Christiansen and Shackleton point out, the European Council was also much better prepared in 2019 than in 2014. At the last EP election, the dynamic the *Spitzenkandidaten* initiative developed took the European Council by surprise: 'It struggled and ultimately ran out of time – under pressure from EP and the media – to propose credible alternatives to the EP's preferred candidate'.⁴⁷⁰ In 2019, the European Council was ready for battle, pre-scheduled meetings to debate its options in good time, and appointed its own working group composed of six of its members – two each representing the EPP, Socialists and Liberals.

Ultimately, the campaigns were framed as a selection process among rival *Spitzenkandidaten* but did not deliver the election of any lead candidate as the Commission President. We believe that this failure seriously damaged the credibility of the lead candidate model and possibly delivered a deadly blow to future reiterations of this process. Against this background, motivating voters in future EP elections to believe in the lead candidate model and convincing them that their political preference and electoral

Koopmanns, R., Merkel, W., Strijbis, O. and Zürn, M., (eds.), *The Struggle over Borders*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Christiansen, T. and Shackleton, M., 'Spitzenkandidaten 2.0: From experiment to routine in European elections?', in L De Sio, M. Franklin and L. Russo (eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, Luiss University Press, Rome, 2019, pp. 43-55, here p. 49.

choice do exert a real impact on the selection of key personnel at the European level will be more than difficult. The EPP selected a somewhat controversial and weak candidate and failed to generate sufficient support and to broker a broad and unified coalition in his favour. These failures opened up the door for long-standing opponents of the lead candidate system, most notably Emmanuel Macron, and eventually enabled the intergovernmental 'counter-revolution'.

With significant damage to the electoral connection done, potential remedies could be engineered through both top-down and bottom-up processes but are controversial and difficult or even impossible to be enacted. From the top-down perspective, a formal and binding legal formalisation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process could be envisaged. To date, as laid out above, the lead candidate system lacks a formal codification, and Article 17(7) TEU only vaguely determines that the selection of candidate for the post of the chief executive should be somehow linked with the results of the European elections. In the same vein, the EU could also foresee the direct election of the Commission President via a separate ballot.

Potential remedies could also be generated from bottom-up processes. These ideas, as wrapped-up by de Wilde⁴⁷¹, would necessitate rendering elections to the European Parliament into salient and generally recognised first-order elections. Paradoxically, this suggestion turns the very aim of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process into a precondition for its success. If EP elections were first-order contests, it would indeed be very difficult for the European Council or individual heads of government to reject the successful lead candidates. Yet to be successful, further iterations of the *Spitzenkandidaten* would, most importantly, require a firm commitment of the European parties and EP political groups to the process as well as unified cross-party support in Parliament for the candidate nominated by its strongest political group.

⁴⁷¹ De Wilde, P., 'The fall of the Spitzenkandidaten: political parties and conflict in the 2019 European elections', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

7. EUROPEANISING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S ELECTIONS THROUGH TRANS-NATIONAL LISTS?

In the 2015 EP resolution on electoral reform, the introduction of a more or less binding lead candidate process was closely connected with the introduction of an transnational constituency. This proposal was also promoted by national governmental actors sceptical of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, such as French president Emmanuel Macron⁴⁷², as an institutional alternative and counter-offer and part of a wider agenda to initiate a more unified and democratic European Union. Similar reform proposals have been discussed in political and academic contributions, but originally achieved only limited public and scholarly attention.

The expected withdrawal of the United Kingdom *before* the 2019 EP elections added considerable momentum to these suggestions, due to pragmatic proposals to transform (parts of) the 73 seats previously held by British MEPs into a trans-European constituency. A specific parliamentary reform proposal, however, drafted by the British liberal-democrat MEP Andrew Duff, was rejected by Parliament in February 2018. Nevertheless, the basic idea to introduce some form of transnational list in the aftermath of the European elections was maintained by Macron and also backed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and supported by incoming Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

This section discusses general features of this reform initiative and evaluates the failure of Duff's proposal. We also discuss the alternative or complementary provision of open lists in order to reinforce the electoral connection of voters and their representatives in the European Parliament.

7.1. Electoral Engineering and the Construction of Party Lists

In the previous sections, we have already highlighted the crucial role of 'comparative constitutional engineering'.⁴⁷³ Changing the rules of the game may frequently be much more realistic than changing its substantive contents. 'Electoral engineering' is likely the most crucial sub-field. Giovanni Sartori underscores that '[n]ot only are electoral systems the most manipulative instrument of politics; they also shape the party system and affect the spectrum of representation'⁴⁷⁴, while Arend Lijphart adds: "the electoral system is the most fundamental element of representative democracy"⁴⁷⁵. In empirical and theoretical debates, political, public, and academic attention has usually been directed at the inter-party dimension of the electoral architecture and focused on the differences among majoritarian, proportional, and mixed-member electoral systems. Applied to the current setup of EP elections, these aspects are of much more limited importance, since all member states have been obliged to elect their respective MEPs by some form of proportional electoral system, including the Single Transferable Vote

⁴⁷² Macron E., *Initiative pour l'Europe. Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique*, 2017. Available at: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>.

⁴⁷³ Sartori, G., *Comparative Constitutional Engineering. An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, Macmillan, London, 1994.

⁴⁷⁴ Sartori, G., *Comparative Constitutional Engineering. An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, Macmillan, London, 1994, here p. ix.

⁴⁷⁵ Lijphart, A., *Electoral Systems and Party Systems. A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, here, p. 1.

