Democratic Legitimacy and Political Leadership in the European Union
Towards the 2014 European Elections

Foreword by
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Essays by
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Foreword
Massimo D'Alema

For the past few years, Europe has been at the centre of a devastating global crisis. On our continent, this is no longer merely an economic or financial crisis, but it has increasingly extended into political, social and cultural spheres. People's growing estrangement from politics and disenchantment with democracy, the spread of populist trends in many EU member states, the technocratic drift of the EU institutions and procedures are, to some extent, the result of the European Union's manifest fatigue and slowness in formulating and providing answers to the crisis. This is due to a leadership deficit and to structural deficiencies for which traditional European politics has so far been unable to compensate. Moreover, it is to be ascribed to the member states' incapability to fully grasp and internalise the scope of their mutual interdependence.

If *policies* are ever more the realm of European institutions, or rather, in some cases, of supranational financial bodies – which are as remote from citizens' control as possible – *politics* remains secluded within member states' national boundaries, producing a sort of "dyscrasia" between the national level and the European one. If the EU member states show a certain degree of flexibility in the search of convergence when it is necessary to identify common policy targets, their political approach is, more often than not, still largely divergent.

Every day in Europe, policies are approved without the political debate that is usually required in Western democracies in order to dissect a matter of general interest, making the case for or

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against it. What we are witnessing today in Europe, thus, is a mismatch between decision-making processes and politics. While the former take place at EU level and are performed by Brussels and Frankfurt technocrats without sufficient democratic supervision or through bargaining among governments (which only give the illusion of neutrality and democracy, but indeed hide the prevailing of neoliberal and monetarist approaches, and offer the economically stronger countries an advantage over the weaker ones), politics remains largely a national matter. This is a political gap, which needs to be filled if we want to successfully address the crisis, in all its different aspects, and boost Europe's economic growth and political development.

Europe's democratic strength and legitimacy, its capability to produce a political dimension are essential preconditions for Europe's full recovery from its crisis. Therefore, the EU must be able to re-establish the primacy of politics over economics and encourage the development of a Europe-wide public sphere.

This goal can be achieved either through wide-ranging institutional reforms – and indeed the question of a new Treaty has arisen again in the European debate – or unfolding the whole range of potential options already offered by the Lisbon Treaty. For example, this could be done through a courageous (and less problematic) political initiative, such as the bestowal of greater democratic legitimacy on the President of the European Commission through his/her selection by the people via European Parliamentary elections. Indeed, this is one of the topics that the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, together with the Italian office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Fondazione Italianieuropei, decided to tackle in the international seminar "Democratic Legitimacy and Political Leadership in the European Union: Towards the 2014 European Elections", which was held in Rome on 18 January 2013. The aim of this seminar was to analyse the democratic deficit that has, from time to time, afflicted the European Union and has become exacerbated

with the outbreak of the economic crisis. Participants proposed viable remedies to this situation with a view to the next European elections in 2014 and the results of the seminar are now published in this pamphlet.

Behind our urge to discuss these topics, there is the firm belief that progressive forces across Europe must finally leave behind the cultural limits that have, so far, fed their mutual divergences and prevented their full cooperation. This is exemplified in deeply national perspectives on the common political challenges that the European Union and its member states are facing, or an essentially intergovernmental approach to European affairs. If a lot has been already achieved – and the Party of European Socialists' proposal for a common political programme and a single candidate to the position of President of the European Commission at the next European elections is particularly significant in this respect – more remains to be done. We must take a leap in the advancement of the European project, and to do this we must act together. Otherwise we risk weakening, or even wasting, all the remarkable accomplishments that more than sixty years of integration have given European citizens.

Europe needs to be politicised. We must move the political debate and even confrontations of everyday national politics to the European level. Europe must be understood as a place where left and right, growth policies and austerity policies, solidarity and individualism come into conflict. This can be realized mainly through the strengthening of the European political parties, of their cultural dimensions and of their political programmes.

Hence, we must advocate the development of a truly European public sphere and politics life, built along transnational rather than national lines. This must be a European politics dealing with issues that divide or unify peoples not according to member states' borders or national identities, but according to common needs, interests, values and beliefs, bringing traditional left/right cleavages into the European political discourse.

Raffaello Matarazzo
The EU Democracy and the Challenge of Politicization

Democratic legitimacy is at the heart of the debate on the European Union's future: the argument runs that the EU will hardly overcome the crisis if it does not get more legitimate.

And yet, the point is whether the EU can actually become a democratic polity. Academia and politics are not univocal on this point. While a broad consensus exists in the EU that democratic legitimacy is increasingly important, democracy remains nevertheless a disputed concept. A look at the member states' fundamental laws reveals several different views on the institutions and procedures which are alternatively considered essential for the sake of democratic legitimacy. The challenge is therefore to design a political framework that can be universally considered legitimate.

The debate on the EU's democratic quality has followed a peculiar path. A first school of thought, developed after the relevant transfers of sovereignty provided for by the Maastricht Treaty (1993), focused mostly on the standards of liberal representative democracy and the so-called "input legitimacy" (government by the people): a policy is deemed legitimate to the extent that the decision-making process is open to citizen participation. Specific emphasis has been placed on institutional mechanisms granting influence and accountability, in particular through an increasingly relevant role of the European Parliament.[1]

In the same years, another group of scholars emphasized, on the contrary, the relevance of the "output legitimacy" (government for the people): the European Union is legitimate if en-

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sures effective governance and provides public goods, such as wealth, security, clean environment, etc. According to this view, the predominantly regulatory nature of the EU policies is considered beneficial to all and is almost self legitimate.

"Input" and "output" liberal democratic theorists have been opposed, however, by communitarians, who, despite their minority position in the debate about EU democracy, are far from being marginal. Their most prominent position is commonly referred to as the "no-demos" thesis: without a "demos" there cannot be democracy, democratization or majority rule at European level. "Demos" here refers to a community rooted in shared nationality, language, culture, religion history or way of life, rather than ensuing from "freedom and equality", as proponents of liberal democracy assert. How could, communitarians argue, political choices with relevant redistributive implications be otherwise legitimized?

Against the idea of a «substantively integrated ethical community», the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has finally elaborated the "deliberative democracy" approach, which seems to be the most solid support for democratic doctrines applied to the EU today. According to Habermas, it is the flow of communication between civil society networks and the parliamentary circuit to frame and grant popular sovereignty, and not the formal procedures that liberals trust, nor the demos that communitarians emphasize. The deliberative model of democracy is particularly interesting for the EU because it claims that democratic will-formation does not presume a pre-existing community based on the sharing of values or of a common mission. Politics is here considered separately from culture or identity issues, while justice and ethic patterns become pre-eminent: democracy, in short, is a process whereby citizens deliberate on "what is fair or just".[2] The development of a European public sphere is therefore considered essential to the democratic process.

Some politics in the EU!

Along the lines here roughly summarized, some recent trends claim that an injection of political contention in the EU debate is essential to consolidate a common public sphere and to ignite democratic participation and accountability.[3] Proponents of politicization stress that the advanced state of European integration inevitably brings about winners and losers on specific policies. Such policies cannot be considered legitimate by reason of their supposed "neutrality" or "technicality", because they are ideologically and politically oriented. Hence, there is no intrinsic reason why these policies should be excluded from democratic contention.

