

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Preface

European Democracy in 2019

Christopher Huggins

Citation

Huggins, C. (2019). 'European Democracy in 2019', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15 (4): 327-330. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1140>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This special section examines the theme on democracy in Europe. In this preface, the section editor, Christopher Huggins, briefly introduces the contributions and places them in the context of debate surrounding contemporary European democracy.

Keywords

Democracy; Europe; European Union

Last year's special section in the *Journal of Contemporary European Research* (JCER) reflected on the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that ended World War One, noting that Europe had undergone a remarkable transformation over the last 100 years, but nevertheless still faced an uncertain future (McDonagh 2018). This uncertainty has been reflected in other reviews on the state of Europe, with the editors of this year's *Journal of Common Market Studies*' Annual Review highlighting that 'It is clear that Europe is now moving through very troubled waters, where the final destination remains unclear' (Exadaktylos, Guerrina and Massetti 2019: 5).

One of themes identified in last year's special section was the durability of democracy, and in particular how liberal democracy in Europe is perhaps more fragile than is commonly assumed (McDonagh 2018: 292). Indeed, the recent rhetoric of scholars examining the state of liberal democracy across the globe has become increasingly negative, with many pointing to, amongst others, 'crises of democracy' (Przeworski 2019), 'democratic decay' (Daly 2019) and 'democracy under threat' (van Beek 2019). Questions about the quality of democracy in Europe are not new. Indeed, debates surrounding the European Union's (EU) 'democratic deficit' have been a feature of European Studies scholarship since the 1990s (see Bellamy and Lord 2016). But recent trends in European politics bring the question of democracy into sharp focus. This includes ongoing legitimisation concerns following the EU's responses to the financial crisis (for example Hobolt 2018), the ongoing prevalence of Eurosceptic, nativist and populist parties together with their electoral successes (for example Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2019), and illiberal democratic reforms in several EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe (for example Sitter and Bakke 2019).

Reflecting on the state of democracy in Europe in 2019, it is possible on the one hand to paint a positive picture. In May 2019, European citizens voted in the ninth European Parliament elections. The turnout of 50.66 per cent, while still below levels seen in national elections, reversed a long-term trend of ever decreasing participation in European elections. Results from the latest Eurobarometer research also suggest European democracy is in a healthy state. 59 per cent of Europeans are satisfied with democracy at the national level (versus 39 per cent who are not satisfied), while 55 per cent are satisfied with democracy at the European level (versus 36 per cent who are not satisfied). Both of these figures represent the highest levels since 2004. Furthermore, for the first time since 2004, a majority (56 per cent versus 39 per cent) feel their voice counts in the EU, while trust in the EU (44 per cent)

continues to outpace trust in national governments and parliaments (34 per cent) (European Commission 2019).

Nevertheless, there remain concerns about the quality of democracy in Europe. One key example of this is reflected in ongoing concerns about democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe. This is particularly the case in Hungary and Poland, where in the latter judicial reforms and their impact on the independence and impartiality of judges have led the European Commission to launch infringement proceedings, which have now been referred to the Court of Justice of the EU (European Commission 2019b). Overall, however, the EU's effectiveness to respond to illiberal democratic trends within its member states has been mixed at best (Sitter and Bakker 2019; Colsa 2018).

It is in this mixed and uncertain context that the five contributions in this special section seek to explore various aspects surrounding the contemporary state of European democracy.

In the first commentary, Ariadna Ripoll-Servent examines the results of the 2019 European Parliament elections and what the outcome means for parliamentary arithmetic and coalition building in the EU. She finds that, while Eurosceptic and populist parties have failed to make substantial gains and continue to be subject to a 'cordon sanitaire' by mainstream political parties, greater fragmentation and polarisation presents new challenges which will make it difficult to build coalitions and be effective in inter-institutional negotiations. This has implications for representative democracy in the EU. On the one hand, the continued exclusion of Eurosceptic and populist parties from mainstream coalitions will only serve to reinforce their underlying argument that European integration remains an elitist concern not willing to address non-mainstream voices. On the other hand, greater polarisation may lead to inter-institutional deadlock impacting the EU's effectiveness in highly politicised policy areas. This is exacerbated by the fact that Eurosceptic and populist parties are no longer confined to the European Parliament and are now represented in the European Council.

In the second commentary, Ben Stanley undertakes a comparative analysis of the quality of democracy in Central and Eastern European countries. Using the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset he finds that Central and Eastern European countries can be categorised into three broad groups based on recent trends in the quality of their democracy: stable democracies, backsliding democracies and arrested developers. This mixed picture challenges a number of assumptions often made about the state of democracy in the region. Firstly, de-democratisation is not a trend which can be observed across the whole region and the quality of democracies in several countries remains relatively stable. Secondly, where democracy has been backsliding, different factors often account for this in different countries. Thirdly, the case of arrested developers challenges the assumption that the region as a whole has made great strides in democracies and pauses us to reflect on whether the process of democratic consolidation may be incomplete. These variations aside, the findings add weight to the arguments that the quality and durability of democracy in the region is more fragile than commonly assumed.

In their research article Lukáš Hamřík and Petr Kaniok examine the emergence of one recent democratic innovation in European Parliament elections: the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. By drawing on a qualitative analysis of 152 documents produced by political parties and EU institutions, they find that the Spitzenkandidaten procedure has been in development since the 1990s and has been driven by the European Parliament, the European Commission and four European political parties. By exploring the motivations held by these actors, they find that addressing criticisms of a democratic deficit and enhancing the quality of European democracy were central. However, actors' own self-interests were also key as many saw the Spitzenkandidaten process as a way to increase their influence in EU politics vis-à-vis other actors.

In the first of two video interviews, JCER editor Kenneth McDonagh speaks to Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan about the role of education in fostering political knowledge of the EU. The discussion focuses in particular on Dr Schön-Quinlivan's Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Action funded programme 'My Big Friendly Guide to the European Union', which is aimed at developing knowledge, curiosity and debate about Ireland and the EU among primary school children. In the second video interview JCER editor Christopher Huggins talks to blogger Jon Worth about his experience in using social media to communicate European politics and the opportunities and challenges social media presented to the quality of democracy and political debate in Europe.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Research Article

The European Parliament after the 2019 Elections: Testing the Boundaries of the 'Cordon Sanitaire'

Ariadna Ripoll Servent

Citation

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019). 'The European Parliament after the 2019 Elections: Testing the Boundaries of the 'Cordon Sanitaire'', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 331-342.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1121>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The European elections of May 2019 have been labelled ‘a fateful election for Europe’. Although the outcome was disappointing for Eurosceptic and populist forces, polarisation and politicisation will make life in the ninth (2019-2024) European Parliament (EP) more complicated. The article shows that, while the EP might not be more Eurosceptic after the elections, it is certainly more complicated. First, hard Eurosceptics became the fifth political force in the EP, falling just behind the Greens, which is likely to give them a stronger voice and more leeway in parliamentary life. Second, polarisation makes it more difficult to build stable coalitions, which has a direct impact on the EP’s chances to be effective in inter-institutional negotiations. Third, although mainstream parties continue to use the ‘cordon sanitaire’ to exclude those deemed ‘undesirable’, with the increase of populist forces inside mainstream groups, it has become more difficult to define who belongs to this group. Finally, it considers the implications of polarisation for the role of the EP within the broader political system of the EU, especially now that it has ceased to be a phenomenon unique to Parliament. Polarisation poses a major challenge for the future life of the European Union and prompts us to think in terms of partisan alliances across EU institutions rather than see institutions as monolithic black boxes.