(STV) and preferential voting, by the 2002 Amendment of the European Election Act.⁴⁷⁶ Additional amendments resulted in further convergence, for instance, established an obligatory minimum threshold of between two and five per cent for constituencies with more than 35 seats. The vast majority of member states define a single electoral district, but Belgium, Ireland, Italy and Poland have opted to introduce regional constituencies. Generally, higher thresholds and smaller district magnitudes, as likely installed in smaller member states or defined by regionalised district structures, tend to produce more majoritarian electoral outcomes.⁴⁷⁷

The common label 'transnational lists' refers to numerous vague ideas and specific proposals that aim to construct an additional constituency featuring lists of candidates selected not by national, but by transnational actors. Here, the literature focused, inter alia, on the legal issues related to transnational lists. Initial proposals, as, for instance, drafted in the Anastassopoulos report⁴⁷⁸, were considered not fully in line with the basic provisions by the previous EC treaty which stated that Parliament 'shall consist of representatives of the peoples of the states brought together in the Community' (previous Article 189 [137], EC Treaty, Nice consolidated version). However, the Lisbon Treaty changed these provisions, removed the reference to different national peoples, and solely referred to the MEPs as 'representatives of the Union's citizens'. Therefore, Article 14(3) TEU no longer is a legal obstacle towards the envisaged reform, but instead transnational lists appear to be a logical next step in the long-standing process towards further harmonisation of European electoral law(s).

Moreover, significant attention has been devoted to technical complications and details. Of course, any attempt to augment the national segments of MEPs with another, pan-European district, would add considerable complexity to the set of currently 27 diverse electoral laws which regulate the EP election for the member states. Technically, this would usually require introducing a two-ballot system in each of these electoral laws. For instance, the Duff report stated that 'each elector would be enabled to cast one vote for the EU-wide in addition to their vote for the national or regional list'.⁴⁷⁹ By definition, the introduction of transnational lists will therefore result in a further complication of electoral provisions, of the voting act, and of election administration.

While these complexities are thus costly for voters, for political parties, and for election officers, supporters of transnational lists expect that these additional efforts will be a good investment by addressing and remedying the democratic deficit of the EU, enhancing the legitimacy of its institutional structure, and contributing to the further Europeanisation of both the supply and demand sides of the electoral connection within the EU. In other words: transnational lists, if successfully constructed and accepted by the voters, may be a further and crucial stepping stone in the endeavours to turn EP elections from second- into first-order contests.

On the voter side, the provision of a pool of transnationally nominated candidates is supposed to focus voter attention upon a diverse group of transnational candidates, the specific policies they stand for, and the European parties that have fielded them. The ideal outcome would be the recruitment of more committed and more Europeanised political personnel. Political career opportunities (not only within

⁴⁷⁶ Council Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom (of 25 June 2002 and 23 September 2002) amending the Act concerning the election of the representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage; OJ L 283, 21-10-2002

⁴⁷⁷ Cox, Gary W., *Making Votes Count*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

⁴⁷⁸ Anastassopoulos, G., Report on a proposal for an electoral procedure incorporating common principles for the election of Members of the European Parliament, OJ C 292, 21 September 1998.

⁴⁷⁹ Duff A., *Report on a proposal for a modification of the Act concerning the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976*, A7-0176/2011A7-0176/2011, here p. 6.

Parliament) would thus require to successfully integrate and navigate within transnational structures. If candidates no longer need the exclusive approval of 'their' national political party, but are nominated by the European parties, their commitment to engage with EU politics may likely be increased and fostered.⁴⁸⁰

On the party side, the introduction of transnational lists is expected to generally strengthen the European parties vis-à-vis the national parties, especially regarding the privilege to select suitable candidates and to create electoral lists. Personalisation is not a goal per se, but transnational candidates are also meant to be a means to better represent, organise, and communicate EU politics. Transnational lists would thus enable the European parties to formulate coherent positions and to effectively sideline currently dominant national aspects of campaigning, candidate selection, and vote choice.⁴⁸¹ Even more importantly, an (additional) pool of candidates that represent a common program would potentially enable a genuine focus on EU politics instead of calculations about how decisions at the European level might harm or benefit the interest of national party positions or some, however defined, 'national interest'.

By contrast, critics of transnational lists argue that the envisaged reform will not only fail to successfully address legitimacy issues at the European level, but further undermine the quality of democratic representation in the European Parliament by creating a(nother) slate of unconnected and unrooted representatives within Parliament. Generally, critics from both the moderate and the extreme right object that effective political representation can only be channelled via the democratic legitimacy of member states. Therefore, candidates selected from transnational lists are, from this perspective, rather considered as creating an obstacle to and undermining the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament. Notably, the argument is that these representatives would be lacking a specific constituency, instead be exclusively dependent on the European parties, but disconnected from and unresponsive to their voters. In a nutshell, the EPP has labelled plans to introduce transnational lists as 'a centralist and elitist artificial construction' that would not help foster democratic accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness, but instead cater to the career interests of political elites in Brussels.⁴⁸²

These conflicting standpoints may both be true or false, and it is very difficult to provide any meaningful evaluation or even prognosis of the political consequences of these electoral reforms without defining the technical details of specific reform proposals. Within the context of the international, collaborative project 'Making Electoral Democracy Work'⁴⁸³, Damien Bol and his co-authors have explored likely consequences of transnational lists by fielding a survey experiment during the 2014 EP elections.⁴⁸⁴ In total, more than 1,100 interviewees from France, Germany and Sweden

⁴⁸⁰ Alemanno, A., Why transnational lists matter for EU democracy, 2018, Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/opinion/why-transnational-lists-matter-for-eu-democracy/>; Bol, D., Harfst, P., Blais, A., Golder, S. N., Laslier, J.-F., Stephenson, L. B., and Van der Straeten, K., Addressing Europe's democratic deficit: An experimental evaluation of the pan-European district proposal, *European Union Politics*, Vol. 17, No 4, 525-545; Put, G.J., van Hecke, S., Cunningham, C. and Wolf, W., 'The Choice of Spitzenkandidaten: A Comparative Analysis of the Europarties' Selection Procedures', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 4, No 9-22.

⁴⁸¹ Lefkofridi, Z. and Katsanidou, A., 'A Step Closer to a Transnational Party System? Competition and Coherence in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 56, No 6, 2018, pp. 1462-1482.

⁴⁸² EPP Group, *EPP Group votes down transnational lists*. Available at: <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/epp-group-votes-down-transnational-lists>.