From the perspective of deliberative theory, politicizing EU politics would not only encourage deliberation, but it would increase the number of informed citizens and contribute to a better understanding of the EU framework, which is deemed crucial to consolidate democracy. The key challenge, in this sense, is to bridge the gap between the increasingly politicized Brussels institutions and the EU citizens, who are scarcely informed about the European protagonists and their positions on EU affairs and policies.[4] Other scholars, however, remain much more sceptical about politicization, underlining that it may have devastating effects on the EU decision making and block the development of the European party system, given the incoherence of party positions on the left/right and pro/anti EU dimensions. According to some, politicization may even become "disastrous" if it affects not only political issues, but constitutional ones, such as the questions of EU membership and institutional design.[5]

The Lisbon paradox

Against this background, a key problem is that relevant innovations provided for by the Lisbon Treaty (2009), rather than pro-

moting politicization, further obstacle it. The extension of the ordinary legislative procedure (the old co-decision), in particular, significantly strengthens the political weight of the European Parliament, but, at the same time, it narrows the possibility of raising political confrontation and competition among political parties. The fact that two ideologically very heterogeneous bodies such as the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament must approve the Commission's proposals for bills to be passed, foster the consensual *modus operandi* as the standard approach for the adoption of legislation. Therefore, both centre-left and centre-right governments within the Council of Ministers and the two largest political families within the Parliament have to seek political compromises, moving towards the centre of the ideological spectrum. This *modus operandi* discourages politicization or political confrontation as means to approve laws. Political elites, however, get credit not only for good policy making, but mostly for good politics, defending and disputing policies in a politicized public sphere.[6]

One of the main shortcomings of the current EU institutional set-up, is, therefore, the significant gap it perpetuates between where the European legislative process increasingly takes place (the European dimension) and where citizens look for it (the national level). With two negative outcomes: firstly, the political elites are prompted to influence the legislative process just to achieve national priorities; secondly, the political process lacks a clear supranational dimension through which citizens can make the European political elites accountable. This leads to the twin-phenomena of poor policy-making and weak democratic accountability, or "policy without politics", as Vivien Schmidt defines it.

The way ahead

A growing consensus exists in the academic literature about the idea that a wider public sphere is crucial to increase the Euro-

pean Union's legitimacy, and a rising number of scholars stresses that politicization of European policy making might contribute to strengthen it significantly. The crisis of the sovereign debt and the controversial development of the European economic governance make the need of a new reform of the Treaties more urgent than ever. The democratic deficit will have to be a top priority to be addressed, possibly, by a new European convention; moreover, some changes in the decision-making process, aimed at introducing more policy contestation, will be inevitable. Since this is a burning issue, political will and a leading role of the European parties will be essential to push this process ahead.

A first important move, however, would be the selection of a common candidate for the post of President of the European Commission by the European political parties before the next elections of the European Parliament (Spring 2014). This option does not require a preliminary change of the Treaties, but could represent an important bridge between EU elites and citizens, contributing to expand significantly the European public sphere. This course of action, though, will not be enough, if it will not be followed by an overall transformation of the European political system.[7]

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Thomas Poguntke
Electing the President of the European Commission?

This is a think piece. It draws on a wide range of research perspectives. But it is not another addition to the research literature. Instead, it attempts to draw some wider conclusions based on what we know about the politics of the European Union and its problems. They may be provocative – as a matter of fact, I think they are. Of course, they may be wrong. In any case, I hope they will stimulate discussion.

The problems

What is our point of departure? The European Union is in crisis. The crisis is financial but its repercussions are decidedly political: the nature of EU politics has shifted back towards a stronger intergovernmental logic; the Eurozone is increasingly becoming detached from the EU proper; there seems to be a substantial erosion of support for the EU; and, above all, there seems to be a revival of nationalistic feelings in several EU member states.

The last two points relate to the legitimacy of the European Union. Let us briefly review the evidence. The picture that emerges from the regular surveys monitoring support for the EU is not entirely unambiguous. As always, academics like to discuss whether the glass is half full or half empty. Essentially, it is always difficult to know how much of the movement in the data is simply due to random fluctuation and how much of it represents significant decline in generalized support for the EU.

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Having said this, the overall image seems to indicate decline. Furthermore, there are some hard behavioural indicators that give us reason to worry.

Take turnout in European Parliament (EP) elections. It has reached record lows in several countries.[1] Furthermore, it has declined considerably in those countries where the "permissive consensus" has traditionally been particularly permissive – like in Germany. There have been mass demonstrations with a fairly outspoken anti-EU slant in several EU member states over the past years. Anti-EU rhetoric has entered national party political debates also in countries where it had thus far been largely absent. Above all, the crisis has highlighted the institutional weaknesses of the EU. In other words, the crisis is political. In the democratic world, this means that it is (also) a crisis of democracy. The core question is democracy. It is also the core problem. This paper will now briefly review our knowledge on the nature of EU democracy and its shortcomings before it will turn its attention to potential remedies. Here, we will focus on the role of the President of the European Commission.

Democratic linkage in the European Union

The European Parliament Voting in the European Parliament is characterized by a remarkably high degree of voting along party lines. There is abundant research on voting patterns, mainly based on roll call analysis.[2] However, the truth may be hiding behind these figures. We do not know whether these unified voting patterns are the result of any substantial linkage to the European electorates.[3] In other words, if we find that a substantial proportion of the vote in the EP follows, broadly speaking, a left-right pattern, and if we also know that the EP groups, again broadly speaking, tend to vote together, how much do we really know about the quality of the linkage between the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and their constituen-

cies? Or between EP national party delegations and their national electorates? Or, even more optimistically, between EP groups and the European electorate? After all, nobody denies the tendency of national delegations to close ranks and cast a "national" rather than a "party" vote whenever crucial national interests are at stake. We know from empirical research that the national parties do rather poorly when it comes to connecting national and EU politics.[4] Furthermore, European integration has shifted the internal balance of power in national political parties towards the elites, particularly when parties are in government. This means that the quality of the linkage, as far as it exists, has shifted to a top-down rather than a bottom-up mode.[5]

The European Council and the Council of Ministers There can be little doubt that the Council of Ministers and, in particular, the European Council have gained considerable weight in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis. Yet, when it comes to providing a party political linkage to the European people proper, these bodies are ill suited. By and large, national politics dominate and the party political arenas are little more than convenient opportunity structures which are used in case national and party political interests coincide. In other words, the European Council (and also the Council of Ministers) follows an intergovernmental logic which is mainly geared to national interests. Party political aspects are of secondary importance.[6] This may well be desirable. However, it is structurally unlikely that further integration will be promoted by these institutions.

Towards a direct election of the President of the European Commission?

The debate about a direct election of the Commission President has been an important element of the discussion about the democratic deficit of the European Union for quite some time. How-

ever, as has been indicated by the brief review of the elements of the current crisis, the context has changed considerably over the past few years. Hence, while little new can be said about the pros and cons of certain institutional arrangements, these pros and cons need to be considered now in the light of the specific circumstances of the current crisis. Above all, they also need to be looked at from the perspective of political feasibility.

When discussing a direct election of the President of the European Commission, two fundamentally different institutional arrangements get sometimes mixed up, namely a truly direct election and the election of the leading candidate of a Europarty or an alliance of Europarties by the European Parliament following the EP elections. While the former would move the EU closer to a presidential system of government, the latter would make it more parliamentary in its internal logic. Clearly, they should be kept separate and I will briefly review the relevant core features in the following paragraphs.

Essentially, the demand for a direct election of the Commission President is motivated by the desire to link the most important European executive office to a vote by the European people. Even without any further institutional change this would furnish the Commission President with a considerably enhanced legitimacy and therefore greatly strengthen the weight of this position vis-à-vis the national governments represented in the Council and the European Council.

The presidential strategy In a strict sense, a direct election of the Commission President by the European people would mean a shift towards a presidential logic but it would, of course, not turn the EU into a truly presidential system. Hence, the terminology of a "presidential strategy". Above all, it would entail the introduction of another chain of accountability.[7] It would create a strong linkage between the European people (or peoples!) and one of the centres of power on the European level. But does it

mean a substantive linkage? Or will it mean a mainly symbolic linkage?

What is the substance of this distinction? Substantive linkage means that the election of the Commission President is connected to an identifiable political mandate and, equally important, the power to implement at least considerable parts of it. Symbolic linkage, on the contrary, centres on the selection of the "best person for the job" while the policy mandate may remain unclear.

What is the likely outcome of a presidential strategy? The introduction of a direct election of the Commission President would induce a need for the large European party families (which are organized in the Europarties) to nominate their candidate for the election. Depending on their strength and on the electoral system there would also be a strong incentive to form pre-electoral coalitions. Under a two-round system, alliance building would most likely take place after the first round. This would also be the most likely choice of an electoral system, because in European multi-party politics a simple plurality system would not create sufficient legitimacy. After all, there would be a considerable likelihood that a candidate remaining below the 50% level would get elected, and this would violate the predominant institutional logic of the EU which tends to require surplus majorities.