Keywords

European Parliament; Elections; Euroscepticism; Populism; European Union

Fears of a surge in Euroscepticism and populism dominated the electoral campaigns for the European Parliament (EP) elections of May 2019. With Italian Lega leader Matteo Salvini fronting a new attempt to reunite radical right-wing forces, there were even speculations that they would manage to form the largest group in the new Parliament (Politico 2019a). Consequently, the 2019 elections were generally considered ‘a fateful election for Europe’ (Euractiv 2019a, 2019b), in which voters had to decide between two very different political designs for the European Union (EU). Right-wing populists, therefore, largely set the electoral debate and pushed topics like migration and security to the top of the agenda. However, the efforts of these parties largely misfired and fell short of expectations. On the contrary, the fear of a populist turn served to mobilise younger and pro-European voters, which gave an advantage to liberal and green parties across the EU.

Therefore, this new EP is not necessarily more Eurosceptic but it is certainly more complicated. The electoral results have left us a more polarised parliament still under pressure from the extremes. This affects not only the way political groups work in the EP but also their capacity to close the democratic gap between the EU and its citizens. This article situates the European elections of 2019 in the longer-term process of empowerment and ‘normalisation’ of the EP. In order to have a point of reference with which to compare these elections, it presents first the main trends that have characterised the previous legislatures. It then looks at the results of the 2019 elections and what these mean for the composition of the ninth legislature. Increased levels of polarisation are particularly important when looking at the process of coalition formation. Therefore, the article focuses on possible alliances under

the current distribution of power. The fifth section discusses the internal working dynamics of the EP under the shadow of Euroscepticism and populism, which becomes particularly apparent with the use of the ‘cordon sanitaire’. Finally, the article reflects on the place of the EP in the EU’s political system.

EP EMPOWERMENT UNDER THE SHADOW OF POPULISM

The EP is the EU institution that has changed the most since its inception. Evolving from a ‘talking shop’ to a full (co-)legislator, it has become a more complex machine that needs to negotiate its ideological and national dimensions of representation on a daily basis. Indeed, the EP is the only directly elected EU institution, but this is still done on a national basis. Therefore, most members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have to learn how to choose between being loyal to their EP political group or to their national party (Koop, Reh and Bressanelli 2018). That is why EP elections have generally been seen as ‘second-order elections’, meaning that they are fought mostly on domestic issues and are not seen as relevant by most voters (Viola 2015; Reif and Schmitt 1980). This has often served to explain the declining levels of turnout in EP elections and the disaffection of voters towards their MEPs (Clark 2014).

This perceived democratic gap has been widened by the lack of stable majorities in the EP and the absence of a government–opposition dynamic similar to that of most national parliaments. The EP works on the basis of consensus and compromise, largely determined by the need to find internal agreements that can also lead to a successful deal with the Council of the EU (hereafter the Council) (Ripoll Servent 2015; Costello 2011). The gradual institutionalisation of these norms has strengthened the emergence of ‘cartel’ politics inside the EP (Rose and Borz 2013). Most legislative procedures cannot succeed without the support of the large political groups, which explains why the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) have formed (formally or informally) a ‘grand coalition’ that structures the internal life of the EP. The predominance of the ‘grand coalition’ can be felt in the distribution of top jobs (notably the EP presidency), the formation of legislative compromises and key reforms affecting parliamentary life (like the statute of political parties, the internal rules of procedure and so on) (Ripoll Servent 2018).

The weight of the ‘grand coalition’ became more substantial in the last (eighth) legislative term due to the increase in Eurosceptic and populist fringe parties (Treib 2014). There was, certainly, a spectrum of Euroscepticism among these parties, ranging from hard Eurosceptics who wished to abolish the EU to soft Eurosceptics who advocated for an alternative political model (Taggart 1998; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). This also translated into different types of behaviour once they joined the EP: from those who were never there, to those who used the EP as a tribune to propagate their Eurosceptic ideas, and a large majority who took a more pragmatic view and participated in parliamentary life like any other mainstream MEP (Brack 2015, 2012). However, the rising number of MEPs sitting on the extremes of the ideological spectrum narrowed the field for building compromises among mainstream parties. This was largely due to the ‘cordon sanitaire’ used to exclude hard Eurosceptics from parliamentary life. In the eighth legislative term, this meant that those who belonged to the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) or Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) groups were seen as outsiders, or even outcasts, and were generally excluded from legislative work (Ripoll Servent and Panning 2019).

Therefore, although the EP has largely become a ‘normal’ parliament that has institutionalised legislative working practices and that works on the basis of ideological alliances, it continues to be characterised by high levels of internal contestation directed to its very *raison d’être* (Ripoll Servent 2018).

