



Reconnecting European Political Parties with EU citizens

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

1. Introduction

2. European political parties

2.1. What are they and what do they do?

2.2. Do Europarties matter?

3. Building blocks

3.1. Carrots and Sticks, Rules and Loopholes: How to Regulate European Political Parties?

3.2. Punching above their Weight? National Parties and their Europarty

3.3. Reconnecting the EU with its Citizens in Times of Crisis

3.4. Europarties and their Grassroots Members: An Opportunity to Reach Out and Mobilise

3.5. Can the representative and procedural roles of the Europarties be fulfilled at the same time?

3.6. What can Europarties learn from National Political Parties?

3.7. Global Party Internationals: "Tackling the Dilemma of Indifference"

4. Recommendations

5. Annex: Proposals on Transnational List for the European Parliament

6. Bibliography

7. Abbreviations

8. About the authors

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¹ The report should be referred to as: S. Van Hecke et al. (2017), Reconnecting European Political Parties with EU Citizens. Office of International IDEA to the European Union, Brussels.

² A report of the event can be consulted via the following link: <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/improving-eu%E2%80%99s-political-identity-and-democracy-supporting-european-political>.

Executive summary

This report takes a comprehensive approach to understanding the role(s) of European political parties within the polity of the European Union (EU). Its main focus is on the question how European political parties can (re)connect with EU citizens. Emphasis is placed on the regulatory framework in which European political parties operate, their internal organisation and the outreach vis-à-vis various political actors, but especially citizens. The report also considers pathways in order to broaden, deepen and diversify the way in which European political parties are able to connect.

The report consists of various parts. First, an overview is presented of the overall political context, including recent changes. Second, a more scholarly perspective on European political parties is provided: what they are, what we know about them and why they matter. Third, a closer look is taken at the legal and institutional framework in which European political parties operate, the role of national political parties, the rise of Euroscepticism and the linkages with citizens, individual membership of European political parties, the problem of representation, and membership of the Global Party Internationals. The fourth part lists a set of recommendations to European political parties and stakeholders: proposals to strengthen the role of European political parties and enable their engagement with EU citizens, and therefore enhancing democracy within the EU. A proposal on transnational lists is added to the recommendations.

The recommendations presented are primarily directed at European political parties, but also address EU institutions, national political parties, EU civil society and citizens. Implementation can in some instances take place immediately (short term), while others require the adaptation of existing rules or the introduction of new ones (medium term), or treaty change (long term). Overall, there is a plea for a bigger role of European political parties within, but also outside the 'Brussels Bubble', especially during European Parliament (EP) election campaigns. However, greater engagement should not be limited to the EU election season.

1. Introduction

“Our Union needs to take a democratic leap forward”, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker asserted in his State of the Union address on 13 September 2017 in Strasbourg. Never before has a Commission President dedicated so many words and referred so explicitly to the role of European political parties, civil society and citizens in the framework of what is called ‘A more democratic Union’. More specifically, President Juncker made reference to the role of European political parties in the European Parliament elections of 2019, new rules on the financing of political parties and foundations, transnational lists, the Commission’s Citizens Dialogues and democratic conventions.³

It remains to be seen, however, how many of these announcements will one day become formal proposals, let alone reality. The fact that they are mentioned shows, nonetheless, that things have changed recently. The increased salience of often longstanding ideas about improving democracy at the EU level is due to a broader change of *Zeitgeist*.

While in the second half of 2016 the atmosphere was one of despair, following the outcome of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump as US President, in the first half of 2017 Brussels and many other capitals have regained confidence in the European integration project, its institutions, policies and future ambitions. Clearly, leading politicians at the EU level have played a major role but, without any doubt, the sudden change of mood is largely a product of the outcome of national elections in Austria (2016), the Netherlands (2017) and, particularly, France (2017) as well as improved economic figures and the stemming of migratory flows.

As much as there was talk of a possible, if not likely, disintegration of the EU some months ago, many EU observers have started to dub recent events, and the effect they had in the media and on the European polity, a ‘European Spring’. Looking at some recent elections outcomes and opinion polls in a number of member states, it is wise not to overestimate this new wave of euro-enthusiasm. Interestingly, however, active support for the EU was seen among individual citizens – protesting against the result of the Brexit referendum or campaigning for a pro-European candidate – as well as among new and non-traditional political movements like ‘Pulse of Europe’ and ‘En Marche’.

Apparently, European political parties did not (yet) seem to play a significant role in this ‘European Spring’, at least not the pro-European political families. Of course, left and right Eurosceptics were ready and willing to criticise the renewed support for European integration, whereas political parties at the national and European level, tried to replicate or be part of Emmanuel Macron’s success. In the run-up to the European Council of June 2017, the newly elected French President was conspicuously absent from the meetings organised by the major

³ President Jean-Claude Juncker’s State of the Union Address 2017: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm.

European political parties. Despite this, his views on how to relaunch the integration project, including his democratic stance, have suddenly become a point of reference.⁴

In the so-called party article (TEU art. 10 §4), however, it is the role of European political parties to “contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union.” Their development, especially vis-à-vis the affiliated European Parliament groups and alongside European political foundations, has been impressive, both from a legal and a political perspective. For instance, together with their groups in the European Parliament, they attained a remarkable success against some member states and national political parties in the framework of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system. One of the major goals was, indeed, to strengthen the connection between (the voting behaviour of) EU citizens (during the European Parliament elections) and the executive, i.e. the European Commission. Despite these and other successes, European political parties seem to come under pressure since they are not linked to or part of these recent initiatives, with the exception of President Juncker’s proposals, that nicely fit such efforts, if not lie at the heart of their overall *raison d’être*.

In other words, given these recent events and one year and a half ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections, this is the right time to reflect on the role(s) of European political parties within the EU polity, especially when it comes to their primary mission: *(re)connecting with EU citizens*.

⁴ See the paper ‘Two Visions, One Direction. Plans for the Future of Europe’ published by the European Commission’s European Political Strategy Centre on 29 September 2017: http://ec.europa.eu/epsc/publications/other-publications/two-visions-one-direction---plans-for-the-future-of-europe_en.

2. European political parties

This first section provides the grounding for the rest of the report, as it explores the nature and functions of European political parties, as well as considering the specific challenges that transnational parties face and the degree to which they are truly effective and influential in their activities.

2.1. What are they and what do they do?⁵

Scholarly attention always comes in waves. The first time research on European political parties became popular was in the context of the high expectations, not to say the euphoria, that came with the first direct elections of the European Parliament in 1979. Indeed, in the run-up to these elections the first European political parties were founded and many scholars expected a breakthrough to the detriment of national political parties. The second wave was related to the introduction of the so-called party article in the Maastricht Treaty, as for the first time and within an atmosphere of growing discontent about the European integration process, the role of European political parties was officially recognised within the EU. Increasingly, European political parties were seen from a comparative political perspective, instead of as just another feature of the ongoing integration process. The third wave of academic interest in European political parties occurred in the context of the EU enlargements with Central and Eastern European countries and the establishment of the regulatory framework for these party federations. Scholars analysed the internal party changes following these developments, such as the increase of member parties and ideological heterogeneity, or the role of the new European foundations of the party federations.

Recent developments warrant renewed academic interest, a fourth wave, that takes the existence of European political parties for granted, legally as well as politically. Not only has the number of party federations increased significantly since the first regulations, they have also developed internally and differently, in relation to a changing legal and political context. European political parties can at times be seen as predominant, like in the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, while in other instances they appear to operate only 'in the shadow of hierarchy', according to some even becoming contested players at times. This report clearly aligns with this kind of approach, while also looking ahead, reflecting on likely developments and feasible deliverables, casting our gaze towards the 2019 European elections and beyond.

What are they?

These organisations are labelled as European political *parties*, but they lack the main characteristic that distinguishes national political parties: participation in elections. The selection of candidates and the electoral competition of the European elections are dominated by national parties, although a further advancement of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the

⁵ Steven Van Hecke and Wouter Wolfs contributed to this section, which is partly drawn from Van Hecke S. (2010), Do Transnational Party Federations Matter? (... And Why Should We Care?). *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 6 (3), 395-411.

potential establishment of transnational electoral lists could expand the role of these European party organisations.

Since their inception more than 40 years ago, these political parties operating primarily at the European level have been assigned a number of different labels, each with a specific (sometimes normative) connotation. The term “pan-European parties” for example, implies a supranational perspective that sees these party organisations as more than just the sum of their parts. According to this perspective, the European parties should be developed into fully-fledged party organisations and take up roles similar to their national counterparts. The term ‘Europarties’ has recently become popular, as has ‘European political parties’, referring to the official name in the treaties.⁶

In academia, the term ‘transnational party federation’ is used, as one of the three components of the European party family, next to ‘national political parties’ and ‘supranational party groups’. The term has two main implications. First, the term emphasises the fact that these parties are *federations* (i.e. they consist of various national political parties). They mainly operate as “parties of parties”, i.e. umbrella organisations for their national member parties. Second, their components, member parties, are not fully integrated into a single organisation, a Europarty, as is the case with the delegations of national political parties in the party groups of the European Parliament. From the moment they are formed, party groups operate independent of national political parties and their delegations. In the party federations on the other hand, the political centre of gravity lies with the national member parties. In our definition, the fact that supranational party groups are more developed than transnational party federations does not imply a normative bias.

Second, the adjective ‘transnational’ is essential, as it refers to the transnational level (i.e. the level between the national and supranational levels), for which a separate and distinct party organisation has been established. ‘Transnational party politics’ therefore refers to the level at which the national (or intergovernmental) and the EU (or supranational) spheres overlap. In other words, they are ‘multi-level’ parties (Deschouwer, 2006) that operate both at the national and the European level. The transnational level also reflects the dual character of the EU, being intergovernmental and supranational at the same time. Transnational party federations are involved with intergovernmental institutions (the Council of Ministers and the European Council), as well as supranational institutions (the European Parliament and the European Commission) (see Table 1). More generally, the fact that they operate in both of the institutional circuits of the EU is a unique characteristic of transnational parties. They provide an important link between the national and the EU level, and between the intergovernmental and supranational institutions.

Table 1: Levels and their corresponding party organisations and EU institutions

Level	Party organisation	EU institutions
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⁶ In itself this is already a derivative from ‘political parties at European level’. See article 10 § 4 of the Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2016/C 202/01): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/collection/eu-law/treaties.html>.

National	national political parties	national governments and parliaments
Transnational	transnational party federations	Council of Ministers, European Council
Supranational	supranational party groups	European Commission, European Parliament

Transnational party federations are also collective units, to a much greater extent than national political parties and supranational party groups are. More precisely, they are collective in a different way. National political parties are sometimes analysed as non-unitary actors, as is the case when addressing intra-party organisations, factions, tendencies or similar topics. A Europarty also consists of several intra-party actors, that each can have a different view on the role that the European party organisation should fulfil (Day 2005). Whereas national party leaders consider European parties as facilitating bodies for networking, Members of European Parliament (MEPs) see them mainly as support organisations for EP group work, while staff from the Europarty secretariats aim at strengthening their supranational party characteristics.

Compared to national parties, transnational party federations are even more non-unitary, in the sense that they are composed of (national) political parties. Despite the fact that the statutes of transnational party federations do contain provisions that extend membership to individuals, membership is mostly restricted to national political parties. As a result, the nature of variations between transnational parties, in terms of membership numbers, differs from the nature of similar variations in national political parties. Membership variations among transnational parties are also related to the size of each member (small or large member parties); this element is completely absent from the membership composition of national political parties. In a national (or local/regional) party, all members are equal, although size (quantity) is accompanied by weight (influence). In theory, large member parties are independent of each other; in practice, they are often strong or influential in terms of policy-making. Policy distance (including intra-policy distance) is also a major factor. For example, a large member party could be weak if it is located far from the ideological centre of its transnational party federation. On the whole, intra-policy distances reflect the degree of cohesiveness within intra-transnational parties. This is important in a number of situations, as when a transnational party federation drafts an electoral manifesto that is intended to be binding for its member parties.

Transnational party federations are much more elite-driven than national political parties. It is the leadership that runs the party, and there is little participation from partisans. Unlike national political parties, the electorate, the membership, the rank-and-file and other actors cannot compete with the leadership as might occur at the national level, as these party components do not exist at the transnational level. Unlike national political parties, transnational parties have almost no direct links with society, except for the slowly growing number of actors in European civil society. Transnational parties are, therefore, not as

embedded in society. Not unlike national political parties, transnational party federations have organised themselves around *familles spirituelles*, or party families (von Beyme, 1985). Not all of these families have, however, been present from the early days of transnational party federations. Since 2004, transnational party federations have had a legal status and have benefitted from direct financing from the European Parliament budget.⁷ In the period 2004-2017, no less than twenty organisations were recognised as ‘political parties at European level’ and consequently received EU funding.⁸ Currently, there are sixteen (see Table 2).

The link with the supranational branch of the party family – the political groups in the European Parliament - has been a process of growing emancipation. Before the introduction of direct European subsidies in 2004, most European political parties were located with their corresponding political group in the European Parliament and were totally dependent on them for staff, accommodation and resources.⁹ The direct subsidies have pushed the Europarties to more independence, but this – together with the establishment of a large number of new Europarties – has also resulted in a more ambiguous relation between the Europarties and the political groups (Table 2). The clear one-to-one relation between a Europarty and a political group that characterised the pre-funding situation, is now rather uncommon. Some groups bring together MEPs from various Europarties whereas some parties see their members dispersed over several groups. Furthermore, Bardi (2006) correctly adds that every European election generates some disruptive effects: once the new European Parliament is composed, the centre of activity and, accordingly, the attention of media and public opinion shifts from the European political parties towards the elected assembly and its groups.