⁴⁸³ <http://electorademocracy.com>

⁴⁸⁴ Bol, D., Harfst, P., Blais, A., Golder, S. N., Laslier, J.-F., Stephenson, L. B., and Van der Straeten, K., Addressing Europe's democratic deficit: An experimental evaluation of the pan-European district proposal, *European Union Politics*, Vol. 17, No 4, 525-545.

were presented with transnational slates of candidates that competed on both closed and open lists. The findings are somewhat sobering and illustrate that voters would likely respond to national incentives. According to the study, transnational lists would therefore not be a successful vehicle to move electoral competition from the national arenas towards the European level. With closed list proportional representation, voters are more likely to support a specific list, when it features a visible number of co-nationals. Yet even with open lists, voters would, everything being controlled and equal in the experimental design, also usually prefer co-nationals over citizens from other member states.

The practical recommendations and remedies suggested by Bol et al. are, however, not entirely in line with established rules and practices for the selection of parliamentary candidates in current representative democracies. Effectively, the authors suggest a quota system for the number of nationals on the transnational lists or even the preferential candidacy of politicians holding more than one EU citizenship. Their policy recommendations also consider and criticise the provision of open lists, because the tendency of voters to opt for co-nationals could generally produce a dominance of representatives from the larger EU member states within the pool of transnational candidates.

7.2. A Failed Attempt

Within EU politics, the idea of electoral reform has always been a contested topic, and the introduction of transnational lists has always been one of its focal points. More recently, transnational lists were proposed as a technical alternative to the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, for instance by French President Emmanuel Macron, while recent reform proposals by Parliament envisaged to institute both measures concurrently.

In this account, a necessary task is to first settle on a common technical definition of ‘transnational lists’. Electoral engineering is a rather technical discipline, and a number of diverse suggestions have been discussed in both political and academic debates.⁴⁸⁵ The most radical suggestion implies to construct a single European district, to present each European voter with identical lists of Parliament candidates, and to assign an identical weight to each vote and each voter. Current reform proposals are, however, much less ambitious and more modest in scope. The most prominent reform proposal has been suggested by the ‘Duff report’⁴⁸⁶, named after its rapporteur, the British MEP, Liberal Democrat, and federalist Andrew Duff. The 2011 proposal suggested that ‘each elector would be enabled to cast one vote for the EU-wide list in addition to their vote for the national or regional list’.⁴⁸⁷ Technically, this proposal would imply to, as before, cast one vote for lists of candidates established by regional or national political parties, and another vote for the transnational lists established by the European parties.

The debate on transnational lists was revived and reinforced in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. The United Kingdom had 73 MEPs in the European Parliament, and after Brexit these seats could either be disposed of, re-distributed to other member states, or allocated to something like a pan-European

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, Pukelsheim, F. and Oelbermann, K.-F., Reinforcing uniformity in the European election act: gentle interim arrangements in 2019 - Towards systematic double-proportionality in 2024, in *The Electoral Reform of the European Parliament: composition, procedure and legitimacy*, In-Depth Analysis Requested By The Committee On Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, Brussels, 2015, pp. 18-25.

⁴⁸⁶ Duff, A., *A proposal for a modification of the Act concerning the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976*, (2009/2134(INI)), A7-0176/2011.

⁴⁸⁷ Duff, A., *Report on a proposal for a modification of the Act concerning the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976*, (2009/2134(INI)), A7-0176/2011, here p. 6.

constituency or transnational lists. In early 2018, Rapporteurs Danuta Maria Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira introduced a proposal for transnational lists to compete for 27 mandates in the European Parliament with the lead candidates heading the lists of their respective European parties.⁴⁸⁸ Notably, the governments of Cyprus, Spain, France, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Ireland supported this initiative, while French President Macron and the EU Commission President Juncker were also favourable.⁴⁸⁹

Parliament, in turn, was deeply divided about the initiative: national party groups affiliated with Liberals (ALDE), Social-Democrats and Socialists (S&D) and the Greens (Greens/EFA) generally supported the introduction of trans-national lists, while most parties attached to the EPP group opposed any kind of transnational lists which, from their perspective, would result in the election of second-class, (nationally) unrooted MEPs based on the flawed perception of the EU as a federal state. Eurosceptic and nationalist actors in Parliament were, of course, also vocally against the introduction of any pan-European element to the electoral system.⁴⁹⁰ As a result, while a group of prominent MEPs claimed that '[T]ransnational lists are a well-established demand of the European parliament'⁴⁹¹, Parliament rejected to use (some of) the 73 (former) British seats for the introduction of transnational lists in February 2018.

7.3. Open Lists and the Intra-Party Dimension

In the last decades, the intra-party dimension of electoral competition has gained additional and reinforced attention. Programmatically, Carey and Shugart have focused on 'Incentives to cultivate a personal vote' and discussed the benefits and setbacks of candidate- and party-centred provisions within numerous electoral systems.⁴⁹² Effectively, the suggested introduction of open lists addressed very similar features than those that were supposed to be remedied by the concept of a transnational constituency in European elections. These proposals also aimed to increase democratic accountability, responsiveness, and to improve the electoral connections among voters, candidates, and representatives. Another pivotal goal of these reform proposals was to somewhat weaken the monopoly for the selection of political candidates and representatives which is still held by the respective party leadership and to return these competencies to the voters.

Moreover, successful candidates on open lists need to be attractive to the voters and electorates rather than to the party leadership. In line with the proposals to create a transnational constituency, competition on open lists, i.e. the personalisation of electoral politics, is supposed to render politicians more active, more accountable, and to enhance their ability to communicate and connect with their electoral constituencies. Therefore, the introduction of open lists for European elections might be discussed as either an alternative or a complementary reform idea. To date, while some kind of

⁴⁸⁸ Hübner, D. M. and Silva Pereira, P., *Report on the composition of the European Parliament* (2017/2054(INL) – 2017/0900(NLE)), 26 January 2018.

⁴⁸⁹ Raube, K., 'From dawn to doom: the institutionalization of the Spitzenkandidaten process during European elections and its final negation', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

⁴⁹⁰ Raube, K., 'From dawn to doom: the institutionalization of the Spitzenkandidaten process during European elections and its final negation', in S. Kritzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm, J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020.