A MORE UNSTABLE PARLIAMENT

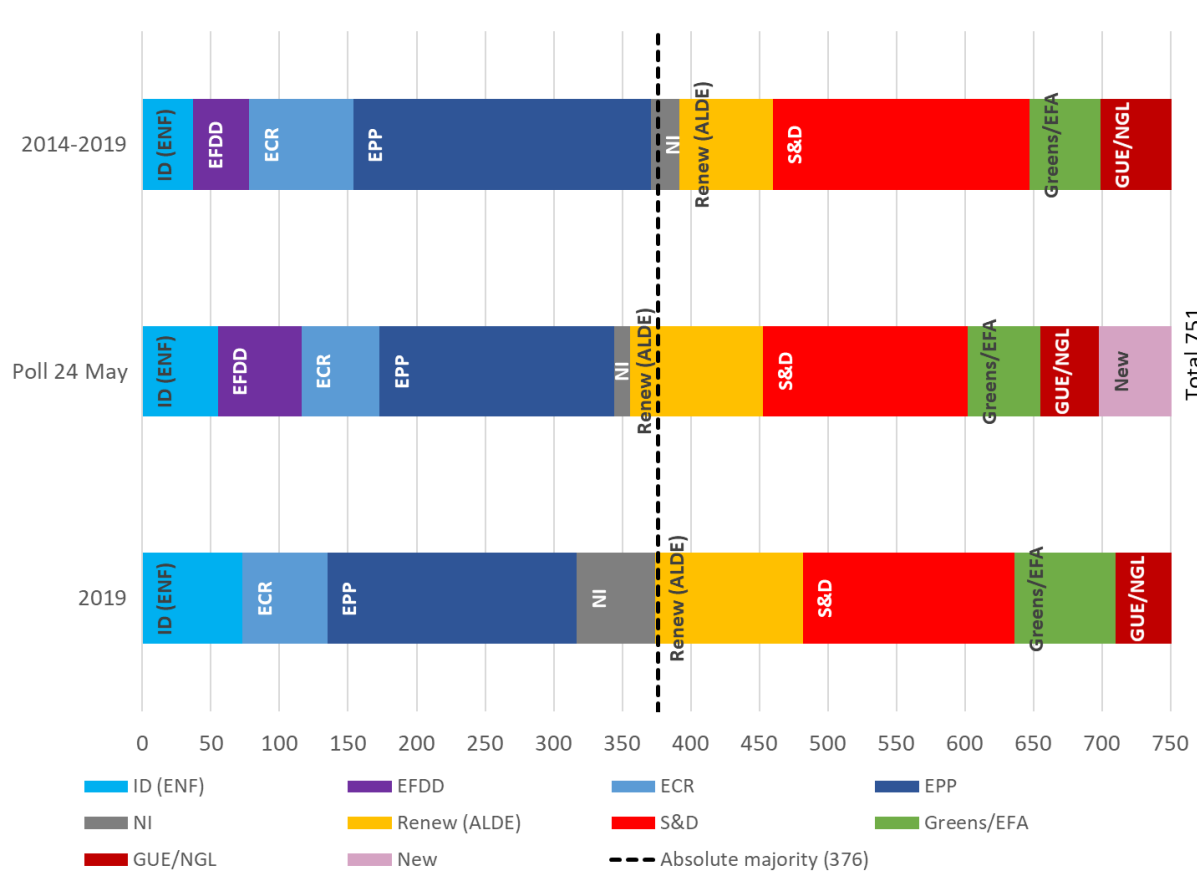
The perception of 2019 being ‘a fateful election for Europe’ served to reverse some of the trends present in previous terms. Turnout increased from 42.61 per cent in 2014 to 50.62 per cent, with notable increases in some of the countries where it had been traditionally very low (Romania, Poland and Hungary). However, the levels of turnout continued to be highly divergent across the EU, with many Central and Eastern European countries (and Portugal) scoring under the average.

The results of the elections also show a more polarised and fragmented Parliament (Figure 1). If we look at the ideological (left-right) dimension, the larger mainstream groups (EPP and S&D) lost support in favour of the centrist group Renew (former liberal Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe [ALDE] group), the Greens and the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group (a variation of the ENF). As for the European integration dimension, the numbers show that the new Parliament is not necessarily more Eurosceptic. In 2014, 27 per cent of MEPs belonged to a hard Eurosceptic group (ten per cent in the ENF and EFDD) or soft Eurosceptic group (17 per cent in the European Conservatives and Reformists [ECR] and Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left [GUE/NGL]).

The picture in 2019 is more complicated but not dissimilar. If we include non-attached members, 31 per cent of MEPs can be considered Eurosceptics. There are, however, two main differences: the number of soft Eurosceptics (those who are part of the ECR and GUE/NGL) decreased to 13 per cent, while the representation of hard Eurosceptics (former EFDD and ID) became more complex. On the one hand, the alliance between Matteo Salvini’s Lega and Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National became stronger as the fifth force of the EP. On the other hand, the new Brexit Party was unable to resuscitate the former alliance between the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Italian Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and, therefore, lost an important source of income, the chance to hold offices as well as its main weapon: speaking time during plenary debates (Brack 2012). This opened a window of opportunity for the M5S, which had suffered from its association with hard Eurosceptics and had been treated as an outsider in the previous legislative term (Ripoll Servent and Panning 2019). This is probably why, in September 2019, instead of trying to join the GUE/NGL group they were wooing the Greens to let them join the group (Politico 2019c).

Therefore, when it comes to overall representation, the potential impact of Euroscepticism in the EP is mixed. On the one hand, the hard Eurosceptics are now reunited under a stronger group (ID) and thus have more chances to influence the internal life of the EP. Since Parliament works largely on the basis of the D’Hondt system, they should theoretically be allocated with more top jobs (vice-presidencies, committee chairs and vice-chairs, rapporteurships and so on). On the other hand, a large part of the Eurosceptics remain as non-attached MEPs, decreasing their voice and influence. In the advent of Brexit, most of them (from the Brexit Party) would even disappear from the EP altogether, although this would not substantially shift the balance of power between Eurosceptic and mainstream groups (Ripoll Servent 2019b).

Fig 1: Comparing the composition of the European Parliament



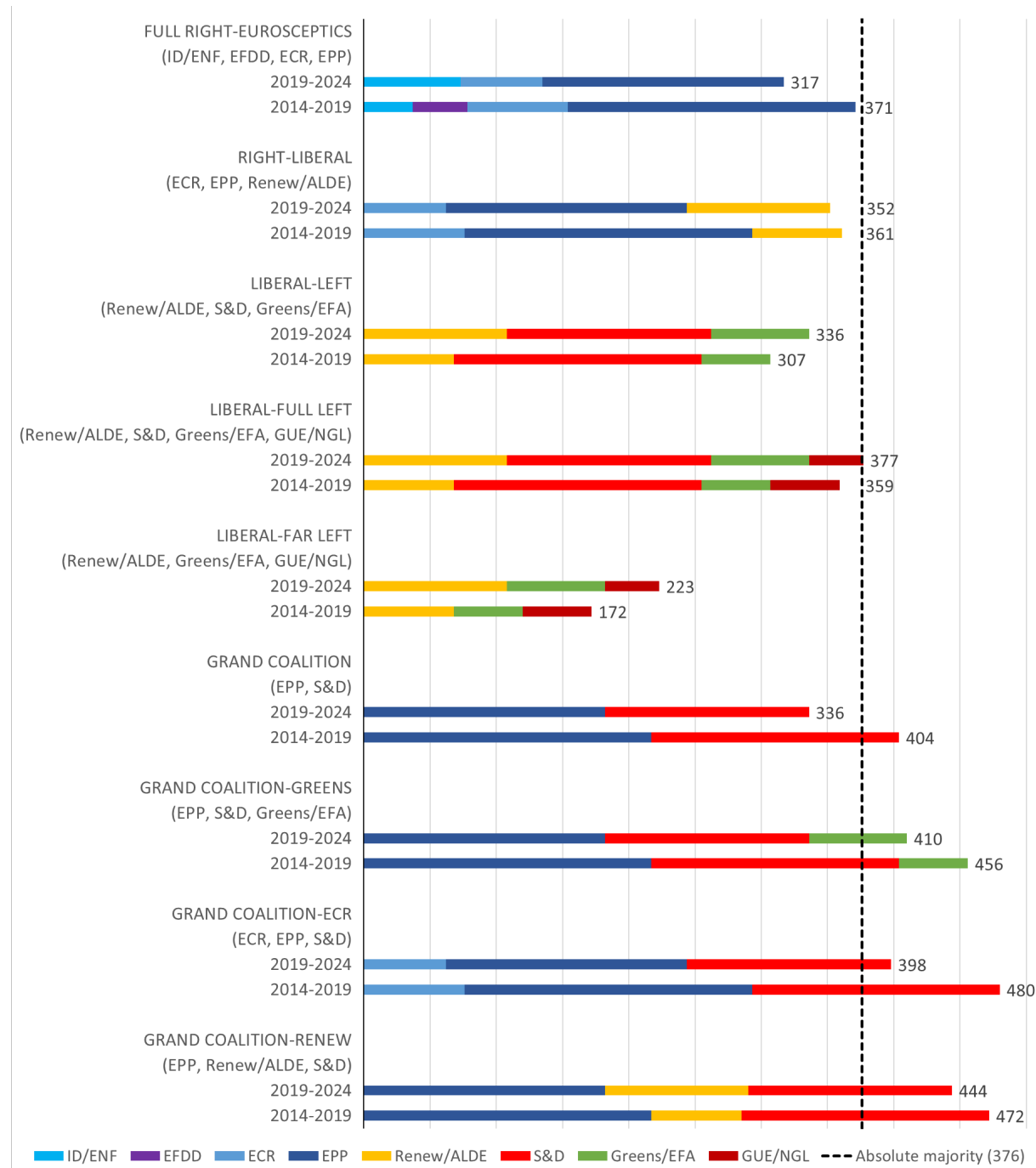
Sources: European Parliament (2019a) and Financial Times (2019)