Table 2: ‘Political parties at European level’ (2017), most recent data retrieved from the website of the European Parliament, and their political families¹⁰

Political party at European level'	Represented in these Political Group(s) in the European Parliament	Political Family
European People's Party (EPP)	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	Christian Democrats / Conservatives
Party of European Socialists (PES)	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	Socialists / Social Democrats
Alliance of Conservatives and	European Conservatives and Reformists Group	Conservatives / Eurosceptics

⁷ Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding, Official Journal of the European Union, L297/1-4, 15 November 2003. The regulation and its 2007 amendment also use the term ‘political parties at European level’.

⁸ See http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/Grant_amounts_parties_01_2017.pdf.

⁹ See 3.1.

¹⁰ The table is based on the affiliations of individual MEPs to European political parties in the context of the distribution of Europarty funding by the European Parliament, as included in the annex of the note of 5 December 2016 of the Secretary General of the European Parliament on the grant award decision for the financial year 2017.

Reformists in Europe (ACRE)		
European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)		Christian-Social
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)	Group of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	Liberals
European Democratic Party (EDP)		Centrists
Europeans United for Democracy (EUD)	Confederal Group of the European Left - Nordic Green Left Group of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance	Eurosceptics
Party of the European Left (EL)	Confederal Group of the European Left - Nordic Green Left	non-Socialist Left
European Green Party (EGP)	Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance	Greens
European Free Alliance (EFA)	Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance European Conservatives and Reformists Group Confederal Group of the European Left - Nordic Green Left	Regionalists
Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE)	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group	Anti-establishment Hard Eurosceptics
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group & Non-Attached	Nationalist Eurosceptics
Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENF)	Europe of Nations and Freedom	Nationalist/Right-wing Eurosceptics
Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF)	<i>no corresponding group (Non-Attached)</i>	Ultranationalist Far-right Eurosceptics
Alliance of European National Movements (AENM)	<i>no corresponding group (Non-Attached)</i>	Ultranationalist Far-right Eurosceptics
Coalition for Life and Family (CLF)	<i>no EP representation</i>	Reactionary Catholic Eurosceptics

What do they do?

European political parties did not come out of the blue. Their origins are directly linked to the period leading up to the first elections of the European Parliament by universal suffrage, which

had originally been planned for 1978 but did not actually take place until June 1979. Using Duverger's (1951) terms, European political parties were, in this regard, 'internally created', in contrast to 'externally created' parties, whose origins are outside existing political institutions. Without a doubt, the party groups that had already existed since the 1950s took the lead in creating party organisations (see e.g. Van Hecke, 2006).

Since their establishment in the 1970s, the European political parties have developed, both in terms of organisation and membership. There is a longstanding consensus among scholars about the number and main features of the various phases of development, as well as on the decisive role of the environment in explaining party change (Hix and Lord, 1997; Kreppel, 2002; Hix et al., 2007; Bardi, 2006; Ladrech, 2006). In each of these developmental stages, integration (institutional incentives) and enlargement (broadly understood as increase in terms of numbers) has been of paramount importance (Hix et al., 2007). Niedermayer (1983) used a three-stage model to analyse the development of European political parties. He differentiated between a *contact stage* in which infrequent contacts between national parties do not require a permanent transnational structure, a *cooperation stage* with permanent interaction and an *integration stage* in which national parties transfer the sovereignty of decisions to the European party organisation. Day (2014) also applied a three-stage model of Europarty development, although he acknowledged that the eventual *point of arrival* depends on the normative assumptions on the role that the Europarty should fulfil.

With reference to Panebianco (1988), it is possible to distinguish two dimensions in the development of European political parties. On the one hand, institutionalisation depends on the degree of autonomy that an organisation has in relation to its environment. In this sense, European political parties are rather weak, as they must respond and adapt to an environment that they are not able to control. On the other, institutionalisation relates to the degree of 'systemness' (i.e. the interdependence among sub-groups that is made possible by the centre's control of resources). Given the primary importance of national political parties among its constituent elements, European political parties are not institutionalised in this way either. This is not surprising, as the two dimensions are empirically linked: an organisation with a low degree of systemness will find it hard to become autonomous from its environment.

The normative benchmark that is often used for European political parties are the functions that national parties perform in the member states. However, when compared to the traditional functions of political parties, the role of Europarties is rather limited (Table 3).¹¹

Table 3: Functions of European Political Parties

Functions of Political Parties	European Political Parties
1. Structure the vote	Limited due to European elections as "second-order national elections", but can be improved through <i>Spitzenkandidaten process</i> ,

¹¹ For a more extensive overview, see Wolfs, W., Smulders, J. 2018. 'Party financing at the supra-national level: The example of Europe', in: Mendilow, J., Phéllipeau, E. (eds.), *Handbook of Political Party Funding*. London: Edgar Elgar.

	EU transnational lists or Europarty labels for national member parties.
2. Mobilisation and Socialisation of the public	Limited due to low recognisability of Europarties, but can be improved through <i>Spitzenkandidaten process</i> , EU transnational lists, Europarty labels for national member parties and a more developed individual Europarty membership.
3. Recruitment of Political Personnel	Only through the <i>Spitzenkandidaten process</i> , and can be improved through the introduction of transnational lists.
4. Aggregation of diverse interests	Limited, since only a few Europarties have built a network of civil society organisations.
5. Integration and shaping of public policy	Limited, since most Europarty manifestos are the lowest common denominator of its member parties and the link with a political group in the European Parliament can be ambiguous. More detailed party manifestos and a stronger link with a political group are desirable.
6. Organisation of government	Limited, since only a few Europarties have meetings to bring together their representatives in the different EU institutions. Summits should become an important activity of all Europarties.
7. Legitimation of the political system	Limited, since it is not possible for Europarties to provide a strong link with the EU political system.

A first function of political parties is that they structure the vote through party labels in elections. However, the electoral connection of Europarties is limited, since European elections are fought in national electoral districts. In their well-known article, Reif and Schmitt (1980) define European Parliament elections as 'second-order national elections'. In short, the first European elections were 'national' because candidate selection, issues, campaigns and other aspects were national, not European. They were considered 'second-order', as they had little or no direct effect on the parties that were in government at the national level, as is the case with local elections. The concept of 'second-order national elections' was later refined, particularly with regard to the electoral cycle and the timing of European elections (Reif, 1984). Elections taking place in the middle of a legislative term generate a *vote sanction* for

government parties prior to first-order national elections. Because European Parliament elections were for a long time considered second-order national elections, European political parties (and even European Parliament groups) were seen as *a posteriori* party organisations. They were always late, as national parties wield power in a number of ways, including the control they exercise over the selection of candidates and the party group MEPs join once they are elected. With the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, however, this has changed.

The second function of political parties is the mobilisation – or representation – and socialisation of the population: political parties connect citizens to the political system and foster their social attachment to that system. Such a function requires high party recognisability, which is not the case with European political parties: they are not well known by the general electorate (Mair, Thomassen 2010; Van Hecke 2010). A more developed *Spitzenkandidaten* process and transnational EU lists could significantly improve the Europarties' visibility. National parties should also be more active in displaying their connection to a European political party in their communication, political programmes and campaign material. Another way for political parties to represent and socialise citizens is by mobilising them as party members or activists, which improves their affinity to the parties in particular and the political system in general. However, individual membership of European political parties is underdeveloped: only a few Europarties have introduced individual membership and make ample use of political activists during campaigns.¹²

A third party function is candidate-selection: political parties recruit political personnel and select political leaders. In the EU, two institutions are directly elected or appointed: the European Parliament and the European Commission. However, European political parties have (almost) no role in the candidate selection process. The selection of political personnel is thus not a key function of Europarties (Raunio 2007; Bardi, Calossi 2013). The electoral lists for the EP elections are composed by national political parties and the candidates for the various posts of European Commissioner are proposed by the national governments. This has slightly changed during the 2014 European elections, when five of the largest Europarties put forward their candidate-president for the European Commission – or *Spitzenkandidat* – after different internal selection procedures (Put et al. 2016). Transnational electoral lists, composed by the European political parties themselves would give the European political parties a stronger influence over the recruitment of political personnel in the EU institutions.

The aggregation of interests of various interest groups in society is a fourth function of political parties. Some European political parties have a large network of affiliated civil society organisations, but this is more the exception than the rule. Also regarding the aggregation and articulation of voters' interests, European political parties are rather weak (Mair 2009).

This is also related to the fifth party function: the integration and formation of public policy: parties try to influence policy-making on the basis of their ideology. Although European political parties are organised according to political ideology, they are internally more heterogeneous than most national parties. Consequently, their political programs and

¹² See also 4.4.

manifestos are usually rather short and undetailed. Moreover, the corresponding political groups in the European Parliament do not always act in line with the positions of their Europarty. Some parties are for example represented by various groups in the European Parliament, which raises questions about its ideological coherence. Stronger links with one particular EP group and the development of more extensive party platforms that are followed by its group and its member parties, could significantly improve the Europarties' ability to integrate and shape public policy.

The sixth function of political parties is the organisation of government: parties structure the relations between the legislative and the executive branch. The largest European political parties have developed the tradition to organise party summits that bring together the representatives of their political family in the different institutions. However, these meetings are mostly limited to an exchange of views: no thorough coordination of positions takes place. Moreover, most Europarties do not even have this type of summits.

The seventh function – the legitimisation for the political system – flows from the previous six: parties connect citizens to the political system. Since Europarties fulfil the different functions only to a limited extent, they cannot provide a strong legitimisation for the European political system. It is clear that a further development of European political parties is required to enable them to form a strong link between European citizens and the EU institutions.

Despite their being caught for a long time in second-order elections, and despite the above-mentioned reservations regarding the functions they fulfil, European political parties have demonstrated a remarkable adaptability to alter their organisation and, even more significantly, to incorporate a large and diverse number of new members, from both new and old Member States. As a result, they have become more complex in terms of size, strength and policy distance. This has even become the rule as one cannot be recognised as a European political party when lacking, for instance, representation in a number of EU member states. Similarly, changes in EP rules have made it impossible for single-party groups to be recognised as official groups. In other words, European political parties have not only been the object of change. As 'rational, purposive organisations, they obviously have considerable incentives to mould the institutional opportunity structure in their favour', as is the case with national political parties (Luther and Müller-Rommel, 2002b: 340).

Since a couple of decades, the study of European political parties has been part of a tradition within the field of comparative politics that sees the EU as a developing political system, the components of which are analogous to nation-states (Bardi, 2002: 294). This comparison has both advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that this analogy is 'caught' within the state-centric paradigm, making national political parties the dominant unit of comparison. Therefore, European political parties were consequently considered weak in such areas as organisation, policy formulation, interest representation, media access and staff. The analogy is also advantageous, however, as it allows the study of European political parties to benefit from numerous insights and findings about national political parties that have developed within the field of comparative politics, such as financing of parties and voting behaviour of MEPs.

2.2. Do Europarties matter?¹³

Beyond providing a nuanced definition and detailed account of their functions, it is at least as significant to consider the material impact of Europarties. What influence do Europarties really have? The answer is that their influence is conditional (Johansson 2016, 2017; see also Van Hecke 2010). What are the conditions under which Europarties can be expected to ‘make a difference’ or matter? What factors can be hypothesised to condition Europarty influence?

The influence and effectiveness of the Europarties depend on their capacity to mobilise ‘their’ heads of government for the party cause. The pre-summit meetings among government/party leaders are a central aspect of this mobilisation process. However, their significance appears to vary over time and across party families. And while Europarties may be able to secure the participation of their heads of government at pre-summit meetings, participation is not all, as limits in the ambition and capacity to co-ordinate positions may reduce the influence of the Europarties as well. Nor are the Europarties really able to impose their views and any decisions on the outcome of a specific European Council summit. This is the supreme EU body shaping and taking the most important decisions in and for the EU. Europarties are unable to tie the hands of national government leaders in the negotiations. At this level the Europarties have no formal powers to take binding decisions.

Europarties can be expected to matter (more) when they are in numerical ascendance. One clear conclusion from previous research is that the Europarties are able to influence decisions in the European Council when political leaders from one distinct party family outnumber those from other party families (Johansson 1999, 2002a, b; Lightfoot 2005; Tallberg and Johansson 2008).

However, numerical strength or superiority of a Europarty and party family alone is not a sufficient condition for influencing political outcomes in the European Council along party political lines. In addition, the heads of government of a particular Europarty must be mobilised for the joint cause. An increased volume of Europarty summitry ‘may be a necessary condition for influencing EU decision-making, but it is not sufficient by itself’ (Hix and Lord 1997, 186). As Hix (2005, 187) notes with regard to party influence generally in the EU, ‘translation from party strengths to policy outputs requires party actors in the same party family to cooperate, and winning coalitions to be constructed between different party families’.

So, arguably, the greater the dominance of one particular Europarty – that is, the relative strength of the party families, as well as the greater their cohesion and capacity for mobilization – the more likely Europarties are to influence the process and outcome of negotiations in the European Council (Tallberg and Johansson 2008). Exploring party politics in the European Council theoretically and empirically, Tallberg and Johansson (2008, 1238) note that the theoretical hypotheses advanced ‘may be refined to incorporate other factors, such as the domestic political context of heads of government (majority/minority government, coalition/one party government)’.

¹³ This sub-section was drafted by Karl Magnus Johansson.

The cohesion, mobilisation and influence of Europarties are conditioned by factors pertaining to domestic politics. As Hanley (1994, 197; see also Hanley 2008) reminds us, with special reference to the EPP, even though the group of national leaders – party and governmental – happen to agree about very fundamental aspects of policy and consult regularly, ‘these leaders remain first and foremost national politicians, responsible to national electorates.’ Arguably, this concern with domestic politics, constituencies and elections is the central factor restraining Europarty influence. Essentially nation-bound institutions, rooted in national societies, social cleavages and issue dimensions, political parties are likely to give priority to concerns in the domestic arenas of party politics rather than to European ones. It is difficult to create a unitary command and control structure within Europarties as they are federative ‘parties of parties’, consisting of *national* member parties.