⁴⁹¹ <https://euobserver.com/opinion/140843>.

⁴⁹² Carey, J. M. and Shugart, M. S., 'Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 14, No 4, 1995, pp. 417-439.

proportional representation is established by the European Electoral Act since 2002⁴⁹³, the specific implementation varies among the member states:

- For the 2019 European elections, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Spain, Romania, Spain, (and the United Kingdom except for Northern Ireland) selected their contingent of MEPs from closed lists that were exclusively usually put together by the party leadership;
- a large group of countries select their slates by some kind of preferential voting: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden;
- the remaining countries apply the single transferable vote system in their EP election law: Ireland, Malta, and Northern Ireland.

The personalisation of European elections by preferential voting has often been successful in politicising the elections (at least within the national arena) and creating sufficient political 'drama' to attract attention within each of the diverse European electorates. In Austria, for example, preferential voting has changed or shifted the party-determined rank-ordering of the candidates.⁴⁹⁴ In Finland, individual candidates are not ranked by their political parties at all. With 'only 13 seats up for grabs (14 including the potential 'Brexit' seat), candidates thus have a strong incentive to highlight their own personal qualities (political experience, knowledge of 'Brussels' etc.) and issue priorities. Party leaders thus stay in the background, leaving campaigning to their candidates.⁴⁹⁵ The introduction of a preferential vote system or open lists for the national segments of the European elections could thus further advance the personalisation of EU politics and potentially create meaningful incentives for voters to gather information on candidates and the (EU) policies they represent. Likewise, candidates might be more straightforwardly motivated to present themselves to a truly transnational electorate, to emphasise specific policy agendas at the European level, and to present a programmatic focus that is attractive for voters from and outside their respective country of origin.

⁴⁹³ For the 1976 Electoral Act and its numerous revisions cf. Wouters, J., 'The long and winding road towards a European electoral law', in S. Kitzinger, C. Plescia, K. Raube, J. Wilhelm and J. Wouters (eds.), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020. Art. 1 of the Electoral Act stipulates that 'members of the European Parliament shall be elected as representatives of the citizens of the Union on the basis of proportional representation, using the list system or the single transferable vote'. The Electoral Act also adds that 'Member States may authorize voting based on a preferential list system in accordance with the procedure they adopt'.

⁴⁹⁴ In 2019, for example, the lead candidate of the Austrian Peoples Party, Othmar Karas, lost the first rank on the list to Karoline Edtstadler, <https://www.diepresse.com/5635910/eu-wahl-edtstadler-uberholt-karas-bei-ovp-vorzugsstimmen>.

⁴⁹⁵ Raunio, T., 'Finland: European elections in the shadow of national politics', in N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell and L. Nord (eds.), *Euroreflections. Leading academics on the European elections 2019*, Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, Sweden, 2019, p. 35.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The first key aspect in the debates on constitutional and electoral engineering in EU politics is whether an increased politicisation of European issues is beneficial or harmful for the development of democratic politics at a pan-European level. As we have outlined above, different positions are put forward in the academic debate. We believe, however, that there is not alternative to the introduction of at least 'limited democratic politics'. A return to de-politicised policy-making based on inter-elite inside deals will not be a credible and feasible perspective on the long run.

The second key aspect, which profoundly affects these debates is the controversy about what the EU currently is and what it could or should finally be: normative intergovernmentalists who prefer a union of fully sovereign nation states, will by definition reject institutional innovations such as the lead candidate system or the introduction of transnational lists; European federalists, in contrast, will certainly embrace these initiatives. Therefore, any debate on institutional reforms will necessarily touch key issues of European integration and its institutional form and result in complex proposals and difficult pathways towards implementation.

Third, institutional reforms have to be accompanied by political communication and education. Most reform proposals aim not only at 'simply' changing institutional rules but also at altering actors' behaviour. Attempts to direct public attention to key issues of political competition and policy-making at the EU level so far, however, have mainly been able to attract the attention of and to successfully connect with citizens and voters that are already well-informed and hold mostly integrationist preferences. By contrast, they have had limited success in reaching those citizens that are uninformed about or alienated from EU politics.

In the following, we therefore discuss the two main proposals for institutional reform, the lead-candidate system and the introduction of transnational lists and provide recommendations on how they could be, in the former case, continued and strengthened, and, in the latter case, implemented. The recommendations are informed by two leading principles: First, we consider under what circumstances they might be able to remedy some of the most important obstacles to the upgrading of European elections from second- to first-order elections. The second principle concerns the simplicity of envisaged policy or reform proposals. Eurosceptic actors regularly base their criticism on the complexity of decision-making within the European multilevel system, highlight the remoteness of the supposed technocratic dictatorship in Brussels or, paradoxically, ridicule the EU with (often constructed) references to its allegedly ineffective and slow decision-making. While EU politics is and has to be about compromise among actors and veto players at many levels and in many arenas, we still believe that only comprehensible and tractable modes of decision-making can be successfully communicated within Europe's diverse electorates and its many constituent groups.

With these principles and limitations in mind and along our discussion in the previous sections, we present a number of specific policy proposals, focussing first on institutional reforms:

- EU politics is all about compromise and complex negotiations. However, with reference to the key principles of 'Comparative Constitutional Engineering', we strongly recommend focusing on institutional reform proposals which result in a **simpler institutional setup of the EU's political system**.
- Due to the 'counter revolution' led by the European Council and, importantly, the lack of commitment by the centrist political groups in Parliament, the lead candidate process lost credibility, and at this point it is unclear whether it can be successfully reinstated in 2024.

The casual abandonment of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process in the last election likely frustrated integrationist voters and reinforced the view of Eurosceptics that the EU is an undemocratic system. The damage done will be difficult to recover from. Despite the limited success for far, we do believe that the *Spitzenkandidaten* system - in some form - is worth saving. Yet we also believe that **for any future iteration of the lead candidate system, it can no longer be at the disposal of the political actors involved, but must be based on a legal and binding formalisation of the process** through which the selection of the Commission President is linked to the election result in the European Parliament.