There would also be a need to unite the party (or an alliance of parties) behind a common platform. But, as we know too well from other presidential systems, there is a real danger that these platforms would consist of little more than a smallest common denominator. Furthermore, a truly presidential contest might also invite populist contenders to seek a direct mandate from the European people which would be unmediated by political parties. To be sure, we have seen such candidates in several European countries in the past, and a truly direct election might provide a formidable opportunity for a candidate who is capable

of raising sufficient resources without the help of an established Europarty.

Above all, and disregarding the spectre of populism for now, there would be no need for disciplined parties after the election because the majority in Parliament does not need to keep the executive in office.[8] In essence, this means that a directly elected President of the European Commission would lack the power resources necessary to get his or her agenda implemented. A brief recapitulation of Barack Obama's first term in office underlines this point, even though a US President has many more power resources at his or her disposal than a Commission President could ever expect to control. Think of the power of patronage, the size of the state machinery and, not least, the access to the national media and hence the power to influence the public agenda.

To conclude, a direct election of the President of the European Commission would significantly enhance the political weight of this position. It would also heighten the political awareness of European mass publics and hence strengthen a European public sphere by creating a truly European electoral contest for the highest elected office in Europe. However, it would complicate further the already complex arrangement of European institutions by introducing a new chain of accountability. And, as we have seen above, this new linkage would be mainly symbolic while adding little in terms of a substantive policy linkage. Finally, yet not unimportantly, a presidential strategy requires a revision of the Treaties, and it is hard to see this happening in the present political climate in Europe.

The parliamentary strategy In a less strict sense, a direct election of the Commission President could be understood as a strategy which would tie the election of this position directly to the electoral process for the European Parliament. In other words, the President of the Commission would emerge from the ma-

jority of the European Parliament, and the Commission would need to be her or his team rather than an assembly of national governments' delegates. In order to generate a true electoral connection, the relevant Europarties and their EP groups would need to nominate their respective candidates before the European election. Clearly, this would not turn the EU into a truly parliamentary system, which is why the term "parliamentary strategy" is used.

Under the current conditions of European multi-party politics, a clear commitment of the Europarties and the EP groups to push for a parliamentary prerogative in the election of the Commission President would create a strong incentive to form pre-electoral alliances, maybe even with a common platform, in order to reach the necessary majority of seats in the EP.

In order words, it would substantially strengthen *ex ante* mechanisms of accountability because European voters would be able to identify who they vote for and what political package this person stands for. To be sure, this would not mean an end to complex and more detailed inter-party policy negotiations after the Commission President and his or her Commission have assumed office. Yet, just like in a parliamentary system of government, a common platform (or even diverse platforms of the alliance partners) would provide a point of reference for the political actions to be taken by the Commission President (and the Commission) and the supporting parliamentary majority. The decisive mechanism is already in place: the Commission is collectively responsible to Parliament and has to resign if the EP passes a vote of no confidence (article 17.8 of the Treaty on European Union). So far, this instrument has not been used for party political reasons, but there is no reason why it should not. To be sure, the initiative is in the hands of the European parties. However, it is well known that their prime focus is on national politics and they have few incentives to strengthen their European layer at the expense of their national party organiza-

tion.[9] Yet, this may be a political battle worth fighting and the sovereign debt crisis has put institutional issues fervently back on the agenda of EU politics.

What are the advantages of a parliamentary strategy? Such a strengthening of the party linkage would inject a certain degree of policy substance into the European electoral process, which has so far been confined to the sorry fate of a large number of simultaneous second order national elections. It would connect the competition for office to a policy mandate. To be sure, a wider process of presidentialization of modern democracies has meant that the importance of the policy mandate is eroding to the benefit of the office component in many European democracies.[10] Hence, the expectations vis-à-vis such a European policy mandate must be modest. Yet, it is still preferable to divorcing office and policy institutionally, as would be the result of a truly direct election of the President of the European Commission.

The result would almost certainly be a shift back from growing intergovernmentalism towards supranationalism. In a nutshell, strengthening the political weight of the President of the European Commission would create a counterweight to the growing tendency to rule Europe from national capital cities. This could, in turn, reinforce the legitimacy of, arguably inevitable, further redistributive policies in the European Union. Last but not least, it does not require a revision of the Treaties.

Conclusions

An ironic result of the crisis has been a substantial Europeanization of the public sphere in Europe. Many Germans may not like the pictures of Angela Merkel paraded through the streets of Athens or Madrid. However, they indicate the growing awareness across European publics that national policies, and hence national welfare, are increasingly influenced by politicians

who are not national politicians – and that the decision-making arenas that count are increasing supranational and, in most cases, European.

Also, the inevitable outcome of years of Euro crisis management is that European citizens can no longer escape the knowledge that European Union politics is also about redistribution across national borders. To be sure, the German government in particular has been working hard to avoid this simple truth from becoming apparent. The slogan is that "Europe must be no transfer union". This claim has finally become unsustainable when the November 2012 EU summit, devoted to the Greek crisis, decided that real money is going to be paid instead of the provision of loans and guarantees. It may take a while before this "sinks in" in the broader public. And the government parties will continue to work hard to slow down this process. There are, of course, similar discourses in other EU member states. Yet, there is any reason to believe that the current crisis creates the public awareness necessary for further steps towards a truly integrated Europe.

There is an important caveat, however. What has been pointed out above may simply be too optimistic, because it is rather mechanistic. You may also call it rational. In other words, we like to think that, because the crisis has accelerated *de facto* integration (even if by ways of intergovernmentalism), the institutional reaction must be a strengthening of integration and supranationalism. And that the European public will follow this reasoning. Yet, politics in crises is often irrational. So are mass publics. And we must not forget that the gains and losses are highly unevenly distributed – between countries and within countries. This applies equally to stronger and weaker Euro countries.

We know from experience that the probability of getting major institutional changes ratified by European mass publics is very low. This is an obvious constraint. Incidentally, it is called de-

mocracy. We may bemoan the increasingly undemocratic and elitist way major decisions are being made right now. But we should not complain that European publics may simply not be prepared to go a major step in the other direction. This effectively excludes a truly direct election of the Commission President. There is also another problem connected to such a radical solution: what if direct elections of the Commission President were introduced but the parties would fail to meet the challenge? The result might be severe institutional stalemate if a President of the Commission would be juxtaposed against the majority of the European Parliament. True, the EP could pass a vote of no confidence, but this would be a risky operation as it were then directed against a directly elected President of the Commission. There can be little doubt that such a scenario would further erode the legitimacy of the European Union.

Hence, the solution may lie – typically European – in the middle. It may not amount to a silent revolution but it would certainly be a major silent reform. Above all, as has been pointed out above, it would not require a revision of the Treaties. It will only work if the actors who have the power to make it work will successfully meet the challenge. In case of success, this might significantly strengthen the legitimacy of the European Union. If they fail, at least there will be no further threat to the currently precarious situation within the EU.

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Luciano Bardi
Parties, Party System and Party Government in the European Union

Parties and democracy

The future of political parties at European level (PPELs) is at the core of the question of the European Union's survival as a viable system of government. The EU produces more and more decisions with relevant policy implications for the member states. As a result, citizens are becoming more and more aware of the existence of another level of government they are subject to. After decades of "permissive consensus" a demand for democratic control of the EU level of government is developing.

Academics and practitioners have discussed the existence of, and possible solutions for, the EU's "democratic deficit" for more than three decades, that is at least since the first direct elections of the European Parliament (EP) in 1979.[1] These discussions have produced a very large amount of analyses and proposals, whose almost universal common characteristic has been a great emphasis on procedural and institutional aspects of democracy. The reason for this is that the EU's democratic deficit stems from institutional inadequacies that cause a lack of popular legitimacy of the EU executive.

The history of the European Union since the introduction of direct elections is strewn with the debris of possible reforms based on normative institutional solutions that failed or fell short of their intended aims, mostly due to member states' unwillingness to surrender incremental portions of their sovereignty. It

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could in fact be argued that the most significant advances of European integration were almost unintended by-products of accessory measures devoid of significant institutional content. The white paper connected to the Single European Act (SEA), that determined the completion of the EU's internal market and arguably accelerated the season of Treaties inaugurated with the SEA and continued with Maastricht, is a good case in point.