Accordingly, it is essential to take domestic politics into account when exploring not only how governments but also parties act in the EU. However powerful heads of government may be in their role, they do not have full control over the domestic context in which they operate. This also alerts us to the impact of the interplay between government and opposition, the inherent conflict between them, and the party-political battles that break out as a consequence, as well as to intra-government divisions.

In sum, the conditions for influence of Europarties are demanding. They must exhibit a certain degree of cohesion on the internal arena. The numerical strength of Europarty presence in EU institutions is not a sufficient condition; there must also be effective mobilisation. There are domestic constraints on national parties and leaders that constitute important limits to Europarty influence.

One way of trying to find out whether Europarties matter or ‘make a difference’ is to see to what extent there are attempts at mobilisation and influence. In other words, to explore how Europarties, through their party networks, make efforts to shape political processes and policy outcomes.

In conclusion, Europarties matter when they are in numerical ascendance, relatively cohesive and able to mobilise their networks of political parties and leaders. Given the above overview on the functioning and impact of Europarties, the following section will turn to what can be broadly defined as the *context* in which they operate. This ranges from the regulatory framework in which they operate, to their complex relationship with national parties, the challenge of reconnecting to EU citizens and being representative, with the rise of Euroscepticism as well as, finally, the “untapped potential” of their membership of Global Party Internationals (GPIs). Issues and potential solutions are raised in order to enhance the effectiveness of Europarties through these different prisms.

3. Building blocks

3.1. Carrots and Sticks, Rules and Loopholes: How to Regulate European Political Parties?¹⁴

Although the first European party federations had already been established in the run-up to the first direct elections for the European Parliament in 1979, it was not until 2003 that an EU regulatory framework was developed.

The legal groundwork was laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992-1993), which added a strong political dimension to the European integration project that had been, until then, predominantly economic in nature. Following strong political pressure from the presidents of the three main party federations – Wilfried Martens (EPP), Guy Spitaels (CSPEC) and Willy De Clercq (ELDR) – a specific article on Europarties was included in the Treaty text (Roa Bastos 2012). The article states that “political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union”.¹⁵ This reference was important because it provided a “constitutional recognition” to the Europarties. However, it was mainly declaratory in nature and did not constitute a sufficient legal basis to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework.

Nevertheless, political pressure was held high in order to come to rules and particularly EU funding for these Europarties. The European Parliament issued a resolution in 1996 – the so-called “Tsatsos report” – calling for amendments to the party article in the EU treaties, so that rules on the legal status and financing of European political parties could be introduced (European Parliament 1996). Furthermore, the Greek, Austrian and Italian governments called for a revision of the treaty article in the 1996-1996 Intergovernmental Conference that would lead to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997-1999). Although these attempts did not achieve their goal – the article remained unchanged – they created a narrative and pathway towards Europarty funding and rules (Day and Shaw 2003; Johansson and Raunio 2005).

The Europarties themselves also continued to push for revision of the treaty article. In December 1999, the presidents of four of the then five Europarties issued a statement in which they emphasised the need to strengthen these party organisations. A few months later, in February 2000, the Secretary-Generals of all five parties published a working document, setting out a common position on the rules for party funding. The five party presidents endorsed these proposals with a joint letter to the European Commission and encouraged the institution to take a legislative initiative (Day and Shaw 2003; Johansson and Raunio 2005).

The issue became more urgent when the Court of Auditors published a critical report on the finances of the political groups in the European Parliament later that year. The Court denounced the existing practice whereby these groups provided the Europarties with accommodation, staff and resources. Indeed, at that time, most parties were located in the European Parliament with their corresponding political groups and most of the party

¹⁴ This sub-section was drafted by Wouter Wolfs.

¹⁵ Article 138a of the Treaty of Maastricht, which was renumbered to Article 191 in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997-1999) and subsequent Treaties.

personnel were actually staff members working for the group. The Court emphasized that financial support for Europarties could not be taken from the budget that was intended for the funding of political groups. However, without such support, the organisation and activities of the Europarties would be seriously jeopardised, which made separate EU funding for these organisations even more pressing (Wolfs and Smulders 2018).

In February 2001, the European Commission launched its legislative proposal on the statute and financing of European political parties. However, no agreement could be found in the Council of Ministers and the negotiations eventually collapsed at the end of the year (Johansson and Raunio 2005, 527). The treaty of Nice (2001-2003) provided a new opportunity for legislative action: the party article was amended to include a specific provision on party funding. There now was a stronger legal basis for an EU regulation on the rules and funding of European political parties. Only three weeks after the entry into force of the treaty of Nice in February 2003, the European Commission launched a new legislative proposal. The European Parliament and the Council were able to build on the efforts made in the previous years and an agreement was soon found: the Regulation was published in November 2003 and entered into force after the 2004 elections for the European Parliament.

Subsequently, the regulation was amended in 2007 to allow for separate funding for the European foundations that are linked to the Europarties. Since 2008, these political think tanks also receive grants from the European Parliament. The regulation was more substantially revised in 2014. The main changes have to do with the control of European political parties and possible sanctions in case of misconduct. The 2014 revision also includes the establishment of an Independent Authority that handles party registration and monitors compliance with the rules. In September 2017, the European Commission once again published a proposal to revise the regulation, although this time it only includes minor changes on the definition of party membership and the way the EU subsidies are distributed among the parties. The text is currently being discussed by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, but the EU institutions aim at finalising the revision in the first half of 2018, so it can be fully implemented by the European elections of 2019.

This regulatory framework for European parties follows the same rationale as party finance laws at national level: it is a combination of public funding (carrot) and rules to regulate party organisation and activities (stick) (Scarrow 2011). On the other hand, the motivation behind these EU rules and subsidies significantly differs from the rationale behind similar legislation in the Member States. Whereas at national level it was mainly seen as an instrument to combat corruption and to make party competition fairer, the reasoning at European level was much more normative. The regulatory framework was considered to be a measure to build up the Europarties and create strong party organisation at EU level, which could help to overcome the EU's democratic deficit. The rules should not make party competition more equal, but – more fundamentally – should *establish* such a political party competition (Wolfs and Smulders 2018).

Overall, the regulation of the internal party organisation is relatively limited and leaves a lot of flexibility to parties (For a more extensive discussion, see Wolfs 2017). First, the rules set out

a rather loose party definition, both ideologically and organisationally. The regulatory framework does not include specific ideological requirements: European political parties do not necessarily need to support European integration; also Eurosceptic parties are eligible for EU funding. Furthermore, there is no requirement for the party to be ideologically homogenous. This is different from the situation in the European Parliament, where technical groups are no longer allowed and MEPs form political groups “according to their political affinities”. However, the European political parties are required to have a political manifesto in which they observe the EU’s fundamental values, but there are no further conditions imposed.

The rules neither include many organisational requirements. A Europarty cannot pursue any profit goals and must have its seat in one of the EU Member States. Participation in the European elections is a third requirement, although the role of European political parties in these elections in practice remains rather limited. The electoral lists are drafted by the national member parties and the European elections largely remain a sum of 28 national elections. The Europarties themselves do not compete directly in these elections. Europarties can indeed campaign with a *Spitzenkandidat* – their candidate to become European Commission president – but in the last European elections in 2014, only five of the thirteen then existing Europarties nominated such a top candidate. It thus remains unclear how this particular condition is assessed.

The most challenging requirement for European political parties is to have a sufficient EU-wide representation. In order to be eligible for EU funding, the Europarty must be represented in at least a quarter of the Member States, either by members of European, national or regional parliaments, or by a national member party that has scored at least three percent in the most recent elections for the European Parliament. This requirement is interpreted rather broadly: also members from an assembly that is not directly elected for example, such as the House of Lords, are taken into account.

With regard to other organisational aspects, the regulatory framework does not contain any requirements. There are no specific provisions on the modalities of membership of European political parties; a European party can be composed of (a combination of) national political parties, individual politicians, citizens or civil society organisations. However, in order to reach the above mentioned representational threshold of seven Member States, only members of parliament and national parties are taken into consideration. Neither does the regulation encourage a strong link between a European political party and a political group in the European Parliament. MEPs from one political group can be affiliated to different Europarties and a European party can count MEPs from various political groups.

The main consequence of these rather loose provisions is that party life at European level can get rather complicated and instable. A one-to-one relationship between a Europarty and political group is rather the exception than the rule: only the two largest parties – the European People’s Party and the Party of European Socialists – have a clear connection to their corresponding group in the European Parliament. Additionally, the party system is also characterised by significant cross-membership and membership volatility of M(E)Ps: members

of the same EP group or even the same national political party are affiliated to different European political parties. The MEPs from the French *Front National* for example support up to three different Europarties. Some Members have even attempted to be affiliated to two different Europarties at the same time (Wolfs 2017).

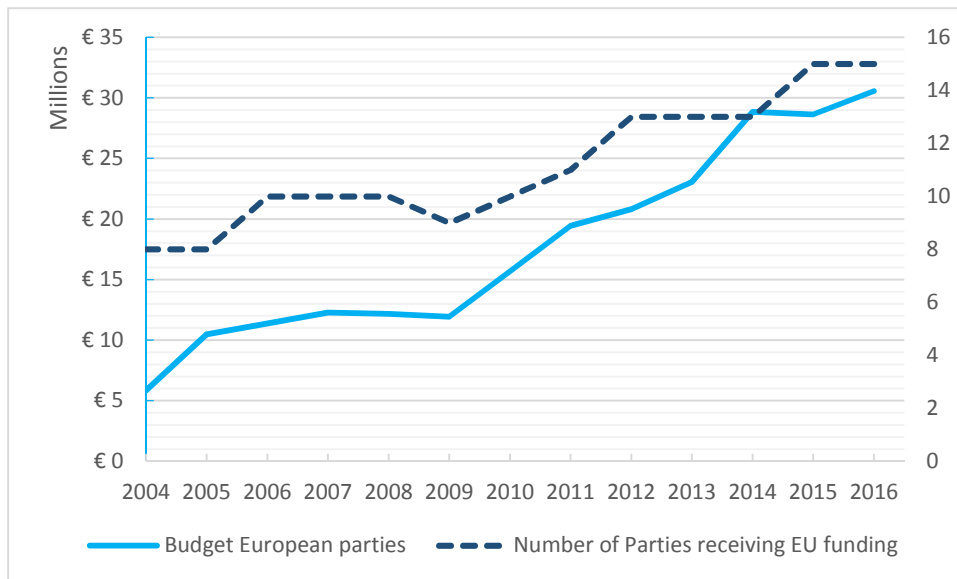
The recent legislative proposal of the European Commission tries to make these party affiliations more straightforward and transparent. The representational threshold of seven member states will no longer be considered at the level of individual members of parliament, but at the level of national parties. This will put an end to the possibility of cross-membership. The Commission also proposes that national parties are obliged to publish the symbol and political platform of their Europarty on their website. This will make the link between the national and European party level much clearer to citizens, which is particularly important in the context of European elections. However, the proposed revision does not provide any incentives to strengthen the connection between the European parties and the political groups in the European Parliament. It will, for example, still be possible for a national party to be a member of a particular EP political group and, at the same time, be affiliated to a European party that does not correspond to that group.

When looking at the funding rules for European political parties, the distribution of subsidies follows a two-step procedure. First, a total sum for the funding of the parties is determined each year in the budget of the European Parliament. Second, these two sums are divided among the various parties following a specific distribution key: 15 per cent of the sum is distributed in equal shares; 85 per cent is allocated proportionally in relation to the number of MEPs that are affiliated to the Europarty.

Hence, the funding principle is different from the system that is commonly used at national level. In most countries, the amount of subsidies for each party does not alter significantly between elections. At the European level however, the public funding for each party can be much more fluctuant. If the total sum for Europarty funding considerably increases or decreases from one year to the next, or if the number of parties changes, this has an impact on the level of funding each party receives. Since the introduction of direct EU subsidies in 2004, both the total sum and the number of parties have gone up almost constantly (Figure 1).¹⁶

Figure 1: Total amount of party funding (prices of 2017) and number of Europarties receiving funding

¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that for the financial year 2018 the funding procedure is slightly altered. European political parties must now register first with the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations. Only registered parties can receive EU funding. This registration procedure is more demanding than in the past. At the time of writing only ten Europarties were registered by the Authority. See: <http://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/transparency/registered-parties-and-foundations.html>.



These European subsidies are clearly the most important source of income for the European political parties, but the rules include a certain threshold on the amount of public funding a party can receive: maximum 85 per cent of the total party income. This means that the European political parties need to look for 15 per cent of own resources to “match” the EU grant. For this, they can rely on contributions from their individual members or member parties, donations or other sources of revenue. Most parties manage to get their entire grant, but several of the smaller parties have more difficulties to collect sufficient own resources to match the public funding, causing their subsidies to be lowered.

In its proposal to revise the regulatory framework, the Commission has suggested to change the distribution key as well as the maximum level of public funding in the total income. Henceforth, only 5 percent of the total sum would be distributed in equal shares and 95 percent would be allocated proportionally. Although it seems tempting to make the distribution of funding correspond to the number of affiliated MEPs, it also entails the risk of creating an imbalance between the big and smaller parties, thus making it more difficult for newcomers to enter the system. The argument for a strict proportional distribution is stronger for political groups in the European Parliament: it is important that they receive resources, speaking time, etc. in line with the share of the electorate they represent. Extra-parliamentary parties, on the other hand, fulfil a different role: they have to stimulate ideological debate at the European level, particularly in the context of the European elections. Therefore, it is important that also the smaller parties have sufficient funds to bring their message to the EU citizens. However, the lower the percentage of the total sum that is distributed equally, the more difficult it will be for smaller parties to get their voices heard.

Similarly, the European Commission is aiming to raise the ceiling for public subsidies from 85 to 95 per cent of total party income. This would make it indeed easier for smaller parties in particular, to receive their entire grant. On the other hand, increasing the ceiling takes away the incentive for parties to strengthen their (financial) ties in society and involves the risk of turning them into “semi-state agencies” (Katz and Mair 1995).