- There are different options for such a formalisation of the process. One option would be a constitutional provision that the lead candidate of the largest EP group will, quasi automatically, be appointed Commission President. The other option would be for Parliament to **elect the Commission President out of the pool of lead candidates** (rather than through a vote of investiture of a single candidate nominated by the European Council as is currently the case). The latter has the advantage that the selection would not be based on a mere, and possibly slight, plurality within Parliament. Instead, the political groups in Parliament would have to forge a support coalition for their candidate. Either way, a formalisation of the selection process would provide an incentive for the European parties to field their best candidates, force the political groups in Parliament to stick to their democratic commitment and insulate the selection from the influence of the European Council as well as from the impact of political infighting and personal conflicts within the political groups and between actors from different institutions.
- While the *Spitzenkandidaten* process would develop the political set up of the EU towards a parliamentary system by providing citizens with a fused vote for both the legislative body and one of the executive top jobs, another option often suggested would be borrowing from features of a presidential systems and to consider **the direct election of the Commission President by an additional ballot**. A direct election of the President would have a number of advantages. It would, importantly, give EU citizens a direct say, thus providing the office of the President with direct, popular legitimacy. As a result, the incentives to field the best candidates and to connect with large parts of the electorate would be even greater. At the same time, a direct election also comes with a number of, in our view more severe, disadvantages. First, a low turnout could severely damage the legitimacy of the office and weaken the Commission President. By contrast, and unless the two offices are fused into the office of an EU president, a strong popular legitimacy will affect the balance of power between the Commission President and the President of the Council. Second, presidential elections are 'winner takes it all' contests. Thus, provisions would have to be found to **ensure that the election of the President is not disproportionately dependent on the outcome in the larger member states**. Given the absence of a European demos, introducing presidential elections could lead to citizens in smaller member states feeling effectively disenfranchised. At the very least, the election would therefore have to be **based on a two-round majority system**.
- We also support **the introduction of transnational lists as a means of Europeanising the European Parliament elections**. In our view, however, most related reform proposals are not only too limited in their scope, but may also prove counterproductive. The introduction of a small group of transnationally selected candidates might be considered a worthwhile democratic experiment, and the exit of the UK from the EU would have

provided a good opportunity. In light of the continued second-order nature of EP elections, we are sceptical, however, whether voters, who frequently fail to notice or to recall the lead candidates and the policies they are supposed to stand for, would be able to connect with a small pool of transnationally fielded candidates. Moreover, limited measures would introduce additional complexity without sufficient benefits, likely further alienate some voter segments, and reinforce the reputation of the EU as an enormously complicated and unnecessary complex political system. A very small pool might even prove to be counterproductive, because it makes Parliament vulnerable to accusations of violating the character of a genuine, representative parliament, of creating different groups of representatives within a patchwork institution that lacks clear-cut features of a representative body, and of, to put it bluntly, symbolic politics and window-dressing.

- To achieve some impact at all on voter information and to foster electoral linkages among voters and their representatives, we believe that any promising reform proposal would need to **establish a much more sizeable pool of transnational candidates which covers, ideally, at least half of all MEPs.**
- As discussed, Bol et al.⁴⁹⁶ have put forward the very reasonable warning that the provision of transnational lists may reinforce a national focus when voters predominantly attempt to vote co-nationals into European office, and cautioned that especially open lists are likely to increase the shares of MEPs from the larger member states. Here, **a larger transnational constituency based on closed lists** would facilitate a compromise between, on the one hand, the need to safeguard the freedom of European parties to choose whom to put forward as candidates and, on the other hand, the introduction of national quotas and/or rules regarding the most prominently ranked candidates.
- In addition, a sizeable trans-national constituency would go some way towards bringing the European parliament closer to the 'one person, one vote' principle. Yet means would have to be found to ensure that a transnational constituency does not provide incentives for the European parties to focus their campaigns predominantly, let alone solely, on a few member states with the largest number of voters, which would be fatal for the legitimacy of Parliament. One option here would be to **base the transnational constituency on a single EU-wide district, but to field separate transnational lists in each of the member states or even in cross-border constituencies.** As a result, the European parties would campaign with different transnational lists in the different EU sub-districts.
- In addition, we would **encourage the European parliament to pursue its proposals for amendments to the European Elections Act with renewed vigour and to push for a harmonised and fully European electoral system.** While we certainly understand that national parties usually have no incentive to relinquish control over the national electoral process, fundamentally different electoral rules, such as different electoral formula and thresholds, different rules regarding the options of remote voting, voting from abroad and from third countries, or different minimum ages to be eligible to vote and to stand as a

⁴⁹⁶ Bol, D., Harfst, P., Blais, A., Golder, S. N., Laslier, J.-F., Stephenson, L. B., and Van der Straeten, K., Addressing Europe's democratic deficit: An experimental evaluation of the pan-European district proposal, *European Union Politics*, Vol. 17, No 4, 525-545.

candidate, to name just a few, violate the basic democratic principle of equality that ought to inform elections to the supranational parliament.

- In particular, we also propose a **general introduction of open lists or preferential votes for the national segments of the European election**. Enabling voters to rank and select candidates fielded by a party does not guarantee (see the example of Austria), but *can* (see the example of Finland) create greater visibility for individual candidates, limit the power of and campaign focus on party leaders (who usually do not stand for election) and enable the creation of better, direct links between voters and their representatives.
- To sum up, we believe an important step towards truly European elections would be not just to aim at harmonising national electoral laws further, but, domestic constitutional hurdles notwithstanding, to transfer provisions regarding European elections fully into a **single set of unified European electoral rules**, i.e. a truly European Electoral Law.

To reiterate our introductory comments, implementing institutional and/or political reform steps is clearly a complex and complicated process.

First, it is always difficult to anticipate how specific ‘constitutional engineering’ will impact preferences of publics and political actors and therefore whether a reform will achieve the intended aims.