TOWARDS A POLITICAL IMPASSE?

Therefore, the presence of Eurosceptic and populist forces on the wings of the EP continues to put pressure on mainstream groups. If anything, the process of forming coalitions has become even more arduous than in the past (Ripoll Servent 2018).

Figure 2 presents some examples of potential coalitions, chosen for their ideological proximity or likelihood based on past coalition patterns. Only a Liberal-full left coalition (made up of Renew, S&D, Greens and GUE/NGL) or a combination of the grand coalition with either Greens, ECR or Renew would manage to breach the absolute majority threshold of 376 MEPs. Certainly, an absolute majority is not needed in most cases as legislation passed at first or early second reading only needs the support of a simple majority. This is particularly relevant, now that most legislation does not reach the second reading stage; in the period 2019–2016, 89 per cent of files were passed in first reading and ten per cent in early second reading (European Parliament 2019b: 3). However, we know that despite, it being a rare occurrence, the shadow of second reading weighs heavily on MEPs and that, despite not needing it, they always try to reach broader majorities than those strictly necessary for a simple majority. This is because a broader support for the EP’s mandate puts the rapporteur in a stronger position when negotiating with the Council and the Commission in trilogues. Therefore, tight majorities might make it more difficult for the EP to be successful in inter-institutional battles, since rapporteurs are often afraid of losing the necessary support in committee and plenary and are, therefore, less effective in negotiations (Ripoll Servent 2018).

Fig 2: Playing the coalition game



If we compare the coalition patterns of the eighth (2014–2019) and ninth (2019–2024) legislatures, we see three specific trends. First, it has become very difficult to build clear left-wing or right-wing coalitions, especially if mainstream groups wish to continue using the ‘cordon sanitaire’ to exclude hard Eurosceptics like the ID group. Indeed, only the left-wing groups could reach an absolute majority, but to do so, they would need to include both the liberal (Renew) group and the soft-Eurosceptic GUE/NGL (Liberal-full left coalition in the figure). In comparison, if the EPP tried to form a right-wing coalition, it could not do so while maintaining the ‘cordon sanitaire’; an ECR-EPP-Renew coalition would only reach 352 out of 376 (Right-liberal in the figure). Only by accepting the votes of Renew and the ID group could they form a right-wing coalition. Therefore, the 2019 electoral results reinforced the trend towards the centre and the blurring of the left-right divide. Second, it became almost

impossible to build coalitions without the larger groups. Despite having lost significant support in the elections, the EPP and S&D groups are still indispensable to form stable coalitions, which means that the smaller groups are still dependent on them. For instance, a liberal-left coalition that excluded the S&D would fall very far from the absolute majority with only 223 seats (Liberal-far left coalition on the figure). Finally, despite the necessary support of the larger groups, the ninth legislative term offers a chance to break away from the 'cartel' system that dominated previous legislatures. Indeed, contrary to the 2014-2019 term, a 'grand coalition' of EPP and S&D would not be sufficient to ensure an absolute majority any longer. The 'grand coalition' in the ninth legislative term only reaches 336 seats compared to the 404 of the previous term. This gives more power to smaller groups like Renew (444 seats in a Grand coalition-Renew alliance), the Greens (410 seats in a Grand coalition-Greens union) and the ECR (398 seats in the case of the Grand coalition-ECR joining forces), since they might become king-makers in many decisions. At the same time, they may turn into the 'squeezed-middle', since they will always need to rely on the wishes of the larger groups, which often derives into a 'tyranny of the majority' (Ripoll Servent 2015; Hausemer 2006).

In sum, these patterns show that, when it comes to coalition dynamics in the 2019-2024 Parliament, we can expect stability rather than change. The shift towards the centre has been reinforced, which potentially strengthens the role of Emmanuel Macron's 'neither right nor left' vision of European politics. If EP groups wish to form either right-wing or left-wing coalitions, they will need to continue counting on the support of soft Eurosceptics like the ECR and GUE/NGL.