The formal surrender of sovereignty by member states which is necessary for the strengthening of EU institutions is something that requires the approval and ratification of new treaties; as such, member states can easily limit it and, if they wish, avoid it. But the question of member states' sovereignty now goes beyond the boundaries of a formal respect for prerogatives and responsibilities of the various levels of EU government. As we have already mentioned, the EU's policy reach is impacting with increasing force on European citizens. This makes the question of how democratically legitimate EU decisions really are rather urgent and politically important, irrespective of the formal adherence to the Treaties of the procedures that produce them.

The question is thus not only and simply how governmental actions can be controlled at European level, but, above all, how citizens can be made aware and convinced that they are indeed in control. Any discussion on how to build democratic supranational or intergovernmental institutions that produce decisions with respect to member states' sovereignties and prerogatives must be expanded to include how to build citizens' consensus around such decisions. In this, I believe, the role of parties at European level can be of fundamental importance.

The view that the EU's policy decisions can be legitimized by a sum of national legitimacies transmitted through intergovernmental institutions is showing its limits. On the one hand, decisions made at European level through intergovernmental procedures are increasingly being perceived as impositions from few strong states on many weaker ones, even if made in

full respect of the Treaties and, procedurally, of member states' sovereignties. On the other hand, the perceived reluctance, or even refusal, by the "weaker" states to comply with such decisions can be seen as revealing of a more or less deliberate intention to take advantage of the "stronger" states' generosity and tolerance. These are relatively new developments which add to the resentment towards "Brussels" and the EU institutions that initially signalled the end of the honeymoon between the EU and its citizens, including many who live in non eurosceptic member states. For many years analysts and practitioners entertained the comfortable illusion that if we could not have a fully federal Europe the confederate version would be good enough. As we have seen, as a result of what we could call selective or member state-induced euroscepticism (that is aimed more at other member states than at the idea of European integration), this is no longer the case. The question of EU democracy thus reasserts itself with new strength and character.

Any discussion on democracy and democratic control of governmental actions can only depart from existing models and notions. Inevitably, these are those provided by member states' political systems, which most European citizens consider "normal".[2] If we frame our discussion on EU democracy within such models we necessarily must consider the role of political parties. "Normal" member states' democracies are in fact based on party government. For one, the formal rules of democracy are certainly met by political parties. But, historically, parties are important also and above all because they have performed crucial functions for the development and operation of democratic political systems: political education, mobilization, candidate recruitment and selection, as well as, broadly speaking, representation and government functions.[3] This has been made possible by the integration of the "three faces" of party organisation identified by Richard Katz and Peter Mair.[4] The "party on the ground" (that is the members,

the sympathisers, but ultimately also the electors), the "party in central office" (that is the various party bodies that, at different levels, direct party activities and formulate party lines) and the "party in public office" (that is all party officials elected and/or appointed to representative or executive positions) converge, according to precise and institutionalized divisions of labour, in performing such functions. Finally, in "normal democracies" the actions of government and the representation of citizens are made fully democratic by the existence of party pluralism, that is of a working party system in which parties operate and interact with respect to their mutual roles (i.e. government and opposition).[5]

To be sure, in the last three or four decades there has been a growing concern about the ability of political parties to continue performing their functions and especially to continue reconciling government and representation even at national level. To put it differently, parties are experiencing a growing tension between responsibility and responsiveness, which are associated respectively with governing and representing. The impact of global and European factors and concerns on policy making and the distance between parties and citizens have increased at the same time. This may be one of the reasons that have prevented some European governments from finding solutions, which would be acceptable to the citizens, for the problems posed by the current sustained crisis. Moreover, the effective (responsible) measures which are needed to face the crisis are extremely difficult to take, as they are diametrically opposed to the excessively responsive policies that have contributed to its creation.

"Normal" democracy, political parties and party system in the EU

Considering that parties are experiencing difficulties in balancing their governmental and representational roles in the mem-

ber states, where, for better or for worse, they still have a central role in democratic politics, can we realistically expect them to contribute to the EU's democratic development?

At first sight, this is certainly a very difficult proposition. Due to the lack of citizens' interest, an attitude euphemistically defined, and dismissed, as "permissive consensus", at EU level difficulties but also day-to-day policies are dealt with in a "responsible" rather than in a "responsive" way. In other words, policy decisions have the foremost purpose of producing effective solutions, and not necessarily of responding to citizens' wishes and inclinations. This is the approach generally followed by the Commission, and more often than not also by the Council, where intergovernmental procedures are used and responsive behaviour can at best be aimed at a few member states' citizens. These considerations allow us to develop a new frame for the analysis of the EU's democratic deficit. What is in question is not so much the capacity of EU institutions to act in a responsible and effective way, at least in those policy realms for which the EU has adequate competences. Rather, this frame suggests that what needs to be assessed is the EU institutions' ability to identify citizens' demands and develop adequate responses, which would in turn enjoy the citizens' consensus and support.[6] As this is a function that parties perform in "normal" democracies, the new frame reiterates the need for a consideration of the role of political parties at EU level.

At first sight, there is no doubt that there still is a lack of democratic party government at EU level. This is due to at least three reasons. For one thing, the inadequacy of the European Parliament's powers has long been blamed for the EU's democratic shortcomings and is certainly responsible for the lack of party government at EU level as well. There is no question that in most "normal" democracies Parliaments are the loci of party prominence. This is certainly true of all parliamentary systems, where parties transmit to the executives the popular legitimacy

they receive in elections, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, of presidential and semi-presidential systems, where they exercise the legislative function and balance the executives' powers. Naturally this is true only if Parliaments' powers are sufficiently well developed. In the EP's case, legislative powers have been greatly improved, lack of legislative initiative notwithstanding, but the ability to legitimize and therefore control the executive is still very limited. The other two reasons are more technical, but also very important: Euro-level party organizations' "faces" are still incomplete and very poorly integrated; a properly developed Euro-level party system is still lacking.[7]

Europarties have evolved according to the internal genetic model, that is by becoming initially institutionalized in the EP rather than by emerging from the need for representation of pre-existing societal groups (the external model).[8] After their formation, unlike other internally generated parties, Europarties, as federations of pre-existing national parties, did not have to develop external links with sympathetic citizens or societal groups. The Europarties' "party on the ground" is almost non-existent, membership being mediated through their national components. Although attempts are being made to develop a specific Europarty membership, they have not been very successful so far.

The "party on the ground" problem however goes well beyond the question of membership and of direct Europarty rooting in society. It involves the complex relationship between the national parties and the two EU level components in central and in public office. National parties prevail over the other Europarty components from an organizational viewpoint. Not only are they for all practical purpose the Europarty on the ground, but they also condition the Europarty in public office as they are responsible for EP election candidate selection and, through their exponents in member states' governments, also for the appointment of the Commission and European Council Presidents. Actually the

biggest problem that parties are facing at European level is that the national parties are still competitors; they constitute the membership of the Europarties but they also compete with them, in that they have a different and more direct access to policy at the European level through the Council of Ministers.

The "party in central office" has certainly benefited from Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 and its follow-ups, which regulate the status and financing of PPELs. The regulation gives strong incentives for PPELs to be formally connected to corresponding EP party groups in order to access party financing funds.[9] This is in itself very positive because it gives the PPELs a status vis-à-vis the party groups that their predecessors, the federations, did not have. It also gives them a role in EP elections and campaigning, which allows them to challenge at least partially the national parties' predominance. What is still being questioned however is the party in central office's ability to dictate, or even coordinate with the other faces, the party line at European level. On the contrary, within the same party family there are still several "party lines" expressed in intergovernmental bodies, in which the PPELs have no formal role, by national party components.

Finally the "party in public office" is limited to its elected parliamentary component, the EP party groups. In fact, EU executive institutions and positions are not party based. This fundamental limit notwithstanding, the EU level party in public office is the party face that has best responded to the challenges posed by the EU's evolution. This is due to the success of the EP party groups. It is certainly remarkable that, after so many EU enlargements, EP party groups have been able to incorporate practically all of the new national party components that have come into the arena. Twenty-seven countries are represented in the S&D group, twenty-six in the EPP, eighteen in the ALDE, fourteen in the Greens-EFA and eleven in the GUE-NGL. Considering that some of the countries have very few representatives in the EP, these are remarkable results, especially for the smaller party groups.