Second, institutional reforms and innovations take time to fully unfold their effects, especially if not based on clear legal or constitutional rules. As the fate of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process illustrates, until they do, they remain vulnerable and can easily be undermined. This is why we want to emphasise again that the proposals require a constitutional basis in the Treaty. Democratic procedures, such as the selection of the Commission President, cannot and must not be at the disposal of political actors.

Third, any reform project needs to be accepted, implemented and enacted by self-interested political actors. Therefore, ‘arguing’ on reform proposals that claim or do achieve common gains is all too often overshadowed by ‘bargaining’ among political actors who lack motivation to change rules that awarded them political office or are unable and/or uninterested to look or move beyond their personal interest. The political science literature refers to numerous cases of failed attempts to induce political change in established democracies.

Fourth, reform discussions are even more complex and reform processes are even more complicated in political systems with many veto players, of which the EU is a prime example. Within EU politics, self-interested bargaining therefore easily outweighs arguing about common goods, and numerous actors within the European multi-level system are well-positioned to prevent or at least slow down institutional change and reform initiatives. Lengthy negotiations all too often result in hyper-complex (institutional) compromise which is almost impossible to communicate and tends to reinforce the image of the EU as an inefficient, slow, and detached political entity.

Given these caveats, the prospects for reforms that aim at injecting even ‘limited democratic politics’ into the EU’s political system, are not necessarily good. The measures require a successful negotiation, revision and ratification of the EU Treaties as well as the European Election Act, and it seems rather unlikely that the European institutions will be able and willing to address this. More importantly, we do not see how and why institutional and partisan veto players might be convinced to give up their veto positions. Yet the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, currently likely to start in September 2020, may provide a true opportunity.

- **The success of the Conference will depend crucially on the agenda and how it is set.** Here, the Commission ‘proposes to organise the Conference along two parallel strands: the first focusing on policy, and what our Union should seek to achieve, the second focusing

on institutional matters'.⁴⁹⁷ While the agenda for the former is mainly guided by the policy priorities of Ursula von der Leyen, the second strand on 'topics specifically related to democratic processes and institutional matters, including the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and transnational lists for European elections'⁴⁹⁸ could **allow for a broad public debate and provide citizens with an actual say over their democratic participation in the EU**. This requires, however, that possible Treaty changes or amendments of the European Electoral Act are not, formally or informally, taken off the agenda.

- The success of the Conference will also crucially **depend on how citizens and civil society are involved**. Here, the Commission and EP proposals envision a broad, inclusive, transparent and participatory process based on, inter alia, the organisation of 'Citizen Dialogues' or 'Agoras', including one reserved for younger citizens, flanked by online consultations. Yet so far it is unclear how they will be organised, and in particular, to what end. The online forum organised in the context of the Convention on the Future of Europe 2001 to 2003 should, in any case, serve as a clear example of how not to treat citizen and civil society involvement. The aim was similar, namely to provide an instrument for open exchanges with and among citizens and to give 'civil society the means to make its voice heard in a real European public forum'⁴⁹⁹. Yet while the online forum 'facilitated an interactive, transnational discourse largely focused on the development of a European constitution', participants 'were not, as best as can be told, "average" citizens' but people who were well educated and very interested in the EU'.⁵⁰⁰ Moreover, it remained unclear how, if at all, views expressed or proposals made by citizens or civil society representatives actually fed into the outcome of the convention. Only very few civil society organisations actually succeeded in having a dialogue with members of the Conventions, for all others the process remained a purely one-way exercise with the Convention listening without committing to an answer.

In May 2018, the Commission launched an online consultation on the Future of Europe based on a questionnaire co-developed by EU citizens through a participatory panel with the aim of exploring EU citizens' concerns, hopes and expectations as part of the 2016 to 2019 Future of Europe Debate. These were accompanied by the citizens' dialogues between high-ranking Commission officials or even Commissioners and citizens as well as 'European Citizen Consultations' (EECs) organised by the member states. According to the Commission, the consultation with its 87.000 participants as well as the results of more than 1500 citizens' dialogues, 'inspired and enriched'⁵⁰¹ the Commission's contribution to the Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council. Yet the European

⁴⁹⁷ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 22.1.2020, COM(2020) 27 final, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-conference-future-of-europe-january-2020_en.pdf, here p. 2.

⁴⁹⁸ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 22.1.2020, COM(2020) 27 final, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-conference-future-of-europe-january-2020_en.pdf, here p. 2.

⁴⁹⁹ http://europa.eu.int/futurum/about_en.htm, cited from Wright, S., 'A virtual European public sphere? The Futurum discussion forum', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 14, No 8, 2007, 1167-1185, here p. 1167.

⁵⁰⁰ Wright, S., 'A virtual European public sphere? The Futurum discussion forum', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 14, No 8, 2007, 1167-1185, here pp. 1180 and 1179.

⁵⁰¹ European Commission, Citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations - Key conclusions, European Commission, Brussels, 30. April 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/progress-reports-citizens-dialogues-and-consultations_en, here p. 3.

Commission's contribution summarises the 'permanent dialogue with citizens' on two short pages (out of almost 80) and fails to show where and how exactly the dialogue enriched, informed, or even had any impact on the document⁵⁰². The Strategic Agenda 2019 – 2024 of the European Council⁵⁰³, in turn, does not mention citizen involvement at all. 'The list of vague commitments it describes covers all the important "buzzwords", but fails to mention or reflect the discussions conducted with citizens that were intended to be at the heart of the Summit's conclusions. [...] [This] raises doubts about how seriously European leaders have taken the ECCs, and risks letting down the citizens who participated in the consultations.'⁵⁰⁴