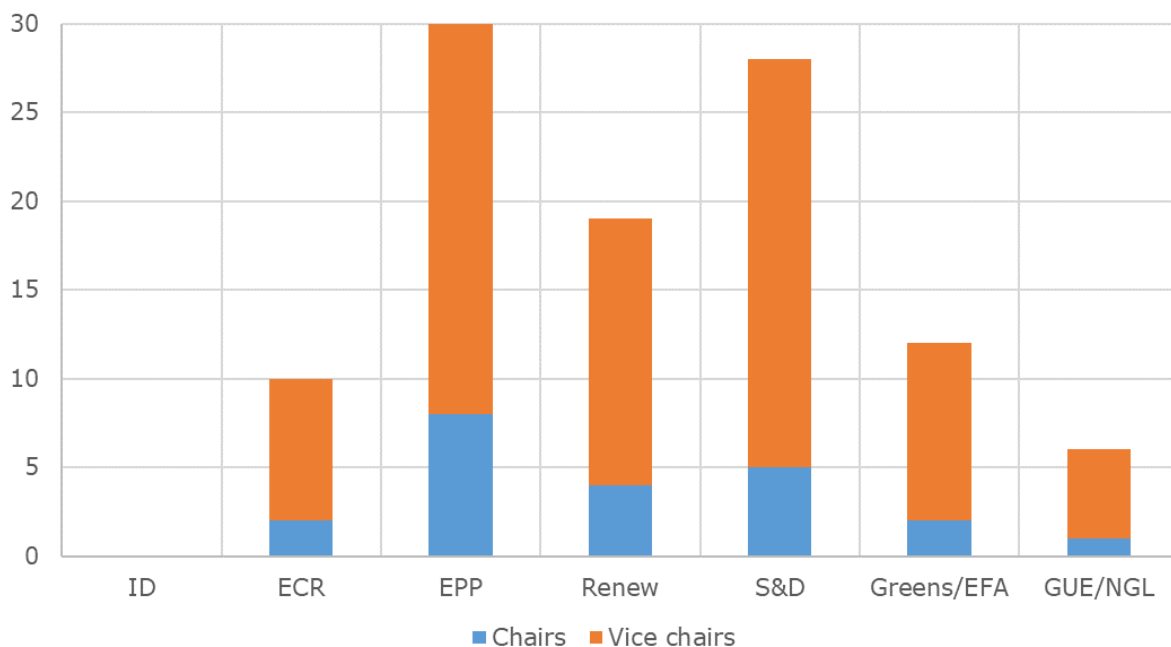
SANITISING THE INTERNAL WORKINGS OF THE EP

These dynamics are made more complicated by the use of a 'cordon sanitaire' in the daily life of the EP. In the eighth legislature, we saw how the use of the 'cordon sanitaire' applied particularly to those that were perceived as hard Eurosceptics (Ripoll Servent and Panning 2019). This hid a wide range of Eurosceptic types: from those who refused to participate in the legislative work of the EP (for example UKIP) to those who were seen as insiders and included fully in the daily life of the Parliament (for instance the United Kingdom Conservatives as part of the ECR group). The 'cordon sanitaire' was particularly harmful for MEPs who wanted to participate but were often prevented from doing so because they were members of a hard Eurosceptic group. This affected first and foremost M5S MEPs, who were keen to participate but were seen as outsiders by mainstream groups due to their affiliation to the EFDD, considered a hard Eurosceptic group.

Only a few months into the ninth legislature, it has already become clear that the use of the 'cordon sanitaire' continues. Mainstream groups have already used it to exclude Eurosceptics from getting key positions in the new parliament. First, the EPP, S&D and Renew concluded an informal agreement so that neither the candidate proposed by the ID group (Italian Lega MEP Mara Bizzotto) nor by the ECR (Polish MEP Zdzisław Krasnodębski) managed to get elected as vice-president. Surprisingly, for the first time ever, a non-attached member of the M5S (Fabio Massimo Castaldo, who had already served as vice-president between 2017 and 2019) did manage to win enough support and became the fourteenth vice-president (Euobserver 2019a). This signals that M5S MEPs might be drifting into acceptability and are not seen in the same light as other Eurosceptics anymore. For the ID and ECR groups, it means that the former will not sit in the Bureau (responsible for organising the political life of the EP) and the ECR will only do so because one of its members (Polish MEP Karol Karski) acts as a Quaestor (responsible for the EP's administration and working conditions). Although this might seem a technical detail, the Bureau is responsible for decisions on the funding for political parties, appointing the Secretary-General and issues of internal organisation such as harassment. In addition, vice-presidents have other tasks, such as coordinating inter-institutional relations, relations with the press or national parliaments. Therefore, the absence of vice-presidents affects the ability of these groups to be kept in the loop and have their say on matters that might have direct implications for them.

Second, the ‘cordon sanitaire’ has been particularly effective to undo the proportional distribution of committee offices among political groups. Theoretically, chairs and vice-chairs are distributed proportionally following the D’Hondt rules. The choice of candidates depends largely on the preferences of the groups, their size (larger groups have priority) and internal bargains among national delegations. Each chair and vice-chair then need to be voted into office by their respective committee. It is at this point that the D’Hondt rule might be violated. In each election, there are instances of committees deviating from the proportional distribution and voting someone of their choice. For instance, in 2014, the Petitions committee ‘revolted’ against the chair-presumptive (an EFDD MEP) and voted instead for a liberal member (Ripoll Servent 2018: 52). The same happened this time with the two committees that should have been allocated to the ID group (see Figure 3). Mainstream groups managed to apply the ‘cordon sanitaire’ so effectively that the far-right group could not even obtain the vice-chairs they were allocated in several committees (Politico 2019b). To help better understand the effects of the cordon sanitaire, one should keep in mind that, with 73 MEPs, the ID group has only one seat less than the Greens (74 MEPs).

Fig 3: Number of chairs and vice-chairs per political group



It did not help that the ID group nominated two French members of Rassemblement National as chairs of the Agriculture (Maxette Pirbakas) and Legal Affairs (Gilles Lebreton) committees. These two committees were seen as particularly sensitive. When it comes to the Agriculture committee, the fact that Rassemblement National wishes to re-nationalise the Common Agriculture Policy was seen as particularly problematic. As for the Legal Affairs committee, since it deals with issues such as rule of law and parliamentary immunity, having a far-right party chairing it seemed to contravene its very purpose. Eventually, Norbert Lins (German EPP MEP) was elected chair of the Agriculture committee and Lucy Nethsingha (British liberal MEP) became the chair of the Legal Affairs committee. The latter case shows how, despite the uncertainty of Brexit, mainstream British MEPs are still perceived to be a better choice than ID members. Obviously, since non-attached MEPs are not considered for committee positions, none of the M5S or Brexit Party members were elected as (vice-)chairs.

The effectiveness of the ‘cordon sanitaire’ is, however, a *trompe-l’oeil*. First, although it was applied to exclude systematically hard Eurosceptics, it was more selective when it comes to soft Eurosceptics. There, it might only be applied in very visible cases, such as Poland’s former Prime Minister Beata Maria Szydlo, who was rejected as chair of the employment committee due to her association with the

Law and Justice (PiS) party's efforts to undermine the rule of law in Poland (Euobserver 2019b). At the same time, other ECR members belonging to far-right populist parties managed to secure vice-chairmanships in various committees. For instance, Mazaly Aguilar, member of the Spanish far-right party VOX, was elected as vice-chair of the Agriculture committee, while Raffaele Stancanelli, who belongs to the Fratelli d'Italia, managed to do the same for the very sensitive Legal Affairs committee. Also, a member of the newly created Dutch Forum voor Democratie (Derk Jan Eppink), a direct competitor of Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid, managed to secure support as vice-chair of the highly influential Economic and Monetary Affairs committee. This shows that the use of the 'cordon sanitaire' is often a tool used to signal disapproval towards certain groups or national parties rather than a systematic system to segregate far right and populist parties.