The regulatory framework also includes certain provisions on how the European political parties can spend their public funding. Europarties cannot use the European subsidies to finance – either directly or indirectly – national political parties or candidates. Nor can they spend the funding on referendum or national electoral campaigns. In other words, there is rather strict separation – in principle – between party funding at EU and at national level. However, the European parties can co-organise events and activities with their national member parties. This is even desirable if they want to raise the awareness of the EU and want to connect to European citizens. But because of these co-organised activities, the strict separation between the European and national becomes blurred. It is therefore not surprising that many cases of misuse EU party funding were related to the co-organisation of events and activities. Most of these cases were an unambiguous violation of the rules. However, sometimes it is less clear. In practice, it often proves difficult to determine when co-organisation becomes indirect financial support.

This is particularly important with regard to the upcoming European elections in 2019. European political parties are allowed by the rules to conduct their own European electoral campaigns, but in practice this often takes place in coordination and cooperation with their national member parties, as was also the case in 2014. The stronger the link between the national and European party organisations – as is encouraged in the Commission proposal through publishing the symbol and programme of the Europarty on the national party's website – the more difficult it will be to differentiate between campaign activities of the two organisations and the higher will be the risk for indirect financial support to national parties. However, the Commission proposal does not contain more provisions on joint activities and events, or clarifications on how the EU subsidies can and cannot be used. Therefore, there is a need for clearer guidelines on party expenditure for the upcoming European electoral campaigns, particularly regarding joint campaign activities and events. Of course, the relationship with national political parties is not confined to these regulatory matters: there are interrelated institutional and political dynamics, between the national, transnational and EU levels – which the following section now turns to – that are very relevant to the capacity of Europarties to perform their functions.

3.2. Punching above their Weight? National Parties and their Europarty¹⁷

Many of the current Europarties have very similar organisational structure. Indeed, as argued by Delwit et al., "a kind of mimicry (...) has had an effect in the structuring of European [party] federations" (2004, p. 10). Generally, Europarties are organised around a congress of representatives of their member parties, which forms the foundation of the party federation. Additionally, they have a central office, which takes care of the day-to-day management of the federation. Finally, most of them also have so-called Party Leaders' Meetings, pre-Summits or Summits, which bring together the leaders of both government and opposition parties across the EU. As such, the Europarty acts as the main coordinating institution connecting the national and European political arenas (Hix & Lord, 1997). However, it is quite an investment on the part of national parties to participate in this coordinative network, and they will not do so just for the sake of it. Rather, parties will only participate if they can ensure a proper return on investment — meaning, if they can maximise their influence on the outcome of policy-making. Yet, national parties generally do not participate in the day-to-day management of the Europarty or even party politics in the European arena (Ladrech, 2007). They rather focus their efforts on those venues where they can have a direct say on the policy positions of the Europarty, i.e. the congresses and the Summits. Let us have a closer look at these two institutions.

First, all Europarties regularly convene a party congress. Although the exact competences, voting procedures, membership and frequency vary to a certain degree, all Europarties clearly posit the congress as the principal institution of the party federation. The PES statutes, for example, call it its "supreme organ", while the EFA statutes refer to it as the "*organe souverain*". Indeed, the congresses decide on some fundamental party issues: they elect the president (and other member of the central party office), they nominate the *Spitzenkandidat*, they approve the election manifesto and political programme of the party, and often they have the power to change the party statutes. Moreover, they bring together Europarty officials with national party delegates, MEPs, Commissioners, heads of state and government, and sometimes even representatives from parliamentary assemblies of other international organisations such as the Council of Europe and NATO. As such, these congresses are the prime location for national parties, with all their various background and ideas, to network with the like-minded and discuss the future of the Europarty. The question remains, however, how national delegates engage in these discussions.

In particular, Klüver and Rodon argue, it is important to "evaluate how these ideologically diverse national member parties coordinate and arrive at a common position" (Klüver & Rodon, 2012, p. 630). For one, their research has shown that Europarties do not simply adopt the median position among their member parties. Indeed, only with the ALDE party does this seem to be the case. The other Europarties in their study — the EPP, PES and EGP — all diverge significantly from the median position. As with most joint decisions, therefore, coming to a common position in a Europarty would seem to be a matter of give and take. Put differently, national parties compete with each other during these congresses in order to ensure that the

¹⁷ This sub-section was drafted by Gilles Pittoors.

Europarty's position is as close as possible to their own ideal position. Applying Gamson's law to this process, Klüver and Rodon argue that "national parties' ability to succeed in this multilevel competition is determined by their legislative resource", which they define as "the share of seats [national parties] control in the EP" (Klüver & Rodon, 2012, p. 633). The logic is quite sound: the more you can give in terms of legislative resources, the more you can take in terms of policy position. In short, larger parties weigh in much more than smaller parties. The results of their study support this claim: the outcomes of Europarty congresses are indeed "skewed towards national parties with a larger seat share" (ibid., p. 649).

These results are significant when considering the relation between national political parties and their Europarty. It is important to keep in mind here the importance of Europarties in structuring the policy-making process in the EU, and particularly the partisan dynamics in the European Parliament. In this sense, they significantly limit the capacity of national member parties to develop an independent policy at the EU level. As a result, the policy position of the Europarty is highly relevant for national parties' EU policies. However, Klüver and Rodon's research shows that parties are not represented in an equal way in their Europarty. This is true regardless even of electoral success, because the number of European Parliament seats are determined based on population size, "parties from small member states are systematically disadvantaged in the political arena at the European level" (Klüver & Rodon, 2012, p. 649). For example, an electorally unsuccessful German Social Democratic party might still have more EP seats than an electorally successful Flemish Socialist party, and hence also more legislative resources and influence over the policies of the Europarty. This situation severely limits the representative capacities of Europarties, and can become a serious issue for the democratic legitimacy of the EU should Europarties become increasingly important actors.

National parties, however, also have a second venue for ensuring influence: the Summits. While they have been around since the 1970s, Summits have significantly grown in importance together with the rise of the European Council, as they now mainly serve to prepare common positions among party families. Most Summits bring together national heads of state and government, opposition leaders, Commissioners and other relevant 'political personalities', thereby becoming "the only political arenas where all the officials fulfilling executive functions at the European level from the same party family meet to discuss the medium- and long-term agenda of the EU" (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 65). As such, the Summits are the only party institutions with sufficient "political authority to agree credible and/or binding commitments about party behaviour at the national and European level" (ibid., p. 66). Similarly, Tallberg and Johansson argue that, "for the heads of government, the transnational parties offer a layer of coalition building in the European Council", whereby Summits are central to a joint mobilisation process (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1229).

More so than with the congresses, however, there are significant differences between Europarties regarding Summits. For one, while the EPP, PES and ALDE parties explicitly mention the existence of such meetings in their statutes and internal regulations, there is no mention of it in the statutes of the EGP, the EFA or any of the extremist Europarties — although the EGP is known to organise such meetings nonetheless. Hix and Lord (1997) paint a rather

optimistic view of the Summits, pointing out that both the quantity and quality have increased over the years. They argue, moreover, that Summits have actively set the medium-term policy agenda in the EU and have contributed to shaping alliance structures in the European Council. More recent work from both Tallberg and Johansson (2008) and Mühlböck (2013) has shown, however, that partisan dynamics in the Council remain rather rare. Tallberg and Johansson conclude that "heads of government are seldom mobilised along transnational party lines" (p. 1222), while Mühlböck shows that MEPs and ministers from the same party "hardly ever vote united" (p. 571).

National party leaders, thus, do not always seem to be highly committed to the Europarty and its Summits. Indeed, Hix and Lord argue that the large number of participants in these Summits make private discussion among party leaders difficult, thereby defeating "the original objects of the meetings" (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 66). As a result, party leaders have either ceased participating, or have sought out other venues for direct discussion with a smaller group of party leaders. For example, Tallberg and Johansson report that former UK prime minister Blair considered these Summits as a "complete waste of time". Also within the EPP, there have been smaller regular gatherings of party leaders, such as the so-called 'Rheinland Group' of German, Dutch, Luxembourgish and Flemish Christian-democratic parties. More importantly, however, it would seem that also here the 'small versus large' issue plays a role. Several scholars have shown that large countries have more power in the intergovernmental setting of the European Council. Faced with limited success of Europarties to generate common positions among their heads of state and government, parties from small countries again are outdone by their bigger peers.

In a way, the power imbalances in the Europarty create a self-reinforcing logic. As small parties seem to be unable to have a significant impact on the positions taken by their Europarty in either the congress or the Summits, they have no strong incentive to invest in participating in the coordinative network the Europarty provides. This, in turn, further limits both the capacity for the Europarty to coordinate and the influence small parties have on EU policies. This brief overview therefore shows that Europarties face important challenges regarding their democratic function, both internally and externally. Internally, they face a democratic shortfall because smaller parties and/or parties from smaller member states are underrepresented and dominated by the heavyweights. Consequently, also externally Europarties are not in an ideal position to fulfil the function that is expected from parties in a representative democracy, i.e. to connect the policy with citizens. At this point, therefore, Europarties need to get their internal democratic mechanisms settled, in order to be able to act as a bridge between the EU and its population.

3.3. Reconnecting the EU with its Citizens in Times of Crisis¹⁸

Reconnecting to EU citizens remains inherently complex to achieve when the European political and public sphere is so often dominated by Eurosceptic narratives. The Juncker Commission proposed a democracy package as one of its 10 priorities and adopted legislative proposals to reform some instruments aimed at increasing citizens' participation to EU politics. Although this attempt is welcome, this democratic concern is far from new. There have been numerous plans and strategies to (re-) connect Europe with its citizens, most of which have not been particularly successful, if one considers the current distrust among EU citizens. Their failure is not surprising, given the complexity of the "democratic deficit" the EU faces and the current context. The EU is facing a series of crises – at the political, social, economic levels – in addition to doubts and criticism as to its democratic nature. It seems the EU has become a crisis manager and is not able to put forward an ambitious and new strategy to deal with citizens' everyday concerns and their participation in EU politics. But at the same time, the democratic crisis is not restricted to the EU: research and surveys show that citizens are increasingly dissatisfied towards the way democracy functions both at the national and supranational levels and that they increasingly mistrust mainstream political parties and democratic institutions (Armingeon and Guthman 2014, Mair 2007). It seems therefore that the democratic challenge is not a thorn in the EU's eye only.

While dealing with all the interconnected issues on the broad and multifaceted debate on democracy in the EU is beyond the scope of this contribution, two elements, however, will be stressed here: the rise of Euroscepticism and the democratic nature of the EU on the one hand and the lack of connection between the supranational and national parties and the limited role of Europarties on the other hand.

Engaging with Euroscepticism

The development of anti-EU sentiments is one of the most important features of the integration process over the last two decades (Usherwood 2007). With the economic crisis, European integration has entered a new and more difficult phase of its existence, characterized by mass Euroscepticism, the rise of radical and populist parties and the mainstreaming of anti-EU rhetoric (Brack and Startin 2015, Vasilopoulou 2013). As a result, the expression of popular discontent during the 2014 EP elections was unprecedented. The EU's scope of intervention, as well as its legitimacy, has been increasingly challenged, especially in the economic governance. The current context of democratic malaise and economic crisis has provided fertile ground for the mobilisation of populist and Eurosceptic parties which could exploit the prevailing sense of disconnect and hostility at the 2014 EP elections. The share of pro-EU groups in the chamber declined while the number of dissenting voices has grown significantly. Euroscepticism is here to stay and cannot be reduced to "the ignorance of the people" about EU issues (Usherwood and Startin 2013). If the EU intends to deepen its democratic character, it is time for its institutions and for mainstream political parties to hear the arguments of this kind of opposition and engage in a constructive deliberation with those dissenting voices

¹⁸ This sub-section was drafted by Nathalie Brack.

rather than systematically discredit their positions. More concretely, the reform of Europarty funding has been recently discussed, including a proposal to restrict EU subsidies to parties committed to European integration. Such a move would be detrimental to a healthy democratic debate on one of the two main cleavages found at the EU level, namely to pro-/anti-EU divide (Hix et al. 2007; Otjes and Van der Veer 2016). EU institutions have proven to be resilient to crisis and should be mature enough to allow a diversity of points of view, including an anti-system minority. Using rules regarding funding to hinder the development of Eurosceptic transnational parties is likely to backfire in terms of democratic development and to fuel criticism of the EU's lack of democratic legitimacy. In addition, research shows that the presence of Euroscepticism within EU institutions could be an asset to alleviate the democratic deficit of the EU, a.o. by increasing its representativeness and showing to citizens that the EU is open to debate and dissent. But it would require EU institutions to engage with sceptics and to use the EP as a true forum for contestation (Brack 2015; Brack 2017; Usherwood and Startin 2013).

A better connection between European and national political parties

The 2014 EP elections should have represented an important milestone for the EU. For the first time, there was a direct link between the vote in EP elections and the nomination of the President of the European Commission (Schmitt, Hobolt, Popa 2014). Most political groups nominated a lead candidate and with the slogan "this time, it's different": this new opportunity was expected to rouse the public's interest, to bridge the gap between the EU and voters and to reduce the second order nature of these elections. But after all, these elections were not that different and remained, in most Member States, second-order national contests.

So far, EP elections are still nationally based and national parties are key: they select their candidates and control the campaigns, usually focused on national issues rather than on the EU. Moreover, the achievements and work of MEPs is rarely taken into account when national parties make up their electoral lists. And although there is an increasing link between national and EU politics (ref), there is an unbalanced relation between Europarties and national political parties, the latter remaining the central players. There is a need to strengthen European parties as an essential link between the EU institutions and citizens through representative democracy. National parties should all adopt the common manifesto of their Europarty during EP elections campaigns and the rules on EU campaigning could be streamlined to give a more prominent role for Europarties. More importantly, Europarties need to be more visible in national politics and have a more defined role.