- A repeat of such exercises during the Conference, even in different structures such as Dialogues or Agoras, runs the **danger of frustrating participants and seriously undermining the legitimacy of the Conference and its outcome**. The establishment of one or more regular 'European citizens' panels' that report to the Conference with a list of proposals for recommendations could be a way forward, but only if such proposals, including those for institutional reform, have real impact. The proposals regarding the organisation and aims of the conference put forward from academics, think tanks or civil society are too numerous to be summarised here⁵⁰⁵, but we want to highlight especially the recommendations put forward in a recent open letter by Alemanno, Nikolaidis and Milanese⁵⁰⁶ to **ensure that civil society and citizens alike are given a genuine opportunity to participate in this process**, i.e. have a true impact on the agenda and on the outcome. In particular, we would strongly advise to find ways of ensuring that participation is not limited to those EU citizens that are already firmly integrationist but includes Eurosceptic citizens and groups as well.
- Instruments such as citizens' dialogues or online consultations can undoubtedly refresh relations between citizens and politicians, and **foster mutual understandings, both among citizens and between citizens and decision makers**. A true exchange is difficult to achieve, however, if meetings are organised as questions and answer session: 'Citizens' Dialogues therefore constitute more of a Commission communication strategy than an in-depth discussion with citizens [...] The Commission engages with citizens in a top-down fashion and citizens largely remain passive actors'.⁵⁰⁷
- In addition, an **improved approach is needed to take citizens' views into account and transform them into EU policymaking** to ensure that citizens feel that their voice is not

⁵⁰² European Commission, Europe in May 2019 - Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world. The European Commission's contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019, European Commission, Brussels, 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco_sibiu_communication_en.pdf.

⁵⁰³ European Council, A New Strategic Agenda 2019 – 2024, European Council, Brussels, 2019, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39914/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024.pdf>.

⁵⁰⁴ Butcher, P. and Stratulat, C., *Citizens expect: Lessons from European Citizens' Consultations*, Discussion Paper, European Policy Centre, 2019, available at: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Citizens-expect-Lessons-from-the-European-Citizens-Consultations~26c3d4>, here p. 6.

⁵⁰⁵ For a selection, consult <https://www.europeansources.info/record/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-2020-2022/>.

⁵⁰⁶ Alemanno, A., Nicolaidis, K. and Milanese, N., *The Conference on the Future of Europe: an Open Letter*, Verfassungsblog, 1 February 2020, <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-an-open-letter/>.

⁵⁰⁷ Russack, S., 'Pathways for Citizens to engage in EU policymaking', *CEPS Policy Insights*, No 14, 2018, available at: https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/PI2018_14_SR_2CU%20chapter%20on%20Pathways%20for%20Citizens%20to%20Engage%20in%20EU%20Policy-making.pdf, here p. 20.

just heard but listened to. 'Citizens do expect feedback on their input'.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, while it is indeed true that the 'outcome of these dialogues and consultations must be communicated openly and fed back into the policymaking process'⁵⁰⁹, it is equally important to **communicate openly whether and how consultations are taken into account**. In addition, Citizens' Dialogues or Consultations ought to include a **standardised feedback system** to provide citizens with the opportunity to relay their experiences with these instruments and to facilitate the evaluation and subsequent improvement of these instruments.⁵¹⁰

In addition, any institutional reform of the EU, whether as a result of the Conference or not, will have to be accompanied by political communication and education. Again, institutional reforms do not aim at 'simply' changing institutional rules but also at altering actors' behaviour and mindset. The main task of political communication throughout the EU is therefore less to connect with already well-informed Europhile citizens, but to reach those that are uninterested in, uninformed about, indifferent towards, alienated from or downright hostile towards the Union. Here, both the European Commission and the European Parliament are in a battle over the communication of Europe with national governments, on the one hand, and Eurosceptic parties, on the other. The former have incentives to nationalise successes but Europeanise failures, and to contain the politicisation of EU politics more generally, in order to avoid electoral fallout, which leaves the communicative space wide open for the latter and their attempts to mobilise national publics against EU institutions and actors.

At the same time, the communication policy of the EU and its institutions has so far met limited success. Over the last ten years, EU actors, politics and policies have become far more salient for the national media, but this is mainly due to the multiple crises, or polycrisis, the EU has gone and is going through. Due to the media's own logic, according to which 'the only good news are bad news', increased coverage often tends to fuel the 'spiral of Euroscepticism'. The national media has, for example, shown hardly any interest in the 'Citizens' Dialogues' or 'European Citizen Consultations'.⁵¹¹

- In our view, the proposals made by the European Commission in its contribution to the Strategic Agenda partly go the right directions, especially **the emphasis on communication as a joint responsibility, on the fight against disinformation and the promotion of media literacy as well as on the promotion of EU education**. By contrast, the Commissions **approach to corporate communication seems counterproductive**. 'Argument and debate between leaders, governments, institutions and people about EU policies is not a sign of conflict, but a sign of healthy and vibrant democratic

⁵⁰⁸ Butcher, P. and Stratulat, C., *Citizens expect: Lessons from European Citizens' Consultations*, European Policy Centre, 2019, available at: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Citizens-expect-Lessons-from-the-European-Citizens-Consultations~26c3d4>, here p. 7; see also Białożyty, W. and Le Quiniou, R., 'Europe's deliberative instruments: has the EU delivered?', in Blockmans, S. and Russack, S. (eds), *Deliberative Democracy in the EU - Countering Populism with Participation and Debate*, 2020, pp. 313-331, here, p. 318.

⁵⁰⁹ European Commission, *Citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations - Key conclusions*, European Commission, Brussels, 30. April 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/progress-reports-citizens-dialogues-and-consultations_en.

⁵¹⁰ Białożyty, W. and Le Quiniou, R., 'Europe's deliberative instruments: has the EU delivered?', in Blockmans, S. and Russack, S. (eds), *Deliberative Democracy in the EU - Countering Populism with Participation and Debate*, 2020, pp. 313-331, here, p. 318.

⁵¹¹ Butcher, Pp and Stratulat, C., 'Citizens expect: Lessons from European Citizens' Consultations', Discussion Paper, European Policy Centre, 2019, available at: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Citizens-expect-Lessons-from-the-European-Citizens-Consultations~26c3d4>, here p. 7.

engagement.⁵¹² Indeed. All the more surprising that the Commissions corporate approach to communication is

'based on one clear, coherent narrative, showing benefits for citizens framed through storytelling. Storytelling is a powerful way of appealing to and engaging with citizens. A policy or political priority that is not explained and underpinned by examples and emotions is unlikely to be embraced in the same way by the citizens it involves and affects. Telling the EU's story in a more engaging and emotive way is a more effective means of communication than one restricted to factual, evidence-based arguments only.'