The second shortcoming of the 'cordon sanitaire' is its effectiveness when it comes to Eurosceptic and populist parties inside mainstream groups. The most problematic case was that of Hungarian members of Fidesz, formally suspended from the EPP but still part of it. On the one hand, the election of Fidesz members as vice-presidents or committee (vice-)chairs opened a cleavage between and inside mainstream parties. For instance, the decision to support the candidature of Livia Jaroka for vice-president (a position that she already held in the previous legislature) opened a cleft inside the liberal group, with some delegations defecting from the group's voting directives, and was also openly criticised by the Greens (Euobserver 2019a). Similarly, the choice of EPP Balázs Hidvéghi as vice-chair for the Civil Liberties committee was so heavily criticised by all other groups (the MEP acted as communications chief for Viktor Orbán and had very critical views on migration) that the EPP decided to do a U-turn and requested to postpone the vote to a later date (Euobserver 2019b). This logic, however, did not extend to all candidates, meaning that Tamás Deutsch did manage to win enough support to become vice-chair in the Budgetary Control committee (Politico 2019b).

At the same time, with more populist forces inside mainstream groups, there is more room for games of allegiance and support across these two camps. Here again, Fidesz became the most obvious choice to lend a hand to hard Eurosceptics. For instance, József Szájer, a Fidesz member who chaired the first meeting of the Legal Affairs committee, expressed his support for the ID candidate:

I would like to ask you, as the legal affairs committee, to observe the old traditions of the rule of law of our committees and elections, which is based on agreements by political groups ... We have worked with those rules for 40 years, and if those agreements are not upheld, the consequences are unforeseeable. (Politico 2019b)

These dynamics show that the increased polarisation inside the EP is becoming increasingly difficult to manage, since the 'cordon sanitaire' is not able to neatly differentiate between 'desirable' and 'undesirable'. The pressure exerted by populist parties comes also from soft-Eurosceptic and mainstream MEPs, which opens a door to new cleavages among mainstream parties. It is a good example of how the end of the grand coalition might lead to a 'squeezed middle', forcing groups like Renew to choose between being part of the new 'grand coalition' even if it means sacrificing their ideals or abstaining from participating and run the risk of not being taken into account in future agreements. It might also reduce the chances to build alliances with the Greens, putting them in a similar situation, where they need to choose between upholding their positions and being a partner in coalitions with the EPP and S&D.

CONCLUSION: THE BIGGER PICTURE

These considerations may sound like unimportant political wrangling, but they do have consequences for the quality of democracy and representation in the EU. First, as we have seen, the 'cordon sanitaire' is effective and also very visible: it excludes those who are seen as too radical or objectionable,

especially if they are well-known or visible figures as in the case of Poland's former Prime Minister Beata Maria Szydlo. This practice helped over the years to keep Eurosceptics and populists in check. For instance, their exclusion from leadership posts allowed for a gradual formalisation of the EP's rules of procedure, making it more difficult to profit financially from EP funding or use the plenary as a tribune. At the same time, these strategies also play into the populists' hands, since it makes it easier for them to portray the EU as being an elitist project detached from its citizens and excluding those who voice non-mainstream opinions. Therefore, with the boundaries of the 'cordon sanitaire' gradually expanding towards the mainstream, there is a need to pay more attention to potential backlashes that might lead to a rebounding of Eurosceptic and populist parties in the future.

Second, Euroscepticism and populism have ceased to be a phenomenon exclusive to the EP. These parties now also sit in the European Council and, to some extent, the European Commission. Therefore, polarisation is not only a challenge for the EP but for the EU's political system as a whole. The difficulties in finding agreements and compromises could already be sensed in the last legislature, especially in highly politicised issues such as migration, where it proved impossible for the European Council to find a common solution to the failures in the EU's asylum system (Ripoll Servent 2019a). The increased polarisation among member states also shaped the selection of candidates for the EU's top jobs, which showed the coordinated efforts of mainstream (centrist) parties to maintain control of the main positions but also the capacity of populist parties such as Fidesz to veto certain contenders like Frans Timmermans (Euractiv 2019c).

Therefore, the pressure of polarisation and politicisation is likely to become a determinant of political life within, but also between, the EU institutions. Over the past years, we have seen how the European Council has made inroads into the legislative game (Bressanelli and Chelotti 2019; Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015). With polarisation raising more conflicts among member states, this activist role of the European Council might cast a long shadow over the other institutions, especially if it stresses inter- and intra-institutional conflicts on the extent and depth of European integration. The new European Commission might then need to navigate different understandings of what the EU stands for, not only in terms of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, but also in its core values and self-perceptions. It might then be necessary to move beyond past conceptions of EU institutions as supranational or intergovernmental and start thinking rather in terms of partisan alliances and broader coalitions that support the Commission's choice for Europe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research has been financed by the DFG (RI 2536/3-1) in the framework of an Open Research Area project on 'Democratic Legitimacy in the EU: Inside the "Black Box" of Informal Trilogues'.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Research Article

Backsliding Away? The Quality of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe

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Citation

Stanley, B. (2019). 'Backsliding Away? The Quality of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 343-353.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1122>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The emergence in Central and Eastern Europe of populist and illiberal political parties, some of which have succeeded in gaining power and implementing controversial reforms, has prompted concern about the condition of democracy in countries of the region and attempts to theorise and explain these changes. Starting from the premise that neither overly negative nor overly positive assessments of democratic quality give an adequate picture of reality, this paper draws upon comparative data measuring several aspects of democracy to identify broad patterns of democratic development in the region. It concludes that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe fall into three broad categories: those where consolidated democracy is currently stable; those where there is clear evidence of backsliding from consolidated democracy; and those where there is evidence of backsliding prior to full consolidation of democracy. These differences notwithstanding, it is clear that the quality and durability of democracy in the region is more fragile and provisional than commonly assumed.

Keywords

Populism; Liberal democracy; Central and Eastern Europe; Backsliding; Consolidation

It is hard for the casual observer to know quite what to make of the present state of democracy in the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).¹ Are they ‘normal countries’ that ‘[in] most ways... now look like any others at similar levels of economic development’ (Shleifer and Treisman 2014: 93) and demonstrate ‘the superiority and continuing promise’ of capitalism and liberal democracy (Shleifer and Treisman 2014: 103)? Or has the ‘populist and anti-liberal wave sweeping Central and Eastern Europe’ (Bugaric and Ginsburg 2016, 69) pushed these countries away from the European Union (EU) mainstream (Ágh 2016, 279)?

As is often the case, the truth contains elements of both these interpretations. The European liberal tradition provided a normative and institutional blueprint for countries of the region seeking to make the transition to democracy, and, as comparisons with countries that took a different path after the collapse of communism show, following this path has made significant contributions to economic prosperity and political and social stability. Yet at a time when the superiority of the liberal model is in doubt, illiberal political and economic practices are starting to strike political entrepreneurs as ‘credible and legitimate alternatives’ (Ekiert 2012: 68). While the emergence of populist and illiberal movements in the CEE region remains uneven, there are abundant prospects for their further success.

Nevertheless, popular notions of a region caught in the throes of democratic backsliding overlook the presence and persistence of different patterns of democratic quality and change in that quality. Drawing on data that measure the quality of democracy across its several aspects, I argue that CEE democracies vary in three key respects: the extent of deterioration in democratic quality; the extent to which this is the product of deliberate political agency; and the extent to which we can speak of ‘backsliding’ as opposed to a failure of democracy to consolidate itself adequately in the first place.