As a consequence, currently less than 4% of all MEPs are not part of any EP party group. But this great potential has not been fully expressed yet because, as we have seen, the Euro-level party in public office is at best truncated. In "normal" democracies the party in public office is the "terminus" of the link between citizens and government and it includes law-making and policy-making elements. It goes without saying that the EU level link cannot be effective if the policy-making one is missing.

These defects tie in with the absence of a Euro-level party system.[10] This is probably the most important shortcoming of EU party-democracy and the one that is most difficult to fix. A European party system must consist of a set of patterned interactions in all relevant arenas. In member states' political systems we have at least three relevant arenas at each level of government (national or sub-national): the electoral, the parliamentary and the governmental arena.[11] Parties in fact compete in elections on the basis of electoral rules they are all subject to and according to patterns determined by the number of parties in the system, their relative sizes and their ideological spread.[12] In Parliament their interactions are to a large extent determined by their being part of the majority or of the opposition and by the relative size of counter-opposed coalitions. The party system in the governmental arena is the most underdeveloped even in member states' political systems, but it does have some relevance, especially in case of multi-party government coalitions, which may manifest visible dynamics between their central and more marginal components.

The situation is quite different at European level. At best we can say that the EU presents a heterogeneity of party systems in different arenas. There is no electoral European party system for the very simple reason that EP elections are contested as separate elections in the twenty-seven member states with different competitors, slightly different rules and different issues being discussed. Moreover we have very low levels of electoral

transnationalization, meaning that different (Euro)parties have different strengths in different parts of Europe.[13] This is not uncommon. It happens not only in federal systems but also in centralized national systems, where one party can be very strong in one region and very weak in another part of the country. This certainly creates problems within national systems, but can have much more serious effects in the European Union as party/ideological differences can significantly overlap with nationally based conflicts.

On paper the European Parliament is a much more "normal" competitive arena, characterized by the presence of a number of party groups theoretically placed along a relatively wide ideological spread. Unfortunately, the ensuing dynamics are not sufficiently competitive to make the EP arena a party system. The absence of a day-to-day confidence relationship with a European government prevents it. The once-in-a-legislature approval of the Commission and its President is not enough. As for the Council of Ministers, considered here in its legislative connotation, the system is composed only by parties that are in government in the respective member states and produce dynamics based on national interests rather than broadly shared values and/or ideologies. In either case (EP and Council) the dynamics between opposition and government parties that shape collective interactions at national level do not exist.

Finally, it certainly comes as no surprise that there is no party system in the EU governmental arena. The Commission works as a collegial body based on a consensus laboriously constructed in working groups and through the contacts of the Commissioners' cabinets. If coalitions develop, they are based on functional convergences (that is between commissioners having neighbouring or overlapping portfolios/competences) and not on ideological (or even national for that matter) ones. And the European Council, considered as the executive incarnation of the Council of Ministers (whose characteristics it

shares), does not constitute a party system for the same reasons as the Council of Ministers itself.

Parties, party system and the building of EU party government

The serious shortcomings of the parties and, above all, of the party system at European level could probably be corrected through one of the two main institutional options for creating a competitive party system that have been considered: the presidential or, more often, semi-presidential system option and the parliamentary option. If adopted, both would be effective as they would force party competition at European level for the formation of a European government. However both of them are problematic as they require extensive constitutional reforms. The difficulties encountered in connection with the most recent attempts at EU constitutional reform indicate that the likelihood of such transformations taking place in the short or even medium term is rather limited. Even if constitutional reform remains, in my view, the only means to make the European Union a strong democracy, some improvements are possible with the resort to more limited, less ambitious, measures and solutions. Two possible institutional developments of lesser import could perhaps help the development of Europarties: the electoral and party statute/financing reforms. The electoral reform proposal based on Andrew Duff's Report was put on standby in March 2012 and it is unlikely that it will materialize in time for the 2014 EP elections. But it does include elements that, if applied, could facilitate a convergence between the Europarties' three organizational faces and foster genuine electoral Euro-level party competition. One of the proposal's overall aims is to «reduc[e] dissimilarities between the electoral procedures of States».[14] This is in itself an extremely important proposition. Although such dissimilarities may seem trivial and justifiable on the basis

of a wish to respect member states' electoral traditions, their cumulative effect can produce significant differences among the national party delegations that emerge from the twenty-seven member state-based EP elections. For example, without getting into the specific merits of closed and open lists as well as of regional or nation-wide constituencies, provisions in the Duff proposal for establishing uniform rules on these points for all member states (albeit limited to those with more than 20 million inhabitants in the latter case) go a long way towards harmonizing political cultures and representational styles within party groups. Moreover, the ensuing similarities that would be generated in member states level campaigning would certainly facilitate closer coordination between the national parties and the PPELs.

The best known and potentially most effective, albeit very controversial, provision included in the Duff report is the proposal for the creation of a twenty-five MEP strong transnational constituency. Again, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the proposal's feasibility and acceptability for all member states. What matters is that if implemented it could foster closer party co-operation at EU level, by promoting genuine transnational campaigning and EU level party programmes. It would also enhance EU-level electoral competition and therefore help create a better working EU level party system. Last but not least, this is the only provision that could, in time, help reduce transnational differences in party support across Europe, thus making the party system more homogeneous.

The second relevant institutional development concerns the reform, to be based on the Giannakou Report, of the Europarty Statute and of Europarty financing regulations.[15] In this case the likelihood of a timely approval of the reform is much greater, as the proposal is already in the EU's decisional pipeline. Very importantly, the Giannakou Report proposes the attribution of a European legal status to PPELs which are now registered as as-

sociations in one of the member states. It also focuses on financial aspects and party formation requirements, with great emphasis being placed on the former. This is certainly important as a strong EU level system of party financing can certainly promote organisational convergence. Despite the incentives that were already in Regulation 2004/2003, PPELs, the Europarty in central office, remain subordinate to their national components and to the EP party groups. Subordination to the national party components is caused by the fact that the reception of Euro funds is conditional upon co-financing, funds for which can only be raised at national level. Subordination to the party groups results from the public funding of PPELs being administered through the European Parliament's budget.

Although this state of affairs is not going to change, the report proposes more flexibility in co-financing and spending, moving away from the grant system which the parties find extremely difficult to manage. Also a simplified accounting system and, most importantly, a reduction in the amount of co-financing needed in order to obtain funding are being proposed. Co-financing is now 25% and what is being proposed is a reduction to 10%, something that could indeed reduce the ability of parties at national level to condition the central organisations at Euro level. Also introducing stricter requirements, such as having at least one elected Member of the European Parliament, for the formation of PPELs can help reduce their number, something almost universally considered "healthy" for the proper functioning of party systems. This requirement would in fact prevent the formation of PPELs composed only of small parties motivated by the desire to obtain public funding.

Besides these two potential incentives for the consolidations of Europarties and for the creation of a competitive Euro-level party system, both institutional in nature, there is at least a third, political, one: the designation by PPELs of candidates to the Presidency of the Commission. Currently the designation of the

President of the Commission still takes place through an inter-governmental agreement, which is only constrained by the need to generically take into account the indications that come from EP elections. This certainly means that the designated President must be chosen from amongst the ranks of the winning Europarty, but the actual choice reflects what member states' governments consider an acceptable compromise. If the PPELs decide, as they seem to be inclined to do, to indicate their preferred presidential candidate and actively campaign behind her/him, they would certainly become better integrated and ultimately institutionalized as a result of the development of procedures and of internal political dynamics for the designation of the candidate. Moreover, the level of Europarty competition would certainly increase; even more importantly, the elections' results would leave the member states very little room for manoeuvre and put strong pressure on them to ratify the appointment of the candidate indicated by the winning Europarty. This would strengthen the party system in the electoral and in the parliamentary arena and could eventually, for the first time, help create one in the governmental arena, in that the process would in all likelihood generate coordination between the winning Europarty and sympathetic member states' governments, at the detriment of consociational agreements among all or most member states.

All of these potential improvements, albeit significant, remain limited and fall rather short of what would be necessary and could only be obtained through extensive constitutional reform.