- While the EU certainly also has to engage in good PR, we would **caution against any attempt to return to a 'neutralisation of ideology'** – whether based on allegedly purely factual arguments or engaging and emotional storytelling - that presents EU politics or policies as transcending political cleavages, in particular the left-right cleavage. This approach is particularly evident in one of the examples given for insufficient corporate communication:

'When it came to the reform of the EU's copyright legislation, the EU institutions found themselves faced with powerful lobbying and communication campaigns mounted against the proposed reform in the last weeks before the decisive vote in the European Parliament. The lack of an equally powerful response on the EU side meant that the intentions and reasons behind the reform were not sufficiently known by the public, even if the reform was ultimately approved by a clear majority in the European Parliament.'

- In fact, the debate on the Copyright Directive can also be seen as an example of a politicised EU issue that was discussed in a public arena that came close to a European public sphere. Arguments of both proponents and opponents of the reform were comparatively widely covered and discussed in both traditional and social media, and the debate was by no means limited to large and powerful corporate interests but also mobilised, predominantly younger, EU citizens over the controversial Article 13 of the directive. Here, research has indeed suggested that **politicisation requires polarising legislative proposals** on which (centre-) left and (centre-) right parties, both in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments, take different positions. In contrast to carefully balanced proposals, polarising initiatives changes the incentive structure of, especially centrist pro-EU, parties within national parliaments, resulting in parliamentary debates where parties publicly present and justify their different views on the issue⁵¹³.

This brings us to our final point, namely that in our view the EU also needs take **the legitimising potential of national parliaments and inter-parliamentary cooperation and communication** more seriously.

- One interesting development is the increasing focus of national parliaments on the European Commission's Annual Work Programme (CWP) as a means to plan their scrutiny activities more

⁵¹² European Commission, Europe in May 2019 – Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world. The European Commission's contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019, European Commission, Brussels, 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco_sibiu_communication_en.pdf, here p. 41.

⁵¹³ Miklin, E., 'EU Politicisation and National Parliaments: Visibility of Choices and Better Aligned Ministers?', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 20, No 1, pp. 78-92; see also Miklin, E., From 'Sleeping Giant' to Left-Right Politicization? National Party Competition on the EU and the Euro Crisis', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 52, No 6, pp. 1199-1206.

strategically. Importantly, the CWP is now also discussed at COSAC meetings, especially the meeting of COSAC's Chairpersons at the beginning of the year, and serves to identify one or two subjects as the focus of COSAC's activity for the coming year.⁵¹⁴ As a consequence, parliaments could use the CWP not only to establish a stronger link between their domestic scrutiny activities, but also as a means to foster inter-parliamentary deliberation on EU initiatives and proposals. In this context, an interesting proposal has been put forward in a report by EP's Committee on Constitutional Affairs⁵¹⁵ and endorsed in a resolution by Parliament on 19 April 2018⁵¹⁶, namely the **introduction of an annual 'European Week'** taking place simultaneously in all national parliaments, with debates on the European agenda between MPs, European Commissioners, MEPs and representatives of civil society. **Simultaneous broad debates of the CWP**, for example, could indeed support the emergence of connected inter-parliamentary public spheres. In addition, such an event is likely to attract rather considerable media coverage.

- Finally, we advocate a **formal institutionalisation of the so-called 'green card'**, a mechanism that would allow parliaments, provided they reach a certain quorum, to propose new legislative or non-legislative initiatives, or amendments to existing legislation. The idea of the 'green card' is not new and had gained quite some momentum amongst national parliaments.⁵¹⁷ Yet although the European Parliament had signalled that it backed the proposal⁵¹⁸ and even the Commission had declared its general openness to the idea⁵¹⁹, the momentum behind the introduction of the green card seems to have slowed down. One reason might be that a number of, albeit completely informal, 'green cards' organised by national parliaments have not been very successful.⁵²⁰ If properly institutionalised, however, a 'green card' system could **provide national parliaments with an opportunity to engage collectively in a more active and constructive inter-parliamentary deliberation on EU responsibilities** than currently provided by the EWM, which is mainly a limited defence mechanism.

⁵¹⁴ Fasone, C. and Fromage, D., 'From Veto Players to Agenda-Setters? National Parliaments and their 'Green Card' to the European Commission, *Maastricht Journal of Comparative European Law*, Vol. 23, No 2, 2016, pp. 294-317, here pp. 300-301.

⁵¹⁵ European Parliament, Report on the implementation of the Treaty provisions concerning national parliaments, Committee on Constitutional Affairs Rapporteur: Paulo Rangel, (2016/2149(INI)), 28.3.2018, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0127_EN.pdf, here p. 5.

⁵¹⁶ European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018 on the implementation of the Treaty provisions concerning national parliaments (2016/2149(INI)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0186_EN.pdf.

⁵¹⁷ See the Biannual COSAC reports No 23 and 24, available at: <http://www.cosac.eu/documents/bi-annual-reports-of-cosac/>.

⁵¹⁸ European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union (2014/2248(INI)), available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0048&language=EN>, here para 60.

⁵¹⁹ European Commission, Reply of the European Commission to the Contribution of the LVI COSAC Bratislava on 13-15 November 2016, 18.01.2017, available at: <http://www.cosac.eu/56-slovakia-2016/lvi-cosac-13-15-november-2016-bratislava/>.

⁵²⁰ Rozenberg, O. (2017). The Role of National Parliaments in the EU after Lisbon: Potentialities and Challenges. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/de/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2017\)583126](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/de/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2017)583126), here p. 37.

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This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO Committee, provides a brief overview of the academic debates on Europeanisation as well as contestation and politicisation of the EU and European integration. Against this background, it focuses on the European public sphere(s), in particular those based on the media and parliaments. The study further discusses current reform proposals aiming to Europeanise the European elections and concludes with recommendations on increasing the legitimacy of the European Union.

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