The following section explores Europarty membership as a key avenue in order to materially enhance the relationship between Europarties and the EU citizenry.

3.4. Europarties and their Grassroots Members: An Opportunity to Reach Out and Mobilise¹⁹

Europarties are still unknown to most European voters. Few will have heard their names or would recognise their symbols. There are a number of explanations for their invisibility. Firstly, all the major Europarties have their headquarters in Brussels, where they organise meetings and conferences for the representatives of their national member parties. Without specific knowledge of the dynamics and actors within 'Eurobubble' it is unlikely that citizens come across the Europarties' politicians, offices, or even campaign posters. Secondly, all the major Europarties remain 'parties of parties' (Johansson, 2009). Whether it is about electing party leaders or writing and ratifying Euromanifestos – the national member parties tend to have the last word. For many national parties, these powers remain a privilege they do not wish to relinquish. It is therefore unsurprising that most national political parties neglect to highlight their Europarty affiliation. Indeed, some of Europe's biggest national parties do not use Europarty manifestos or other Europarty campaign materials such as posters, during European parliamentary election campaigns (Hertner, 2011).

To be sure, Europarties are aware of their invisibility and are seeking to address it. One of their recent attempts to reach the voters directly has been the introduction of party membership for citizens. Under different terms and conditions, all the major Europarties - amongst them the European People's Party, the Party of European Socialists, the European Green Party, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and the Party of the European Left - have introduced individual membership. This brief contribution will highlight the manner in which individual membership can benefit the Europarties, their national member parties, and the individual members themselves. Only when the mutual benefits are recognised can individual membership be successful in the long term.

How Europarties might benefit from individual members

Research on national political parties has highlighted that members are a valuable resource (Scarrow, 2015). For instance, a large membership provides parties with democratic legitimacy. Members might also pay fees, which can help parties pay their expenses. But crucially, members do most of the 'donkeywork' during and beyond election campaigns: they distribute leaflets, put up posters, man stalls on local high streets, knock on doors, make telephone calls, and promote the party on social media. Thus, whilst having a net of online supporters and occasional volunteers is important for national parties, 'traditional' members still carry out most of the donkeywork (Webb *et al.*, 2017; Scarrow, 2015). For Europarties, individual members can be just as important. After all, EU-savvy campaigners who think and act across borders, understand the EU, and are happy to discuss it in an informed manner are in short supply at the grassroots. Many national parties do not invest much in their grassroots' EU knowledge and awareness (Hertner, forthcoming). ALDE's 'individual members', the 'PES activists' and the EGP's 'individual supporters' have demonstrated their willingness and ability to campaign across Europe during European and national elections on several occasions and might contribute to filling the widening EU-gap at the grassroots.

¹⁹ This sub-section was drafted by Isabelle Hertner.

On the other hand, many national parties are reluctant to see individual Europarty members empowered because they worry about losing their pole position within Europarties. They also seek to remain in charge of membership selection and administration. However, with the steady decline in turnout for European parliamentary elections (Franklin and Hobolt, 2011), and the decline in party membership across Europe (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012), national parties might have to open their minds and doors to those people who campaign for Europarties directly.

What's in it for the individual members?

Finally, individuals themselves obtain different benefits or rewards from joining political parties. What is known is based on national political parties, but there is no reason to assume that this is significantly different for Europarties. One can therefore assume that most individual members join a Europarty because they want to participate and make a difference. They also want to meet like-minded people with whom they can socialise and discuss politics. For some individuals, Europarties also offer an ideological home that is not available in their own country. For instance, ALDE and the EPP offer individual membership to citizens living in a country where there is no ALDE/EPP member party.

Europarties: Wake up!

Thus, if Europarties are to be effective in attracting (and keeping) individual members in order to build up a mass membership, they need to grant them rights, such as the right to participate in policy-making and the selection of leaders. Many national parties across Europe have opened up their decision-making processes to members (Gauja, 2013), and Europarties could do the same. So far, progress in this direction has been rather slow. Amongst all Europarties, ALDE has gone the furthest by granting a number of selected individual members the right to vote at the party congress, which is their highest organ and ratifies manifestos. ALDE also allows one elected individual member to attend meetings of the Council, which is the second highest organ and is responsible for approving membership applications, membership fees, the party's annual budget and accounts, and nominating the Secretary General. The PES and the EGP allow their individual members to participate in the party's debates, but do not give them voting rights at the congress. It is, however, worth highlighting that the EGP organised open primaries in the run-up to the 2014 European elections, which gave individual supporters the opportunity to vote for the two Green *Spitzenkandidaten*.

If Europarties are to truly become mass membership parties, they need to convince their member parties to open up the party and let citizens take part in some of the important decisions. After all, according to the so-called party article (TEU art. 8A §4) it is the role of Europarties to 'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union.' This enormous task could be made easier if citizens were given the opportunity to be directly involved in Europarties. This could be achieved through a system of delegation and representation, whereby individual members elect amongst themselves a number of representatives to attend party congresses and other relevant party bodies, where they have the right to vote. At a time when memberships are ageing and shrinking, parties

should more than ever have an interest in reaching out and mobilising their supporters in this manner.

The debate over the representativeness of Europarties is a rather multifaceted one. In the following, the issue of representation is also addressed, questioning whether there may not be deeper dynamics that weigh upon the Europarties' ability to perform their representation functions.

3.5. Can the representative and procedural roles of the Europarties be fulfilled at the same time?²⁰

The title of this report - Reconnecting European Political Parties with EU Citizens – constitutes a fundamental normative challenge: what is expected of European political parties? What kind of roles should they play? And if they are expected to reconnect with EU citizens, what about their procedural role? Can representative and procedural roles be reconciled? This is the precise topic of this short argumentative essay.

The idea that Europarties should reconnect with EU citizens resonates with an idealist vision of mass party politics, when parties first and foremost represented citizens. They were treated as a part of civil society, a transmission belt between voters and the government, standing clearly on the voters' side (Duverger, 1951). However, that era (if it ever really existed) has long since come to a close (for a review see Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). With the rise of cartel parties (Katz and Mair, 1995), these have significantly reduced their representative role, focusing instead on their procedural function and their place within the state structure, thus becoming semi-state agencies or, to put it differently, public utilities (van Biezen, 2004). As such, citizens do not treat them as a part of civil society (Mair and Thomassen, 2010). The contrast between these party models is quite telling. For this reason, if national parties no longer connect with citizens, and if citizens expect them to govern, rather than represent them, why should Europarties be expected to ever engage in a representative role aimed at EU citizens?

One of the answers to this question emerges from the debate over Europarties that began in the 1990s. Given the ever-growing extent of public scepticism, there was much discussion in the EU on how to get closer to citizens. An expectation was that the Europarties could play a role in this endeavour too. This is clearly visible when analysing the discussions surrounding the adoption of Regulation No. 2004/2003, which introduced public funding for the Europarties from the EP's budget (Gagatek, 2014), or similar discussions about the role of European political foundations, affiliated to Europarties (Gagatek and van Hecke, 2014). In short, Europarties were framed into an EU public sphere, which would be created if citizens could be more informed on what the EU was. The main target were citizens, who should be educated on what the EU is and what it does, rather than voters or sympathizers, who should be convinced to support a certain vision (one of many) about what the EU should be. This way, the Europarties were expected to engage with functions typical of those fulfilled today by all civil society organizations.

Since mid-2000s, this mood has partially moved toward discussing the pros and cons of politicising the European integration (Hix and Bartolini, 2008). In a nutshell, the idea was that citizens do not understand and are not engaged in EU politics because it lacks political controversy. The mainstream political parties represent a unified pro-European political front, all emphasising the benefits of European integration. The elections of the EP did not matter, because they had no impact on the partisan composition of the European Commission. The

²⁰ This sub-section was drafted by Wojciech Gagattek.

way to change this state of affairs was, among others, to politicise the European Commission, for example, by making the election of the President of the European Commission dependent on the result of the EP elections. Here comes the place for the Europarties which are thus performing a procedural role in creating conditions for and executing the process of nomination of their leading candidates for the job of the Commission President (Hix, 2008).

Overall, in this context the role of Europarties is moving from being primarily treated as part of a EU civil society, to acknowledging that their different political views on the left-right spectrum (if indeed they are different) and their different views on the current state and the future of the EU, should raise the interest of voters, and this way bring the EU closer. This implies that they are not simply (re)connecting with citizens, but rather voters or sympathizers: the individual members of their own national political parties or even individual members of Europarties, in the same way as their national counterparts do. This represents a comeback to treating political parties not primarily as a part of civil society but as the channels of the aggregation and representation of political ideas.

Can these two goals be achieved at the same time? In other words, can Europarties be expected to better connect with their 'voters', supporters or even the whole citizenry and at the same time be more effective in their procedural roles (i.e. have a greater influence on EU politics)? The experience of the last decades in party politics at the national level has shown that when parties increase their engagement in fulfilling the procedural roles, then at the same time their representative functions diminished. From this point of view, Mair and Thomassen have argued that the fact that there is no party government at the EU level and that the room for engaging in procedural issues is smaller, create conditions for the Europarties to effectively fulfil their representative tasks (Mair and Thomassen, 2010). But is there a demand for this within the Europarties and their national political parties, or is it rather the result of expectations imposed on them from the dominant narrative of bringing the EU closer to its citizens and building a European civil society?

For this reason, one should be cautious in imposing on Europarties those functions that they are unlikely to fulfil if there is not such a demand within their own national member parties. Europarties should remain free to choose the best strategy to achieve their most important goal: to become relevant to their own national member parties and to show the added value of transnational party cooperation. This applies to both pro-European and Eurosceptic political parties at the European level. Some of Europarties might see the benefits of stressing their representative roles, and they should be free in engaging in such activities. But if others have another approach, they should not be forced to go into this direction.

This does not mean that in principle there are no ways to reconnect with citizens. Indeed, since the 2009 EP elections, the Party of European Socialists (PES) has been challenging the European People's Party (EPP) not only on programmatic grounds, but also in relation to which party is more internally-democratic and inclusive, thus claiming to allow a greater input from individual citizens, rather than parties (Gagatek, 2009). A few Europarties introduced ways for individual sympathizers to directly engage in their activities. In 2014, the European Green Party (EGP) initiated a revolutionary process of an open, on-line primary to select its

Spitzenkandidaten for President of the European Commission. However, other parties preferred traditional, delegate-based ways to select a candidate, in which only national member parties had a say (Put et al., 2016). Still, even if some Europarties are consulting individual citizens on who should be their leading candidate, this is because of developments in their procedural, rather than representative, role.

For this reason, already in 2010, Bardi et al. (2010) argued that Europarties could become a transmission belt, an intermediary between the national polities and supranational institutions (Bardi et al., 2010). One key example would be to propose and collect signatures in favour of a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). So far these initiatives have primarily come from civil society organizations, but if Europarties are to reconnect with citizens, and indeed, if one recalls the expectations formulated against them regarding their place within the civil society, there is no reason why they should not show their relevance as actors able to propose and coordinate the collection of signatures. If, on the other hand, one would argue that this instrument should be reserved to other civil society organizations, then perhaps the Europarties, like their national counterparts, should focus on their (prospective) procedural roles, and leave representation of citizens to others.

3.6. What can Europarties learn from National Political Parties?²¹

Europarties do not play the same role and perform the same functions as national parties. One tempting recommendation would be to make European party organizations look more like national party organizations, in order for them to increasingly perform the same functions. Yet research shows that national parties are also facing more and more difficulties in performing their role in representative democracies. While national parties increasingly become public utilities (van Biezen 2004), dependent from the state, rather than voluntary private organizations, they face growing difficulties in maintaining a link with civil society. This affects their capacity to exercise a linkage function, i.e. representation and participation. In particular, citizen mobilization via membership and activism are a challenge (van Haute et al. 2017).

Rather than mimicking national party organizations, Europarties can learn from national parties that have engaged in internal reforms in an attempt to overcome these challenges (Scarrow 1999). These reforms have predominantly focused on two dimensions of party organizations. First, parties have opened up their decision-making processes by extending the selectorate, i.e. the body of individuals allowed to take part in major intra-party decisions such as leader or candidate selection, or manifesto adoption (Rahat and Hazan 2011; Cross and Katz 2013; Cross and Pilet 2015; Gauja 2017). Here, there is a general shift from a delegation model (where party delegates are granted rights) to a one-member-one-vote model (where all party members are granted these rights). Some parties have extended these rights beyond the party boundaries (e.g. via voters primaries). Second, parties have engaged in reforms that are blurring the contours of their organization. They have developed alternative affiliation options such as supporters, sympathizers, or other forms of 'membership light' (Scarrow 2014).

Have these reforms managed to solve the linkage issue and to reconnect parties with civil society? Kosiara-Pedersen et al. (2017) show that parties that offer more rights to their members in their decision-making process, and that offer membership at a lower price (lower fees) tend to have more members. But when membership is relatively costly (higher fees), those who do join are more likely to use their membership by being active in the party. There can, thus, be a trade-off for parties between qualitative and quantitative participation. Besides, parties that develop alternative affiliation options tend to have less traditional members. Offering more rights to members therefore only brings more members to join if they do not have an alternative affiliation option. Achury et al. (2018) show that parties which grant more rights to their members, tend to have a more representative membership base, both socially and politically.

These reforms produce effects that go beyond participation and representation (linkage). Comparing decision-making processes within parties, researchers show that granting rights to more inclusive selectorates (such as party members or voters), opposed to party delegates, can have a negative impact on the representativeness of the output of the decision (leader/candidate/manifesto). It can also decrease the competitiveness of the selection processes, favour incumbent candidates, and present challenges in terms of responsiveness

²¹ This sub-section was drafted by Emilie Van Haute.

and intra-party cohesion (Rahat and Hazan 2011; Cross and Pilet 2016; Gauja 2017). There can, thus, be a trade-off between a more democratic input (more participation) and a more democratic output (the actual outcome of the decision-making process).