VARIETIES OF DE-DEMOCRATISATION

Our understanding of the nature of democracies in CEE reflects the model of democratisation these countries were expected to implement following transition from communism. The procedural and polyarchic conception of democracy (Dahl 1971) provided the basic prerequisites: free, fair and regular elections with full active and passive enfranchisement. In the early years of post-communist transition, the simplest test of whether a country had achieved a 'consolidated' democracy was whether or not those who held power were willing to relinquish it.

Yet democracy and democratic quality are two different things. The rotation of political elites in power is no guarantee that citizens are genuinely playing a role in the determination of policy: 'democracy is a set of formal possibilities for citizen rule; democratic quality assesses whether citizen rule exists' (Roberts 2009: 25). Scrutiny of democratic quality involves the assessment of procedural quality, in the sense of evaluating how free and fair elections are and the extent to which citizens are genuinely able to participate in the electoral process. However, democratic quality rests not only on the power to select and to sanction, but also to exert control over policy makers in between elections (Roberts 2009: 34).

Recent scholarly interest in the deteriorating quality of apparently consolidated democracies has led to numerous attempts to conceptualise this process. With the decline of classic coups d'état, executive coups and vote fraud (Bermeo 2016: 7-8), scholarly attention has turned to practices such as executive aggrandisement and the nullification of institutions of accountability (Landau 2013: 189), strategic manipulation of the electoral process that falls short of outright fraud (Bermeo 2016: 13), and the use of subtly cumulative repressive measures against civil society and the media (Huq and Ginsburg 2018: 137-138).

Most of the approaches to de-democratisation in CEE countries understand it, explicitly or otherwise, as strategic and agent-led: 'a gradual, deliberate, but open-ended process' (Sitter and Bakke 2019: 1). These approaches stress the conscious subversion and nullification of liberal-democratic institutions by an increasingly over-mighty executive. However, some have rejected an exclusively voluntaristic conception of the term, arguing that we also need to understand the factors which shape the opportunity structures exploited by illiberal entrepreneurs, such as 'fading conditionalities, corruption, and economic crisis' (Dawson and Hanley 2016: 23). If backsliding is an active process, it occurs in contexts of 'democratic decay' (Daly 2019). To understand de-democratisation, we must 'distinguish the causes of vulnerability to backsliding from the proximate causes of actual backsliding' and integrate both supply-side and demand-side factors in our model of de-democratisation (Andersen 2019: 647).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full theoretical elaboration or application of such a model, but what is clear from the discussion of the cases which follow is that the countries of CEE vary in the scope of change, the degree of change, and the role of agency.

MEASURING THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

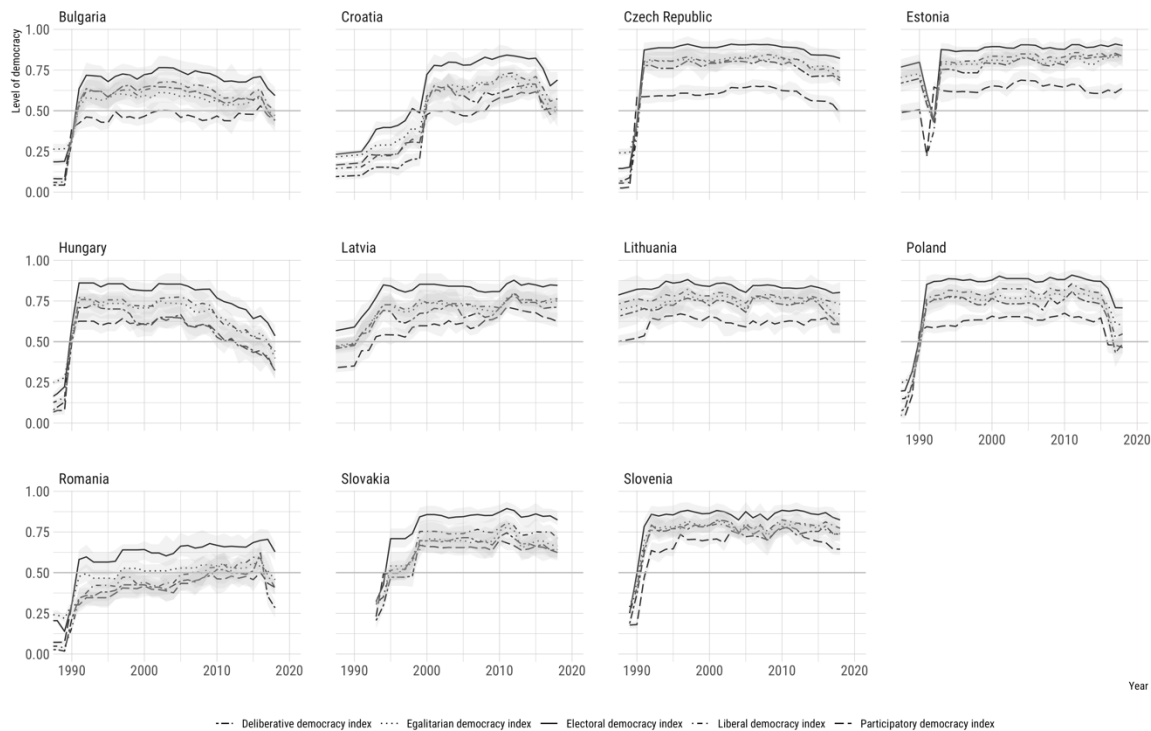
To measure and compare the quality of democracy across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we need to ascertain not only whether democracy is present in the form of institutions and norms of polyarchy, but to what extent it fulfils its core promise of popular rule. The most comprehensive comparative source for this purpose is the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (Pemstein, Marquardt, Tzelgov, Wang, et al. 2019; Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, et al. 2019), which aggregates expert scores to provide measures of democracy on five distinct indexes.

The first of these, the electoral component of democracy, corresponds to the essential concept of polyarchy, which it captures through variables measuring whether executives are elected, whether elections are free, fair and frequent, whether there is freedom of expression and access to alternative sources of information, whether there is freedom of association, and whether citizenship is inclusive, offering universal suffrage (Coppedge, Lindberg, Skaaning and Teorell 2015: 582). The other four components put the flesh of popular sovereignty on the bones of proceduralism. The liberal component ‘embodies the intrinsic value of protecting individual and minority rights against potential “tyranny of the majority” and state repression more generally’. The participatory component ‘embodies the values of direct rule and active participation by citizens in all political processes’. The deliberative component focuses on the extent to which reasoned dialogue prevails over ‘emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests, or coercion’ in the decision-making process. Finally, the egalitarian component reflects the observation that ‘material and immaterial inequalities inhibit the actual exercise of formal rights and liberties’ (Coppedge, Lindberg, Skaaning and Teorell 2015: 582-583).