"Normal" vs. EU party democracy

The defects in party organization and in the competitiveness of the party system are the main reasons why member state-level type party government is not possible at European level. Improvements stemming from new institutional developments in

electoral rules and party financing or from a new assertiveness of the PPELs in nominating the President of the Commission can help, but they are not enough to create at Euro-level "normal" party-based democracy. However, not all differences between the member states' and the European political systems necessarily affect the latter in a negative way. There is actually one that can be exploited to improve the level and quality of European democracy directly by the parties and eventually to guide future extensive reforms. As we have seen, national parties have difficulties in combining their representative and governing functions. This is a problem that currently Europarties do not have to face because, under the present EU constitutional arrangements, they have no governing functions. Paradoxically, this apparent handicap can be made to work to their advantage and to that of EU level democracy. As it was suggested by Peter Mair,[16] because of their inability to exercise their executive functions, Europarties could better concentrate on the articulation of interests and, therefore, better perform their representative function.

This could be done in the European Parliament by debating on issues reflecting citizens' concerns and also by taking a more assertive legislative role exploiting the EP's co-decision powers to force, through appropriate amendments, perhaps less responsible but certainly more responsive legislation. This would require better coordination between the national parties and the respective EP party groups. As this would be necessarily a task for the PPELs to perform, such a strategy would inevitably produce better integrated Europarties, a very important result even if the actual impact on legislation should be limited. It is true that evidence from empirical research justifies a sceptic view on the Europeanization of political parties.[17] But it is also true that the sustained economic crisis being experienced by EU member states has greatly Europeanized the political agenda, as exemplified, for better or for worse, by David Cameron's promise for

a referendum on the UK's membership should he be re-elected in 2015.

A re-politicization of the issue of European integration should facilitate the development of competitive party interactions in the European Parliament as well, and help reduce what in the literature is known as the "tension" between responsiveness and responsibility. But what makes it possible is the clear distinction and definition of the functions, and of the consequent initial positions of the actors involved (the Europarties and the Commission in this case), something certainly impossible when only one actor, the parties, is expected to play two parts.

NOTES

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Ania Skrzypek
Unleashing Competitive Spirit. The Role of Europarties in Politicizing Europe

Typical debates on the matter of Europarties begin and end with the same, persistently reoccurring question: "are those organisations true political parties?".[1] Literature supporting both, the affirmative and the contradictory views, is vast and it is not the aim of this particular essay to side with either of those. Instead, this paper picks up one of the curious arguments, which is being used as evidence that the contemporary Europarties should not be classified as political parties. It is formulated in relation to the traditional definitions, according to which one of the tasks of a political party is to compete within the political sphere with its political opponents. The mainstream assessment is that the Europarties so far are not fulfilling it.

The hypothesis of this paper is that the Europarties are gradually shifting into a position, in which they will be able to contend among and with one another. In order to explore it, the first section briefly examines the main methodological criteria through which partisan competition is being described in political sciences. It proposes a way to transpose them into the context of the complex, multilayer polity of the EU. Subsequently, the second part focuses on the "catalysing" preconditions, through which the further evolution of the Europarties is not only possible, but actually indispensable. This introduces analyses of the long- and short-term processes within the environment of the Europarties. The question here is how far the Europarties can steer them – and

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hence what methodology from the research on political participation is being used.

Shall the hypothesis prove to be plausible, it may open a handful of new research questions in the field of Europarty studies. Once the Europarties find themselves in circumstances of political competition, the query is if they are then in a position to consolidate further and, hence, strengthen their own positions as real actors of the European political scene. The underpinning issue here is to what extent members of the Europarties would be willing to unite further, conceding certain ideological and strategic prerogatives to Europarties. The answer to this question is very important inasmuch it helps assess whether it is European processes that are to shape political agendas or, by contrast, political, ideologically distinctive visions are to shape further integration. From that point of view the paper finishes with the question on the sense of the European partisan politics.

Transposition of party competition theory onto the European level

Democracy requires the fulfilment of a number of preconditions. Among them are *competitive* elections, which are bound to meet certain objective criteria. These are:

a) existence of electoral offers, among which voters can choose after the period of informative campaigns;

b) competition among the parties, which contend on the basis of programmes, and the candidates who aim at winning support to assume certain governing positions;

c) equality of chances ensured for all the parties to present their electoral offers;

d) freedom of choice, which is guaranteed also by the right to cast a secret ballot;

e) balanced, transparent and fair electoral system;

f) legislative mandates of the bodies that are being elected.[2]

Competitive elections constitute a fundamental pillar of contemporary democracy. They not only legitimize political leadership by extending a governing consent to the political group that wins the largest number of seats (and is in a position to assume government by itself or through an alliance), but are also indispensible for legitimizing the entire political system.[3]

This conceptualisation of electoral competitive democracy within the context of the European Union leads to several observations. As far as the first condition is concerned, the electoral offers exist predominantly on the national level. The Europarties' manifestos have not acquired yet a role of actual electoral bids with which the candidates would actually go campaigning.[4] This is due to a number of factors, among which the most frequently criticized is that they are not so much real manifestos, but rather a sort of declarations, often perceived as the "lowest common denominator" within the political family in question. Despite this severe disparagement, they should not be seen as irrelevant: they still constitute the symbol of unity within an ideological family as for the directions of the European integration. The process of their elaboration is internally important, as it mobilizes different actors and encourages the identification of the national parties' activists with the European dimension.

Competition among the Europarties does not seem to exist yet in the context of the European elections that are seen as second order elections and, consequently, still remain a sum of twenty-seven – soon twenty-eight – national elections,[5] in which national parties compete with one another. With certain exceptions, the rivalry has been usually contextualized within national politics' issues. Furthermore, the Europarties remain without a say as far as candidates and messages of the respective member parties are concerned. They have no role in the selection procedure, which then makes the identification of

the elected Members of the European Parliament secondary to their affiliation with the "mother parties" and the group in the EP respectively.

These two observations lead to the following conclusion: the European elections are very specific elections. If analyzed through a national prism, they fulfil the criteria of *competitive* elections and, therefore, ensure the democratic legitimacy of national representations on the European level. However, they fail, so far, to comply with the expectations in the European context. Next to arguable claims that they neither really serve purposes of awareness raising concerning the political differentiations in Europe, nor mobilize for specific pan-European social values, they obviously also fail to legitimize collective actors of the European polity – namely Europarties (whether in the majority or in the opposition).

The condition that different electoral offers must be available in order to ensure the elections' democratic character brings the focus back to the question of the programmatic work within the Europarties. The question is what shall occur for the manifestos to liberate themselves from the depreciative position of symbols and "common lowest denominators" and become instead backbones of political cleavages across the continent.

Within the political sciences, the party political competition is frequently described through so-called "spatial models of party competition".[6] Following the most quoted theory, introduced by Downs in 1957, political scientists tend to argue that the differences among diverse parties can be systematized within a restricted number of dimensions. Examples of these are the scales on which parties are mapped. The strategic question is, however, how to define those spheres that should allow clean cross-cut, according to which also voters would subsequently be able to complete their "package" of ideas and make their choices. The most commonly used scales include the following differentiations:[7]

Economic left/right	Social left/right
Socio-economic dimension	Cultural-identity dimension
Socialist vs. capitalist	Libertarian vs. authoritarian
Economic	Non-economic

Whichever of the classification one takes, it seems not to be in-
cluding the aspect that the parties (here both Europarties and
the national parties) focus their strategies on to expose di-
chotomies, namely the question of pro-Europeanism or anti-Eu-
ropeanism. This means two things. Firstly, the question of
attitude towards Europe as such is an extremely impoverished
criterion of choice. It always places the pro-European parties in
a defence position, in which they focus on legitimizing the sys-
tem as a whole rather than on gaining support for their distinc-
tive proposals, inasmuch it does not allow the shades of pro- and
anti-European attitudes, that there may be – and indeed are –
become apparent. Secondly, clustering parties only accordingly
to their pro- or anti-EU approaches does not exhaust ideological
and political issues connected with desired developments in Eu-
ropean integration. This means that, in the context of the Euro-
pean elections, the national parties engage in two ways: on the
one hand in a seasonal exchange on the European Union's pur-
pose, on the other in the sparring on domestic issues. As a con-
sequence, the national parties are not acquiring pan-European
political competences in those debates and the Europarties can-
not use even those short moments of European electoral cam-
paign to potentially find new openings.