Finally, are these reforms a sign of democratisation of political parties? The dominant view correlates more open decision-making processes where rights are granted to the rank-and-file or voters, to more democratic processes and to intra-party democracy. This illustrates a participatory model of democracy that champions the direct involvement of citizens in the decision-making process. At the system-level and the party-level, reforms are undertaken to develop more participatory tools that empowers citizens and grassroots members. In doing so, this tends to discredit other models of democracy, such as representative democracy that rests on the principle of a chain of delegation in the decision-making process. Parties are at the heart of the delegation process and representative democracy. By undertaking these reforms, they might indirectly widen the gap between citizens and parties.

3.7. Global Party Internationals: “Tackling the Dilemma of Indifference”²²

The final dimension to strengthening the Europarties’ relevance, impact and effectiveness is to ensure that they are able to attain and engage with the global arena, beyond the confines of the EU. This is most likely to be achieved by Global Party Internationals, longstanding global structures of party-political cooperation, that have waned in significance, but that may still constitute a useful tool for Europarties. As is explored in the following, there is, an albeit limited, “untapped potential” (Hällhag 2008), which could broaden and thus enhance the representation functions performed by Europarties, also when it comes to the EU’s role as a global actor, a domain in which the European Parliament and Europarties tend to be sidelined.

Upon hearing the term ‘Global Party International’ (henceforth GPI) what sort of image does it conjure-up and what sort of expectation does it evoke: Internationalism and solidarity? A sense of romanticism? Global-level agenda setting? A relic from a by-gone age? An irrelevance? Exploring this story, it soon becomes apparent that a duality of ‘capacity’ (the empirical dimension) and ‘expectation’ (the normative dimension) are an essential part of the narrative surrounding the GPIs. This duality also underpins what is defined here as the ‘dilemma of indifference’. This is a scenario where advocates for enhancing the transnational and supranational qualities of GPIs inadvertently stoke a sense of indifference because their aspirational desires find it difficult to fit with national realities; while those who hold a general dismissiveness towards the GPIs *start* from a premise of indifference. How might the GPIs face up to this conundrum - remembering that it may well have to be embraced rather than solved? It seems that the starting point has to be a recognition of ‘what is’ rather than ‘what might be’.²³

Table 4: The Global Party Internationals (GPIs) (Source: GPI websites)

Party International	Founded	Key Documents
Socialist International (SI)	1951 – Secretariat based in London. Talk of a ‘House of Social-democracy’ with the Party of European Socialists (PES), in Brussels in the late 2000s, came to nothing.	<i>Goals and Responsibilities of Democratic Socialism</i> , Frankfurt, 1951; Stockholm Declaration 1989.
Liberal International (LI)	1947 – Secretariat based in London.	<i>Liberal Manifesto</i> , Oxford, 1947 & 1997; <i>Liberal Manifesto 2017</i> .
Christian/Centrist Democratic International (CDI)	1961 – Formerly the World Union of Christian Democrats; then the Christian Democratic International. Present name since 2001. Secretariat based in the HQ of the European People’s Party, Brussels.	<i>The Political, Social and Economic Condition of the Continents and the Development of Christian Democracy</i> , Santiago, 1961; CDI Basic Programme 1995.

²² This sub-section was drafted by Stephen Day.

²³ Note - unlike the SI, LI and CDI, the PA (and to some extent the GG) seeks to herald itself more in terms of a network rather than in terms of a ‘party’.

International Democratic Union (IDU)	1983 – Alternating Secretariat. Initially UK Conservative Central Office. Relocated to Oslo (2005). Presently in the CSU HQ, Munich.	<i>Declaration of Principles</i> , London, 1983.
Global Greens (GG)	2001 – Started with a virtual presence. Secretariat now at the European Green Party HQ, Brussels.	<i>Global Green Charter</i> , 2001.
Progressive Alliance (PA)	2013 - Co-ordinating office located in the SPD HQ, Berlin.	<i>Guiding Principles: Progressive Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Solidarity</i> .

Thus, once the GPIs are looked upon as entities in a state of becoming, where the prospect of an ever-permanent vestigial status is very real, it becomes possible to dampen expectations without dismissing them out of hand. From there, one can begin to think about the sorts of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that accompany the GPIs, alongside some future-oriented action points. The aim here is to ask if it is possible to challenge those parts of the narrative that have been shaped by indifference.

Key characteristics

For decades, political parties the world over have sought membership of their corresponding GPIs. Central to the identity of a GPI is their make-up as an ‘association of national political parties’ (that also includes the presence of regional-based party federations such as the Europarties) and the belief that their ideology has a transnational reach. As Dr Alois Mock put it, at the 1983 inauguration of the International Democratic Union (IDU): ‘...political ideas have no national frontiers.’ In addition, underpinned by internationalism and solidarity, the GPIs seek to project themselves on the international stage. The Liberal International (LI), for example, stresses that its purpose is ‘to win general acceptance of Liberal principles which are international in their nature.’ To translate identity into action, the GPIs also seek to foment a sense of purpose with an intention to play a role. This has manifested itself in a lexicon of organisational self-ascription that includes: ‘federation’; ‘network’; ‘association’ ‘partnerships’ and ‘working cooperatively’ and ‘mutual support’ etc.²⁴

Capacity wise, though, the opportunity to live-up to and actualise that self-ascription remains dependent on national member parties believing that their GPI is a site worth investing in. Oftentimes their capacity to follow-through with initiatives appears wanting. However, given that they operate on a shoestring budget, via an *extremely* small secretariat (where many of the handful of staff are volunteers), this is not so surprising.²⁵ A real-world relevance or irrelevance?

²⁴ The CDI, LI and SI all hold a consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) although it is difficult to find out what this actually entails and what impact (if any) they might have had.

²⁵ More recently, in a bid to further cut costs, a number of GPIs relocated to the same address as their Europarty counterparts in Brussels where they are registered as AISBL - *association internationale sans but lucrative*. Others have set-up offices in the headquarters of one of their national member parties.

During the 1970s-80s, as a result of the leadership of Wily Brandt (1976-1992), the SI could claim that it had the trappings of a global player.²⁶ Similarly, in the immediate wake of regime change across Central and Eastern Europe post-1989 the CDI, LI and SI yielded significant ideological and programmatic influence on the newly emerging party-systems. Their recent trajectory, however, especially in the European theatre where they have been displaced by the rise of the Europarties, has been less memorable. The comparison, of course, is not entirely appropriate given the legal framework that has facilitated the latter’s evolution (Day, 2014; Day and Shaw, 2006). But, the changing fortunes of their relationship does illustrate the GPIs’ relative decline. Take the situation of the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC), predecessor of the Party of European Socialists (PES). Article 1 of the statutes of the CSPEC read: ‘... [it] shall be based on the provisions of the Socialist International relating to regional cooperation among the affiliated parties’, implying a degree of indebtedness to its senior. In the late 1990s-early 2000s, however, the statutory relationship had shifted to talking in terms of ‘ensuring close collaboration with the SI’. By 2012 direct reference to the SI, in the objects and aims of the PES, had been removed. The situation became even more dramatic in 2012 when a number of PES member parties (and others) broke away from the SI. They would go on to form the Progressive Alliance (PA) arguing that the former was in dire need of reform. Statutory recognition of the Global Party Internationals by their Europarty counterparts continues to exist in plain sight, as highlighted in Table 5, but it is difficult not to escape from the question: ‘are the GPIs fit for purpose in the minds of the Europarties?’ It is clear that both formations are part of a wider political community, yet the precise nature of that relationship has become increasingly opaque as the role and significance of the Europarties has increased, since the promulgation of the 2004 Party Regulation.

Table 5: Europarty Statutory Recognition of the Global Party Internationals

Europarty	Europarty statutory recognition of their corresponding Global Party International (GPI)	Global Party International
European People’s Party (EPP)	<p>Preamble – ‘This association will be a member of the Christian/Centrist Democrat International (CDI), a worldwide organisation of Christian Democrats and like-minded political parties and the International Democrat Union (IDU), a worldwide organization of Conservative, Christian Democrat and like-minded political parties of the centre and centre right.’</p> <p>Article 6 – ‘Membership of the Centrist Democrat International (IDC-CDI) and/or International Democrat Union (IDU) is a positive criteria.’</p>	<p>Christian/Centrist Democratic International (CDI)</p> <p>International Democratic Union (IDU)</p>

²⁶ The SI’s Wikipedia profile page asserts that during that time the SI ‘...had extensive contacts and discussions with the two leading powers of the Cold War period.’ Numerous informants, in 2016, lamented the lack of a global political figure of similar standing to Brandt.

<p>Party of European Socialists (PES)</p>	<p>Article 39 – ‘Composition of the Leaders’ Conference includes the President of the Socialist International.’</p> <p>Article 37.1 - ‘The President, in co-operation with the Vice-Presidents and with the assistance of the Secretariat, shall ensure: liaison between the PES and the parties, the group in the European Parliament and the Socialist International and other international initiatives such as the Progressive Alliance and the Global Progressive Forum.’</p>	<p>Socialist International (SI)</p> <p>Progressive Alliance (PA)</p>
<p>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – Party (ALDE-P)</p>	<p>Article 3 – [part of its purpose is to] ‘...develop close working relationships with and among its members, their national parliamentary groups, the parliamentary Group of the ALDE Party of the European Parliament, in other international fora and Liberal International’.</p>	<p>Liberal International (LI)</p>
<p>European Green Party (EGP)</p>	<p>Preamble – ‘The European Green Party represents Green Parties from all over Europe, and we are part of the Global Green family.’</p> <p>Article 3.6 – ‘[The European Green Party] acts as the European partner within the structure of the Global Greens movement and subscribes to the Global Greens Charter...’</p>	<p>Global Greens (GG)</p>

Source: Europarty statutes

Despite this very real diminution, it is important not to become overly Eurocentric vis-à-vis the prism through which an evaluation of the GPIs takes place – remember this remains a global story. While they may not be displaying global-level agenda-setting properties, there are still a series of tangible and non-tangible features/outputs that continue to underpin their sense of purpose. Chief among them is the visceral affinity that they appear to accrue. As one informant (despite holding some misgivings) stressed a decade ago: ‘It is a real privilege to be a member... [there is] still a strong belief in its necessity...’ Such a way of thinking remains an essential part of the armoury of the GPIs. In addition, Congress speeches, resolutions, press releases, statutory provisions and statements of solidarity in the wake of disasters and atrocities are all aimed at galvanising the GPI brand – though the reach and effectiveness of such words are difficult to quantify. When it comes to features of a more tangible nature, perhaps their most significant contribution is the organisation of workshops on ‘party-building’ for member (and aspiring member) parties. The Progressive Alliance (PA), for example, talks about the need to ‘...focus on building-up the capacity for campaigns and the organisational integrity of political parties.’ The Global Greens take a similar approach emphasising ‘capacity building’; assisting policy development; research and campaigning’.

Such gatherings provide the opportunity to network, exchange best practice, share electioneering experiences, hear expert commentary on new innovative communication strategies/techniques etc. For smaller/oppositional member parties, in particular, these types of meetings often prove invaluable.

Thinking the future

Facing-up to the 'dilemma of indifference' is not heralded as a panacea. It is, however, posited as a necessary step if the GPIs wish to enhance their role and significance, and display a value-added. The presence of indifference has a corrosive effect, reinforcing a sense of dismissiveness towards the GPIs that leaves them languishing, *at best*, as a peripheral concern for their member parties. Changes, however, are going to require national member parties to initiate a series of reforms (not least increased levels of funding) that will necessitate a shift away from a *strict interpretation* of the GPI as being solely an 'association of national political parties'.²⁷ Member parties are only going to countenance such changes if: a) they believe that the GPI is capable of effectively taking on-board an increasing set of responsibilities, and b) if a GPI proves itself to be something that member parties *and* civil society groups feel a need to be constantly tapped into. Equally important is the need to reformulate the nature of the relationship between the Europarties and the GPIs. The goal here is to ensure that the GPI has real-world relevance in the eyes of its corresponding Europarty. Clearly there is no blueprint in this regard meaning that each coupling is going to have to work out its own bespoke arrangement. Nevertheless, it is a pathway that holds very specific advantages for Europarties, which should not be discounted, but rather constitute an element, among others, aimed at enhancing their relevance within and beyond the EU. Democratic legitimacy in a globalised economy is also achieved through institutionalised and substantive dialogue with political counterparts the world over.

²⁷ The challenge associated with any reform process is dealing with the corresponding resistance to change. With national political parties at the helm the degree of resistance to the organisational reform of the GPIs is likely to be reduced.

4. Recommendations²⁸

How to broaden, deepen and diversify the ways in which European political parties are able to (re)connect, is a complex challenge that will require time (short, medium and long term) as well as the efforts of various actors. These aims are rather ambitious although one should not expect Europarties to deliver on what national political parties are unable to. They are not unlike the goals of existing tools such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).²⁹ The recommendations presented here, however, primarily address (European) political parties. They are numbered throughout the text and summarised in a table at the end of this section.

European institutions

The current atmosphere in favour of enhancing EU democracy with, for instance, an informal Summit on 23 February 2018 about "Institutional issues: European Parliament composition/transnational lists, appointments, including Spitzenkandidaten" is promising.³⁰ Proposals with regard to these issues are aimed at strengthening the electoral and participative EU democracy. At the same time, however, recent developments have taught us that the atmosphere can change rapidly and easily. Therefore, in order to be sustainable, some changes need to be legally anchored, by amending existing legislation or, eventually, treaty change. The latter is everything but self-evident but should, in principle, not be excluded.

Given how reluctant a number of heads of state and government were in May 2014, it is reassuring that currently within the European Council the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* system seems to be part of the 'acquis'. If the European Council wants to strengthen its own democratic legitimacy and accountability at the EU level (next to the democratic legitimacy and accountability it already has at the national level, by means of the heads of state and government from the different Member States), (1) it could consider merging the President of the European Commission with the President of the European Council, as proposed by Commission President Juncker in his 2017 State of the Union address and also foreseen by the Lisbon Treaty. In other words, this does not entail treaty change and it would strengthen the link with EU citizens: as through the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, the voters in the EP elections would also have a say in the appointment of the European Council president. Furthermore, this merger would enhance the visibility of the executive at the EU level.

²⁸ The responsibility for the recommendations lies only with the single author mentioned although a lot of recommendations are supported by different authors that contribute to this report.

²⁹ The ECI was introduced in 2011 as a tool for participation and agenda-setting at the EU level. In the framework of the so-called Democracy Package, on 13 September 2017, the European Commission adopted a proposal to amend the ECI Regulation, together with a proposal to amend the Regulation on European political parties. See <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome> and http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-3187_en.htm.

³⁰ See the draft Leaders' Agenda by European Council President Donald Tusk as presented on 17 October 2017: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/talinn-leaders-agenda/>. See also <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/10/17-tusk-invitation-letter-euco/>.

As far as the European Commission is concerned, it could go several steps further when amending the legal framework with regard to European political parties and foundations³¹: **(2)** European political parties could be encouraged to improve their internal ideological homogeneity and strengthen their relations with one respective single political group in the European Parliament.

As far as **(3)** financing is concerned, the rules on joint activities between European political parties and their national member parties could be elaborated, particularly with regard to the campaigns for the 2019 European elections. Furthermore, Europarties could be given a separate campaign grant for the 2019 European elections in order to safeguard their operational budgets. These grants could be accompanied by strict spending requirements, as is the case in several member states. Overall, Europarties could be encouraged not only to be transparent about their revenues; they could also be more open with regard to spending. A significant part of the funding sum for Europarties could be distributed in equal shares in order to avoid imbalances between larger and smaller European parties. They could be encouraged further to “match” the European public subsidies with own financial resources (as is the case now) in order to induce them to strengthen their ties with civil society and individual EU citizens. The increase of public funding for Europarties from 85% to 95% of their total income could be reserved for newly established Europarties but for limited period of time (one or two electoral cycle), so that they continue to seek alternative funding.

More generally, **(4)** all EU institutions, and especially the European Parliament given its recent plans to rebuild or renovate its Brussels premises, could consider how to (re)organise ‘les lieux du politique’ in a creative way, given the difficulty in balancing new expectations with regard to citizen participation (intensified and unmediated involvement), with more and more severe security measures (increased physical distance).

(5) European institutions could regularly and critically evaluate their political and legal toolbox (public consultations, petitions, the European Citizens Initiative etc.) that is meant to ensure the link with civil society and EU citizens. If some instruments fail to reach this ultimate goal, EU institutions are invited to have the courage to reform, as well as consider repealing and replacing.

(6) They are also invited to be more straightforward, and perhaps less ambitious, when it comes to their aims for the so-called democratic conventions that will take place in 2018. For now it is everything but clear what this will mean in terms of participation, outcome and impact.³² The risk of excessively high expectations leading to disenchantment and disengagement is very real. This becomes even more urgent since the European Council agreed on its Leaders’ Agenda, implying that the calendar of when to discuss what is already more or less set until the 2019 elections, and even beyond.³³

³¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/proposal-regulation-statute-and-funding-european-political-parties-and-european-political-foundations_en.

³² See, for instance, the comments by Alberto Alemanno, Jean Monnet Professor of Law at HEC Paris on 16 October 2017: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/5-big-ideas-to-reboot-democracy-in-the-eu>.

³³ See footnote 30.

(7) At the same time, existing initiatives to hold politicians in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers accountable, for instance the scrutiny of voting behaviour conducted by VoteWatch Europe, could be open for all citizens and not behind paywalls which restrict these tools to experts and universities.³⁴

European political parties

Given the current institutional architecture of the EU, Europarties are not in the driving seat when it comes to enhancing democracy at the European level (unlike the central position most of the national political parties occupy in the member states). They largely depend on the existing legal framework that in some ways clearly limits their room of manoeuvre. Nevertheless, Europarties play a crucial role within this particular set-up as they are the only entities to form bridges between politicians in the three main EU institutions. They also have the political and moral obligation to try to do more and to do better when it comes to reconnecting with non-politicians, in other words: EU citizens, as this is ultimately their *raison d'être*, their mission goal, given the party article in the Treaties.

Therefore, (8) European political parties and their foundations could invest more and be more creative when it comes to reaching out to citizens, even to the detriment of the attention paid to the Brussels Bubble and everything they organise within their respective political families. The use of media and new social media might be helpful in this, especially in light of the 2019 European election campaign, as well as close collaboration between several of their member parties. They could also take on a more active role in increasing citizens' awareness of the European Union, in particular by fighting against the spread of *fake news* on the EU, especially on social media platforms.

Furthermore, (9) European political parties could create horizontal platforms for exchange between citizens and party members from different member states, regions and local communities.

(10) They could be much more visible through social media, regular publications, newsletters, and conferences, open to any citizen and not just located in Brussels, to disseminate information and discuss EU policy issues and not just ideals about EU integration.

(11) Party foundations also have a significant role to play in this area, however, their focus has been hitherto all but limited to the EU's capital. If the politics of the EU should not be confined to the Brussels Bubble, neither should the European intellectual debate be limited in such manner.

More generally, Europarties are invited to rethink their internal decision-making bodies and procedures in light of reconnecting with EU citizens. One way to achieve this goal might be (12) to further elaborate individual membership. Indeed, if Europarties are serious in their attempt to become mass membership parties, they will have to convince their member parties

³⁴ See www.votewatch.eu. Free alternatives are <http://www.mepvote.eu/> and <http://www.mepranking.eu/> but there is need to develop this.

to open up and let citizens take part in some of the important decisions. This could be achieved through a system of delegation and representation, whereby individual members elect amongst themselves a number of representatives to attend party congresses and other relevant party bodies, where they have the right to vote. At a time when memberships are ageing and shrinking, parties could more than ever have an interest in reaching out and mobilising their supporters in this manner. Short-of-membership solutions could also be considered, in order to improve outreach with a tiered system of affiliation, with varying rights and obligations.

A greater role for individual members could be combined with **(13)** the inclusion of party associations (youth, women, seniors etc.) in the decision-making processes. The aim of this kind of outreach towards citizens could be to diversify party memberships which tend to be dominated by middle-aged white men, which clearly implies a deficit of representation. It is essential that efforts are made both to ensure that the preferences of underrepresented groups are taken into account and that such groups are also represented within the party bodies.

Another avenue to enhance links of representation (and somewhat paradoxically given the history of Europarties) is **(14)** to strengthen the relationship between European political parties and their political groups in the EP. This could occur alongside other forms of enhanced coordination, such as among Ministers in the Council and in the European Council summitry. While some may well note that this goes to the advantage only of those parties that are adequately represented, the reality remains that some political families will need to improve their electoral performance in order to be better represented not only in the European Parliament, but also in the Council and European Council.

Furthermore, **(15)** European political parties have the responsibility to select their respective *Spitzenkandidat* in a timely and democratic manner. This does not necessarily include a plea, however, for open primaries, i.e. primaries in which non-members can participate. It does mean, however, that candidates could be selected also taking into account that broader support will be needed within the European Parliament in order for her (or him) to become the next president of the European Commission. If, like in 2014, the European political parties and their respective groups in the European Parliament stand shoulder to shoulder to propose a candidate for the presidency of the Commission, only in that scenario the member states through the European Council will have no other choice than to accept this candidate, in other words, the political outcome of the European Parliament elections which in turn reflects the political choices and preferences made by the EU citizens during these elections.

Finally, **(16)** European political parties could engage more with and contribute to strengthening and developing international networks such as the Global Party Internationals (GPIs), often undervalued political spaces which could provide an essential platform for mutual learning and capacity-building, also for European political parties. The relevance of GPIs, however, is dependent on enhanced links with civil society, introducing forms of individual membership and greater coordination, both internally and vis-à-vis global counterparts.

National political parties

National political parties are a crucial actor as they can leave more room for their European political family to play a role both at the national and the European level. For instance, through their governments, i.e. the member states of the EU that finally decide about treaty change, **(17)** they could push even further the 'parliamentarisation' of the EU by considering that only MEPs would be eligible for the post of Commissioners, as in parliamentary systems. Together with the introduction of transnational lists, it would raise the stakes during EP elections, which could increase citizens' interest and their perception that their voice counts. It would also increase the Commission's legitimacy. And it would oblige national parties to take into account EU affairs on a more regular basis and to connect more with their MEPs and their European political party. (If the member states' governments would not be favourable to that idea, it would be up to the European Parliament to make the participation in the European Parliament election conditional for the hearings of the candidate-commissioners. The same is obviously true for the *Spitzenkandidaten* to become president of the European Commission through a vote by the European Parliament.)

Also, **(18)** simultaneous European and national elections could be avoided, in order to prevent that EU issues are overshadowed by national concerns. Ultimately, **(19)** the aim could be to remove the participation of national parties in EU elections, leaving them solely to European parties and thus indicating only their logo on the ballot paper.

(20) National elections, on the other hand, ideally no longer take place in isolation from EU affairs and key issues in European elections could be addressed also in the context of national campaigns. **(21)** A useful instrument to materially connect national parties to their European political families, would be to show the symbol of the latter, alongside national party logos. **(22)** An additional step to be taken would be that national parties formally subscribe to political programmes of European party and establish the basis for constant debate of these issues through forums aimed at involving citizens and not confined to the election season. There seems to be no reason not to immediately implement these recommendations in the short term.

European civil society

(23) Traditional civil society players could do more to consistently and publicly engage with European political parties and vice versa. **()** Practices that exist at the national level, like civil society organisations that present their memoranda (grievances, expectations, etc.) to political parties during electoral campaigns and in the run-up to the installation of a new government, could be applied at the EU level.³⁵

³⁵ See, for instance, platforms such as <http://onourwatch.eu/>.

(24) To increase their relevance outside the Brussels Bubble, non-traditional civil society players, such as social media platforms, could engage more/directly with citizens in member states by convening hackathons, on-line citizens' conventions etc.³⁶

EU citizens

Finally, (25) citizens have the possibility to engage within European political parties. They also have the political right to inform themselves and to make their choice heard. In other words, if they want the EU to become more democratic and legitimate, citizens have to go vote!

Still, as has been emphasised throughout, this is no one-way street. These recommendations are targeted at enabling and promoting the bottom-up engagement of EU citizens. Since Schattschneider (1942) most have posited that 'modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties'. This is certainly also true for the current EU. Therefore the role played by European political parties is crucial. But this EU democracy is equally unthinkable without its citizens.

³⁶ See, for instance, the four families of *civi tech* that want to renew EU democracy:
<http://www.lacomeuropeenne.fr/2017/05/10/cartographie-des-civic-tech-europeennes/>.

Table 6: Overview of short, medium and long-term recommendations

	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
EU citizens		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → INFORM → ENGAGE → VOTE 	
National parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Debate EU issues in national elections → Indicate the Europarty symbol during national elections → Engage with and formally subscribe to the political programme of the Europarty → Constitute a citizens' forum on EU issues → Focus on EU issues should not be limited to EU election season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Non concurrent elections (National /EU) → Transfer of power to Europarties (e.g. candidate selection) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → National political parties should not intervene in EU elections (Europarty symbol on the ballot paper)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Membership to individual citizens and possibility of tiered system of affiliation short of membership → Develop permanent forums for citizens, beyond the "Brussels Bubble" → Ensure that party foundations also improve outreach beyond Brussels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Rethink their internal decision making structure (i.e. greater role for individual members, majority voting, representation of party associations) → Primaries for <i>Spitzenkandidaten</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Spitzenkandidaten (US-style system)

<p>Europarties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Greater presence on social media → Engage with civil society as a whole → Engage with non-EU and global arenas (e.g. through GPIs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Increase own funding (membership fees etc.) → Openness and transparency of revenues and spending patterns → Strengthen links with groups in the EP → Improve ideological homogeneity → Strengthen European Council summitry coordination 	
<p>EU Civil Society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Address memoranda on key issues directly to EU parties, and not only during campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> →
<p>EU Institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reconsider the balance between (demands for) unmediated citizen participation and security concern → Greater clarity on the impact and outcome of 2018 “democratic conventions” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Redistribute part of funding to Europarties in equal shares in order to redress imbalances between larger and smaller parties → Restriction of 95% funding regime to newly established parties and for a limited time period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reconsider, reform and improve their legal and political toolbox to ensure the link with EU citizens → Consider merging the President of the European Commission with the President of the European Council

- Rules on joint activities between Europarties and their national member parties
- Introduce separate campaign grant with strict requirements

5. Annex: Proposals on Transnational Lists for the European Parliament³⁷

The long-term goal to strengthen EU democracy through increased citizens' participation should be the dual model of both the direct election of the legislature (at least one of its chambers, here the European Parliament) and the direct election of the executive (which is, in the case of the EU, the President of the European Commission). This set-up is modelled after the United States (US) where both branches gain their legitimacy through separate elections. In order to avoid gridlock between these two branches, as is often the case in the US, one needs strong parties that create bridges between 'the parliament' and 'the government'. Clearly, in the case of the EU this role would be assigned to the Europarties.