In addition to the arguments criticizing the confinement of the
political competition to the one-dimensional issue of pro- or anti-
Europeanism, there is also a very practical aspect to support
this reservations: the phenomenon of the decline of the so-called

"stable electorates". This means that actors (here both voters and parties) position themselves in a relatively volatile political space, that is not related anymore to the traditional sociological theories. As classified by De Vries and Marks,[8] the methodological and theoretical approaches can be presented in the following way:

THEORETICAL APPROACHES			
		SOCIOLOGICAL	STRATEGIC
		BOTTOM-UP: IT EXPLAINS DIMENSIONALITY IN TERMS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL CONFLICTS IN A SOCIETY	TOP-DOWN: IT EXPLAINS MATTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SALIENCE OF ISSUES APPROACH
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	A PRIORI	DEDUCTIVE: DERIVES ISSUE DIMENSIONS FROM THEORY IN ADVANCE OF MEASUREMENT	DIMENSIONALITY TYPE 1	DIMENSIONALITY TYPE 2
	A POSTERIORI	INDUCTIVE: RESEARCHERS FRAME A DATASET FROM WHICH DIMENSIONS CAN BE INFERRED	DIMENSIONALITY TYPE 3	DIMENSIONALITY TYPE 4

Without entering into the detailed methodological deliberations that this scheme enables, there is one particular observation that is worth making. With an underdeveloped European public sphere, with a European electorate divided into twenty-seven different constituencies, and with a large diversity of socio-economic arrangements across the continent, it is relatively impossible to assume at this point the plausibility of an attempt to describe Europarties as representatives of certain social con-

flicts. The eventual competition among the Europarties is more likely to be the result of their *strategic* approach. Potentially it can then be generated on the bases of different "cleavage" issues, and here the De Vries and Marks category of "issue entrepreneurship" could offer much to positioning of the Europarties.

It is true that the public opinion studies, which, oddly enough, are often detached from the research on party competition, tend to «inflate the number of cleavage dimensions». This phenomenon has been described as "spatial complexity" of party competition.[9] The relevant, complex typology of party competition that is worth quoting for the purpose of this essay is however the one proposed by Kitchelt that distinguishes:

INSTITUTIONAL	PARTIES COMPETE FOR AN OFFICE. IT PRESUPPOSES THE EXISTENCE OF COMPETITIVE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY
FUNCTIONAL	THERE IS A COLLECTIVE ACTION QUESTION AT HAND. THE COMPETITION IS ABOUT PURSUING A POLITICAL GOAL THAT REFLECTS A SOLUTION TO A SOCIAL PROBLEM

The considerations above highlights the deficiencies as far as the functional competition is concerned. Nevertheless the point of rivalry on the institutional field is equally relevant. Until now, Europarties had no prerogatives to enter into institutional contest – as they remained without the possibility to influence selection, nomination or approval of the candidates. That would apply to the question of the European elections, as well as to the issue of composing a European Commission. What is more, the EU institutional architecture, in which both communitarian and intergovernmental methods are applied simultaneously, has meant that there are diverse (sometimes even opposing) coalitions on the different levels of governance.[10] In such a situation

the possibility for exposing cleavages in any dimension is very limited, if not even impossible.

Summarizing, applying the political sciences research on party competition in the dimension of Europarties leads to the following conclusions. First of all, traditionally the Europarties have not been entering in neither institutional nor functional competitions. Secondly, they are not prevented from doing so in the future, shall a number of changes be made. In terms of functional rivalry, the Europarties' manifestos would need lose their symbolic role and would need to become proper electoral offers. This means that they need to be rooted in the national political dilemmas, increasing their utilitarian quality for the national parties, and that a certain new opening for the Europarties to enter the domestic fields must be created. As mentioned, this would require further political consolidation within the European political families – allowing campaigning on issues instead of broad, intangible visions. "Issue entrepreneurship" could here serve as a very useful perspective. Thirdly, institutional competition may also become possible. This would call for strengthening organisational ties among political actors involved in the EU institutions, as well as relating their mandates to the issues of political legitimacy. The question of so-called "top candidate" is an example, but other proposals, such as transnational lists, are also worth exploring.

Contemporary preconditions enabling the emergence of a new kind of competition

As the first section suggested, there are identifiable and plausible ways of enhancing the competitive characteristics of the Europarties. However, the question remains if the contemporary political climate would prompt it, for this reason analyses of both political reality and institutional circumstances seem indispensable.

There are three main characteristics of the political reality at hand. First of all, the deliberations on the future of Europarties are embedded in the discussion about the future of the European Union and its architecture. Though this debate constitutes a certain constant feature, its relative intensification in the past years is to be connected with the emergence of the global crisis, which the European Union appears to have been neither politically nor institutionally ready to face. In reaction, political and public opinions divided into two groups: those who believe that the EU could retrieve its sense as an opportunity for prosperity and progress; and those who tend to consider the crisis as a cause for further deteriorations due to the austerity measures that have been consequently imposed. In the intensive search for answers, there is also a reoccurrence of "protective" *nationalism*, which carries the danger of return to a modernized version of the concept of "Europe of Nation States".[11] This polarisation of views results in the materialization of a new cleavage that goes beyond typical "euro-enthusiastic" or "eurosceptic" divisions and requires answers on "what sort of Europe" shall there be – encouraging, in turn, further debates on both the pan-European and the national levels.

Secondly, also different surveys on public opinions in Europe seem to support it, indicating that citizens will have expected clearer political choices[12] by 2014. As observed in 2012, the European Union has become a highly politicized theme in the context of subsequent national elections. It has been of course "packaged" and broken into particular issues, ranging from the question of contemporary understanding of sovereignty in the context of proceeding unification to the specific policies of bailouts and austerity. Hence it has occupied vast space within public sphere, inducing a political breaking out from the narrow distinction between the regular "pro" or "anti" approaches, with two main consequences: the pan-European and the particular national messages within one European political family need to

become more coordinated – this is a matter of credibility, on the one hand, and efficiency of the cross-border appeal, on the other; since the European elections are on the way to move on from the second order elections they used to be,[13] there is no possibility to hide behind a notion of "uniformed voter" any-more. This anyway has always been in contradiction to the fabric of contemporary times called an "Era of an informed citizen". Also «blaming the [institutional] system» as too technocratic and not transparent[14] seems no longer to be an option. What shall be required are answers on how to go beyond the predica-ment, and the choice of a path is a highly politicized matter.[15]

Thirdly, the crisis has been of such a profound impact that it seems self-evident that returning to "business as usual" is sim-ply not possible. This would demand the search for a new order, that would, on the one hand, absorb the negative consequences of the predicament and, on the other, put in place mechanisms aimed at preventing it from happening again. Even if a profound institutional reform, that would require a multi-tier compromize, is perhaps still unthinkable, it is also impossible to expect that the current drift and the temporary fixes will outlast the mem-ory of the crash. Consequently, it is expectable that European Union will enter into a new phase, as it has done already in the past, fitting into the theory of the crisis-based developments.[16] In that sense, all the ideological families would need to formulate proposals for a new consensus that, in case of the EU, would re-place the post-war order and equip the Community with the tools it needs in the 21st century. As for the Europarties, they can become agents or subjects of that change, depending on their capacity to mobilize and shape the political will within themselves.

As far as the institutional circumstances are concerned, the Lisbon Treaty has substantially enhanced the institutional pre-rogatives of the Europarties. There are three particular de-velopments worth highlighting in the context of the analysis

of the potential new ground for the competition among the Europarties.

To begin with, the Lisbon Treaty reaffirms that the Europarties can organize campaigns. This follows the European Parliament's Report of Jo Leinen, adopted on 23 March 2006,[17] which laid the foundations of the European Council's subsequent work on the new Regulations (1524/2007) on functioning of the Europarties.[18] This mirrors in certain ways the conclusions of the European Commission's "Plan D"[19] – which made Europarties, at least formally, co-responsible for the development of the European democracy. This means that the nature of the European campaign is likely to evolve, transforming not only the role of the Europarties, but also the character of "eurocampaigning".[20]

Secondly, by sanctioning the capacity to campaign and by introducing several other instruments, the Lisbon Treaty aims at reinforcing the European public sphere. This could be achieved especially through two channels: inducing further civil society mobilizations that could aggregate opinions through a new tool, the European Citizens' Initiative; enabling the political parties to foster their ideological work through liaising with the newly established European political foundations. The research and debates they are in a position to lead could also contribute to the europeanisation[21] of the political debates EU-wide and to changing the "constraining dis-sensus" atmosphere.[22] Both, however distinctively different tools, can popularize the political agenda of the EU through respectively actions and debates. It is likely that new themes will be introduced into the pan-European political discourse. In the light of it, Europarties and, therefore, also the national parties will need to enlarge and precise their political proposals to be able to solidly anchor and distinctively position themselves in this new ambiance.

Thirdly, the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that the President of the European Commission shall be selected from the largest political group in the European Parliament. Politicization of this post

will have an impact on the institutional architecture of the EU overall, and has already induced a new development within the Europarties[23] – which are keen on nominating so called "top candidates" on the eve of the next European elections.[24] Though procedures of selections vary, and it is still ambiguous what sort of a public mandate such a candidate shall have,[25] it is clear that they shall be proposed by the Europarties and that this procedure will have an impact on the *electoral competition* in its *institutional dimension*. Furthermore, it is also likely that *functional* competition will follow. The above described prerogative of the Europarties to run a campaign on the one hand, and their personification on the other will require a new approach to the formulation of the electoral offer. This is due to the fact that a top candidate will have to speak on behalf of the Europarty in a convincing, polarizing manner across the continent. Hence the traditional European manifesto will need to evolve from a symbol of unity into a true European electoral platform.

To summarize, this chapter provides an overview of the three main features of the EU's contemporary political reality, as well as of the three preconditions within the European institutional architecture that might allow the Europarties enter into the next stage of their developments. The next stage of their evolution could entail further consolidation and hence building capacity towards becoming actors within a competitive euro-partisan system. The answer to this question seems to be affirmative, and leads to the conclusion that the profound challenge lies in generating and mobilizing political will within the Europarties themselves.

Conclusions

This paper departed from a hypothesis that the Europarties are gradually moving towards a position in which they will be able to generate a competition among themselves. This should further induce developments of a euro-partisan system, contribute

to the enhancement of the European public sphere and also strengthen the European democracy. The presumption has been proven to be correct, though it has become clear, in the light of this research, that the key to further developments lies in generating political will. It is in fact a question of creating a spirit, in accordance with which, further consolidation and accelerated cooperation among political actors within the European ideological families could take place.

An obstacle to this evolution can be related with the reservations about Europarties' weaknesses and eventual intra-party competition. This would manifest themselves in a dispute over the right of initiative regarding the European policy agenda (national parties or Europarties) and over the representatives' legitimacy (within both communitarian and intergovernmental level). A chance to overcome these obstacles lies in sharing the same interest, namely to perform better in the European elections and gain more influence over the European Union's agenda.

The European elections are likely to go beyond the limits of a second order elections. On the one hand, penetration of the European themes in the national political debate will require the national political parties to elaborate more complex, substance-based and polarizing positions. Making a difference on this field can depend on "issue entrepreneurship". In order to be able to support the pledges with credible strategies on how to fulfil them, the national parties could resort to the credibility of their European political families and call upon the executive power of such a cooperation. On the other, Europarties will need to concede more to national members as far as electoral agenda setting and formulation of the campaign strategy are concerned. With the institution of the "top candidate" it will be no longer possible to "coordinate" the twenty-seven campaigns while trying to re-package them in the European wrapping. It will be necessary to consolidate and synchronize better, making the

European vision perhaps more tangible and the national politics more europeanized.

The research mirrored in this paper shows that new significant step of Europarties' evolution is plausible. Political and institutional circumstances seem to be more than welcoming at this point. The critical question is aggregation of political will. It will determine if European political families will steer the process of political integration in Europe or will just be there for a ride.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, S. Hix, C. Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1997.

[2] D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze i system partyjny. O teorii systemów wyborczych*, Wyd. Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2004, p. 25.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[4] A. Skrzypek, *Studium oferty programowej konserwatystów, liberałów i socjalistów przygotowanej z myślą o kampanii wyborczej do Parlamentu Europejskiego 2009 roku,* in "Przegląd Europejski", 1/2009, pp. 85-122.

[5] J. Priestley, *European Political Parties: The Missing Link. Les partis politiques europeén: le chaînon manquant*, Notre Europe, Paris 2010, p. 8.

[6] R. Bakker, S. Jolly, J. Polk, *Complexity in the European Party Space: Exploring Dimensionality with Experts*, in "European Union Politics", 2/2012, pp. 219-45, available on eup.sagepub.com/content/13/2/219.full.pdf+html.

[7] *Ibid.* See also E. Bergman, E. M. De Sousa, *Party Polarisation and Political Markets. A Model of Electoral Competition and Candidate Positioning*, in "The Open Political Science Journal", 5/2012, pp. 6-15.

[8] C. E. De Vries, G. Marks, *A Struggle over Dimensionality: A Note on Theory and Empirics*, in "European Union Politics", 2/2012, pp. 185-93, available on eup.sagepub.com/content/13/2/185.

[9] H. Kitschelt, *Parties and Interest Intermediation*, in E. Ameta, K. Nash, A. Scott, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, Blackwell, Oxford 2012, pp. 144-57.

[10] See, for example, S. Hix, *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2008.

[11] Ulrich Beck writes for instance about the emergence of "German Euro-Nationalism". See U. Beck, *Twenty Observations on a World in Turmoil*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 66-68.

[12] See C. De Vries, *Ambivalent Europeans*, in "Queries", FEPS Scientific Magazine, 3/2012-13, pp. 78-82.

[13] See R. Corbett, F. Jacobs, M. Skackleton, *The European Parliament*, John Harper Publishing, London 2005, p. 9.

[14] See, for example, H. C. H. Hoffman, A. H. Türk, *EU Administrative Governance*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham 2006.

[15] «People's goals are political, when they seek authoritative decisions that are ultimately backed up by coercion in order to distribute and re-distribute both material and non-material life chances, rights and privileges». H. Kitschelt, *Parties and Interest Intermediation*, in E. Ameta, K. Nash, A. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-57.

[16] F. McGowan, *Social Democracy and the European Union. Who's Changing Whom?*, in L. Martel (ed.), *Social Democracy. Global and National Perspective*, London 2001, p. 76

[17] European Parliament, *Report on European Political Parties*, A6-0042/2006, available on www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2006-0042+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN.

[18] K. M. Johansson, *The Emergence of Political Parties at European Level: Integration Unaccomplished*, in S. Gustavsson, L. Oxelheim, M. Pehrson (ed.), *How Unified Is the European Union? European Integration Between Visions and Popular Legitimacy*, Springer, Berlin-Heidelberg 2009, p. 166.

[19] European Commission, *The Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, Brussels, 13 October 2005, COM (2005) 494 final, available on eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0494:FIN:EN:PDF.

[20] A. Skrzypek, *Ideology, Politicisation and Identification. The role of the europarties in providing citizens with a democratic choice*, a FEPS Next Left study within the Working Group on eurodemocracy and europarties, upcoming.

[21] For definitions, please, see T. Poguntke, N. Aylott, E. Carter, R. Ladrech, K. R. Luther, *The Europeanization of National Political Parties. Power and Organizational Adaptation*, Routledge Advances in European Politics, London 2007.

[22] Hooghe and Marks (2009) wrote that the referendums in 2005 showed a public opinion shift from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dis-sensus". H. Kitschelt, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-57.

[23] A. Skrzypek, *Models of (S)Electing a Pan-European Leading Candidate*, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Brussels 2010, available on www.feps-europe.eu/en/news/204_models-of-selecting-a-pan-european-leading-candidate.

²⁴ And although this deliberations seem almost revolutionary at the moment, it is possible to envisage that in the future the prerogative will enlarge to nomination of possible alternative Commissioners, a supportive team to the top candidate, etc.

²⁵ One of the dilemmas is whether he/she shall really run in the European elections or be only a symbol, to be confirmed by the European Parliament.

THE EUROPEAN UNION MUST BE ABLE TO RE-ESTABLISH THE PRIMACY OF POLITICS OVER ECONOMICS AND ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A EUROPE-WIDE PUBLIC SPHERE