This model, and especially the direct election of the Commission President, currently has little support, although it has been explicitly put forward by Luc Van den Brande in his report 'Reaching out to EU Citizens. A new opportunity' commissioned by the European Commission and presented on 6 November 2017.³⁸

In the following some proposals regarding transnational lists are presented, which are identified as a suboptimal solution. It is a suboptimal solution for various (empirical, practical and theoretical) reasons. Firstly, it should be noted that electoral lists within constituencies that coincide with the entire territory of the polity do not exist for the election of the legislature (neither in federal systems like of the US or Germany, nor in assemblies of large states like Russia). It exists only for the direct election of the executive (e.g. France). Secondly, introducing a transnational list does not solve the large number of asymmetries that remain, among the member states, when it comes to organising the election of MEPs.³⁹ On the contrary, it compounds the issue, as also by making it more visible. Imagine, for instance, that candidates of one single pan-European list have to be 18 years old when they are Danish nationals, but when they are Italian nationals, they need to be 25. Thirdly, a further 'parliamentarisation' of the EU polity, as it exists in many member states, should be avoided. The shift from ad hoc and variable majorities to a fixed majority/opposition system often leads to 'executive dominance': eventually the executive controls the parliament. It would weaken the legislature, preventing an evaluation of legislation on its own merits, but rather having the same majority which supports the executive regardless. Accordingly, it is important to retain the current prominence of the legislature, also by avoiding an electoral calendar that is organised in such a way as to strengthen, once again, executive dominance (i.e. through non-simultaneous elections of executive and legislative branches like in France).

In other words, transnational lists for the election of the European Parliament – again, as a suboptimal solution – should be favoured only as long as there is no direct election of the

³⁷ Wouter Wolfs and Steven Van Hecke contributed to this sub-section.

³⁸ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reaching-out-to-citizens-report_en.pdf, p. 23.

³⁹ Although the European Parliament adopted a report to increase the uniformity of the European elections, the Council is more sceptical towards this issue. It is thus not clear how many of the proposals of the report will be in place by the elections of 2019. See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-union-of-democratic-change/file-reform-of-the-electoral-law-of-the-eu>, www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_1.3.4.pdf, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/569025/EPRS_ATA\(2015\)569025_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/569025/EPRS_ATA(2015)569025_EN.pdf) and [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2014/140762/LDM_BRI\(2014\)140762_REV3_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2014/140762/LDM_BRI(2014)140762_REV3_EN.pdf).

Commission President. Transnational lists represent neither a short term solution, nor should they be the ultimate goal in order to achieve a more democratic Union, but could constitute a useful intermediate step.⁴⁰

The notion of transnational electoral lists has been debated for years, but so far no majority could be found in the European Parliament or Council of Ministers. The proposal of Andrew Duff in the previous term of the European Parliament (2009-2014) on the provisions of the elections for the European Parliament included the idea to create a pan-European constituency to elect 25 MEPs on transnational lists.⁴¹ The proposal proved to be too controversial. Although reservations remain in several member states and political groups, the idea of a pan-European electoral district is also gaining momentum. During his State of the Union in September 2017, President Juncker expressed his support for the introduction of transnational lists. Two weeks later, French President Macron in his Sorbonne speech suggested to use the 73 seats of the British MEPs should be used to create a pan-European district for the 2019 European elections. He even went a step further by proposing that half of the European Parliament should to be elected through transnational lists by the 2024 elections.

Although the idea of a pan-European district is gaining traction, many questions remain. Among the supporters of transnational lists there is a consensus on the basic principles: only a limited number of seats would be elected through transnational lists in a proportional representation system and a voter would get two votes: one for the pan-European electoral district and one for the electoral district in his/her member state. However, the specific technicalities and implementation of the concept of transnational lists are less clear. Here three possible models are presented, each with its specific advantages and challenges. The models all consider a situation in which a fixed number of seats – for example 50 – are allocated using a pan-European district.

When implementing the idea of transnational lists, choices will have to be made on the modalities and mechanisms that will be adopted. These include questions on:

- *Choosing an **open, semi-open or closed party list system**. In an open list system, voters can influence the order of the candidates on that list, usually through preferential voting. In a closed list system, on the other hand voters can only vote for the entire party list without changing the order of candidates. A closed list system increases the control of the political parties, since they determine the order of the candidates that cannot be influenced by the electorate. A semi-open list is a combination of the two, giving voters the possibility to either cast party list or preferential votes.*

- *If some of open list system is adopted, **how many preference votes should a voter receive?** The number can range from only one, to as many as there are seats to be distributed. An additional question is whether a voter can express his/her preference votes only within a single list or across several party lists (“panachage”). The more preference votes a voter can express, the higher the chances that he/she will vote for a candidate that is not from his/her own member state. When voters are not (yet) socialised*

⁴⁰ See also the recent Twitter discussion between Simon Hix (@simonjhix) and Alberto Alemanno (@alemannoEU).

⁴¹ Duff Report, 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.

into voting for non-nationals, the likelihood is high that they would only vote for a candidate from their own country if they only had one preference vote to cast.

*- Should **member state quotas** be applied to the party lists? Parties can be forced to present a list of candidates that is geographically balanced in order to ensure that a pan-European electoral district does not produce a representation that favours certain (larger) member states.*

*- If geographical quotas are adopted, the **candidate characteristic** that must be considered as a criterion must be determined: should an electoral list be balanced in terms of nationality of the candidates or in terms of countries of residence? For example, would a person with a German nationality that is living in France to be counted to reach the quota of France or Germany? Indeed, current provisions allow for EU citizens to stand as candidates for the European elections in the EU member state in which they reside. In other words, a German person elected in France counts as a "French" seat in the European Parliament.*

*- Will **double candidacy** be allowed? Can a person stand for election both on a transnational electoral list and on a national list in one of the member states? Which provisions are made to determine who replaces a candidate that is elected on both lists?*

*- Which **divisor** will be used to calculate the distribution of seats among the various Europarties? The most common for apportionment in the member states is the D'Hondt method, which slightly favours larger parties.*

*- Should an **electoral threshold** be introduced for a party to be able to receive parliamentary seats? The higher the number of seats that are allocated in a pan-European district, the more likely it becomes that smaller Europarties could obtain sufficient votes to get a seat.*

Proposal 1: Transnational lists as a 29th (pan-European) electoral district

In this system, the seats that are allocated in a pan-European district are distributed separately from the seat allocation in the various national districts. In other words, the EU-wide seats have no impact on the seat distribution in the member states; it does not matter from which the member state the elected candidates on the transnational lists are. The pan-European district thus functions as an additional electoral district alongside the 28 national electoral districts.

The seats are distributed as follows:

STEP 1: The seats are allocated among the various European political parties based on the number of total votes for each Europarty, following a specific apportionment method.

STEP 2: The seats of each European political party are assigned to the candidates on the list that have received the most preference votes.

STEP 3: The seats in the 28 member states are distributed separately from the pan-European district

The main consequence of this model is that the number of seats for each member state will vary from election to election. It is impossible to anticipate how many MEPs will come from a particular member state after the European elections.

The most significant challenge of this model is that this could lead to an “overrepresentation” of MEPs from the larger member states, particularly in the first elections after transnational lists are introduced. If voters are not yet socialised to vote for candidates from another member state and the electoral campaigns are not sufficiently Europeanised, the risk exists that voters will mainly vote for candidates from their own member state, regardless of the list that the candidates are on. This will result in more preference votes for candidates coming from the larger member states. In other words, it will be difficult for candidates coming from the smaller member states to obtain a seat in the European Parliament.

A possible way to address this challenge is the introduction of closed lists in combination with geographical quotas. In closed lists, the order of the seat distribution among candidates is only determined by the position of the candidate on the list. The adoption of geographical quotas – comparable to gender quotas – ensures that the electoral lists include candidates from different member states, which would result in a geographically balanced representation for each Europarty. How can such quotas be devised in practice? Member states can be divided into several groups according to their population size, for example in 4 groups. The largest member states are classified in group 1, the middle-sized member states in group 2, the smaller member states in group 3 and the smallest member states in group 4. Subsequently, the European political parties can be obliged to select an equal number of candidates from each group on their electoral list. Moreover, it can be specified that each of the top 4 candidates of the list should come from one of the four groups. The adoption of quotas for groups of member states instead of quotas for individual member states gives the Europarties some flexibility in their candidate selection. This is particularly important for those European political parties that do not have members in each member state.

A closed list system with geographical quotas however entails two main disadvantages. First, voters cannot change the order of the list or vote only for one or more particular candidates they like best. They can only vote for parties and not for candidates. Second, a closed-list entails the risk of affording too much control over candidate-selection to the central Europarty headquarters, which could seriously diminish the independence and discretion of individual MEPs (as is also the case in several member states).

A broader challenge linked to this model is the limited political feasibility of its implementation. As past examples have shown, the composition of the European Parliament is a sensitive issue. In particular, the number of EP seats for each member state has been the object of major controversy in the past. The fact that it is unclear in this model how many seats each member state will have in the European Parliament, might jeopardise its chances to find sufficient support. The two following models anticipate this challenge by keeping the number of seats for each member state fixed.

Proposal 2: Transnational lists with fixed seat distribution for MS (priority transnational lists)

In this second model, the distribution of seats in the EU-wide district is coupled to the distribution of seats in the member states to ensure that the number of seats for each member state does not change. In other words, before the elections the exact number of seats for each

member state will be known. Nevertheless, a number of seats are distributed in an EU-wide district and this distribution has priority over the distribution of seats in the member states.

The seats are distributed as follows:

STEP 1: The seats are allocated among the various European political parties based on the number of total votes for each Europarty following a specific apportionment method.

STEP 2: The seats of each European political party are assigned to the candidates on the list that have received the most preference votes.

STEP 3: Each member state loses 1 seat for their national distribution of seats for each elected pan-European candidate from that same member state.

First, a fixed number of seats are allocated to the different European political parties on the basis of their total number of votes. Second, the seats of each party are allocated to the candidates with the most preference votes. Third, the number of seats for each member state is reduced with the number of elected pan-European candidates from that member state. For example, Germany has a fixed number of 96 seats in the European Parliament. In the European-wide district 6 candidates from Germany are elected (for all Europarties combined). The total number of German seats – 96 – is diminished by the number of elected German candidates on the transnational lists. The remaining 90 German seats are allocated in the German electoral district.

The main advantage of this system is that the number of seats for each member state remains the same. Since the transnational seat distribution has priority over the national seat distribution, this should provide an incentive for Europarties to present strong candidates on the transnational lists.

The main challenge of this model is that it requires all member states to introduce nation-wide districts for the European elections or, if the seat distribution does not take place at the national level but in several regional districts, to have an internal mechanism to determine which regional electoral districts would lose seats. Furthermore, this model is only politically viable as long as the number of transnational seats that are distributed remains low.

Proposal 3: Transnational lists with fixed seat distribution for MS (priority national lists)

In the third model, it is decided before the elections how many seats of the pan-European district are reserved for each member state. The number of transnational seats depends on the population size of the member state. Depending on whether the United Kingdom will leave the European Union, there are several scenarios.

UK-included scenario:

4: (>50 million) Germany, France, UK and Italy

3: (>35 million) Spain and Poland

2: (>10 million) Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Czech Republic and Portugal
1: (<10 million) Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Slovakia, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta
= 16 + 6 + 12 + 16 = 50

Post-Brexit scenario with 50 seats:

6: (>75 million) Germany
5: (>50 million) France and Italy
3: (>35 million) Spain and Poland
2: (>10 million) Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Czech Republic and Portugal
1: (<10 million) Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Slovakia, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta
= 6 + 10 + 6 + 12 + 16 = 50

Post-Brexit scenario with 73 seats:

5: (>50 million) Germany, France and Italy
4: (>35 million) Spain and Poland
3: (>10 million) Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Czech Republic and Portugal
2: (<10 million) Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Slovakia, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta
= 15 + 8 + 18 + 32 = 73

These are the quotas of seats for each member state. It is not possible to allocate more (or less) seats to candidates from the same member state. These quotas are also calculated for all European political parties combined. For example, in the post-Brexit scenario described above, it is not possible that more than 5 candidates from Germany are allocated a seat. These five German seats could be obtained by a single Europarty or by five different ones (each with one German candidate obtaining a seat).

The European political parties cannot have more (or less) candidates from a member state on their transnational lists than there are seats reserved for that member state. This will provide a level-playing field among parties: it will prevent that parties limit their number of transnational candidates from one member state to maximise their votes. Furthermore, it will also prevent that many candidates are skipped in the allocation of seats.

The seats are distributed as follows:

STEP 1: The seats that are reserved for each member state go to those candidates of that member state that have received the most preference votes. For example, if the quota of seats for Germany is five, the five German candidates with the most preference votes – of all Europarties – are allocated a seat.

(Notice that there is no first distribution of seats among parties, but that the seats are directly allocated to individual candidates)

STEP 2: The seats in the 28 member states are distributed separately from the pan-European district

The consequence of this is model that voters vote for candidates rather than for parties. This could lead however to interesting debates between candidates from the various Europarties that all compete for the seats of the same member state. The “transnational” dimension of this model is more limited than in the previous models, although citizens can still vote for candidates from other member states.

The main challenge of this model is that those candidates with the most preference votes do not necessarily receive a seat in the European Parliament. For example, it is possible that the German candidate with the seventh most preference votes has more votes than the Latvian candidate with the most preference votes. Because of the quotas, however, the Latvian candidate gets a seat and the German candidate doesn’t. The model possibly favours the bigger parties, since the preference votes of smaller parties will be spread over all its candidates from the same member states, resulting in no candidate having enough votes to get a seat. This could be mediated by permitting parties to select fewer candidates than the quota for a member state, thus allowing them to “concentrate” their votes of one member state in one or two candidates.

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6. Abbreviations

ACRE	Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe
ADDE	Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe
AENM	Alliance of European National Movements
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
APF	Alliance for Peace and Freedom
CLF	Coalition for Life and Family
CSPEC	Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community
EAF	European Alliance for Freedom
ECI	European Citizens' Initiative
ECPM	European Christian Political Movement
EDP	European Democratic Party
EFA	European Free Alliance
EGP	European Green Party
EL	Party of the European Left
ELDR	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
EUD	Europeans United for Democracy
GG	Global Greens
GPI	Global Party International
IDC-CDI	Centrist Democratic International
IDU	International Democratic Union
LI	Liberal International
MENF	Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom
MEP	Member of European Parliament
PA	Progressive Alliance
PES	Party of European Socialists
SI	Socialist International
TEU	Treaty on the European Union

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