THE BROAD PICTURE: STABILITY, BACKSLIDING AND ARRESTED CONSOLIDATION

Figure 1 shows the level of democracy on each of the five V-Dem measures since 1989 (or the first applicable date). There are a number of common features. Most countries established a reasonably well functioning electoral democracy relatively quickly after transition from communism, the exceptions being Croatia and Romania.² In all cases, electoral democracy is the highest-performing indicator, which is in keeping with scores observed for the developed democracies of Western Europe (results not displayed). On the other hand, participatory democracy is in most instances the lowest-performing indicator. Again, this is a common pattern in democracies of longer standing and not necessarily a sign of democratic immaturity.

These common points aside, there are some clear differences. One group of countries exhibits general stability on each of the measures. In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia there is fluctuation on some indexes, but the longer-term trend is stable. In Hungary, Poland and, to a certain extent, the Czech Republic, democracies which appeared to be consolidated have experienced significant reversals in the quality of democracy over the last few years, with a long, slow decline in Hungary since 2010, the beginnings of gradual decline in Czech Republic, and a swift reversal in Poland. Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania form a third category of countries in which the process of democratic consolidation appears to have been arrested in recent years.

Fig 1: The quality of democracy in selected CEE countries

Source: Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, et al. (2019)

RELATIVELY STABLE DEMOCRACIES: ESTONIA, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, SLOVAKIA AND SLOVENIA

The Baltic states, Slovakia and Slovenia are all consolidated democracies and currently show little sign of de-democratisation. Each country has established a robust procedural democracy. However, in several cases the stability of other aspects reflects a lack of progress in solving persistent flaws in democratic quality.

On regaining independence, the three Baltic states all faced challenges to the democratic order which were resolved 'through peaceful constitutional mechanisms' (Auers 2015: 2). Estonia stands out for a particularly high quality of democracy, both by the standards of its Baltic neighbours and by the standards of the region. Problems include the persistence of public and private-sector corruption and the exclusion from the democratic process of stateless ethnic Russians, who comprise approximately six per cent of the Estonian population. Surprisingly, in light of Estonia's innovative approach to e-governance services, levels of participatory democracy are no greater than those observed elsewhere in the region. Lithuania and Latvia lag slightly behind Estonia and have experienced greater fluctuation in democratic quality but show no sign of backsliding. Both face similar problems of political corruption, socio-economic exclusion, and the exclusion of minorities.

Slovenia made a swift transition to democracy after achieving independence in 1991. It experienced political crisis and mass protests at the beginning of its third decade, after the onset of economic crisis in 2010 revealed the extent of monopolistic, rent-seeking and nepotistic behaviour among an entrenched elite, with 'formal democratic rules and institutions often operat[ing] in the shadow of informal networks and practices' (Berend and Bugarcic 2015: 778). Corruption, unequal application of the rule of law, the social and economic marginalisation of the Roma, and discrimination against LGBT

people continue to be barriers to the improvement of Slovenian democracy. The V-Dem figures indicate a significant decline in the quality of participatory democracy in Slovenia over the past decade, but not to the extent that it stands out from other countries in this regard.

On the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Slovakia swiftly developed the institutions of electoral democracy, but democratic consolidation was stymied by the illiberal nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) until the late 1990s, when opposition forces cooperated to oust it and return Slovakia to the path of liberal democracy (Dawson and Hanley 2016: 28). Since then, it has experienced periods of party-system turbulence that have sometimes descended into political instability, but in spite of concerns about the intentions and influence of populist parties, and the legacy of the HZDS period, it has not undergone a sustained period of backsliding. Yet while the integrity of the electoral system is not in question, corruption remains a particularly prominent issue in Slovak public life, both with respect to privatisation and to the workings of the judiciary. The egalitarian aspect of democracy also remains underdeveloped, particularly in the case of the persistent problems of exclusion faced by the Roma population, the underrepresentation of women in politics and bias against LGBT people.

BACKSLIDING DEMOCRACIES: CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY, POLAND

While the course of democratic consolidation has not been smooth in most of the countries of the region, in three cases there are clear signs of backsliding, whether the gradual but inexorable decline observed in Hungary, the precipitous fall in Poland, or the less pronounced but nevertheless significant downturn in the Czech Republic.

Hungary is the standard bearer of democratic backsliding in CEE. For the first decade and a half after transition from communism, democracy in Hungary was relatively stable, with the rotation in power of conservative and socialist blocs, neither of which contested the essential macro-political trajectory of Hungarian democratisation. However, the political crisis that followed the leaking of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány's admission of repeatedly lying to the electorate about Hungary's economic performance and the impact of the economic crisis on the Hungarian public from 2008 onwards enfeebled the governing socialist-liberal alliance and opened a space for Viktor Orbán's conservative Fidesz party to turn sharply away from liberal democracy (Andersen 2019: 659).

Fidesz's landslide victory in the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections gave it the two-thirds majority it needed to make unilateral changes to the constitution. The course then taken by Hungary was explicitly justified as a departure from liberal conceptions of constitutional order (Berend and Bugarcic 2015: 781). The extent of Fidesz's initial victory made it easy for the party to argue that it had more than a simple mandate to govern; that it embodied the national interest 'not in constant debates but in its natural way' (Enyedi 2016: 11). The dysfunctional character of Hungarian democracy prior to Fidesz's taking power could easily be blamed upon the pluralistic ethos of liberal democracy, which allegedly subordinated efficiency and the interests of the national community to enfeebled governance and individual rights.

Accordingly, Fidesz embarked on a programme of fundamental reform that has taken the country away from liberal democracy. Taking advantage of its constitutional majority in parliament, Fidesz promulgated a new constitution that took very little account of the interests of opposition or civil society, and which effectively 'ringfenced' aspects of policy in the area of culture, religion and the economy by requiring a two-thirds majority for their amendment. Having entrenched its ideological preferences in the constitution, Fidesz then set about re-centralising political power and executing the political capture of successive independent institutions by packing them with party loyalists: in particular the constitutional court, the judiciary, public and private media, the office of the prosecutor,

the tax authorities and the election commission (Scheppelle 2018: 550; Buzogány and Varga 2019: 820-821).

These reforms have had a direct impact on the quality of Hungarian democracy in numerous respects: the politicisation of institutions of state has subordinated the rule of law to the rule of the majority; restrictions on the freedom of civil society organisations and extensive regulation of private and public media have eroded political pluralism; and electoral reforms designed to favour Fidesz (including the redrawing of constituency boundaries and the extension of the franchise to non-resident Hungarians, among whom support for Fidesz is disproportionately high compared with the electorate overall) has taken electoral democracy ever further away from the pluralistic ideal (Herman 2015: 259-262). While '[o]ne of the defining features of democratic backsliding' is the maintenance of competitive elections (Sitter and Bakke 2019: 9), without which there can be no democracy, in Hungary even genuinely competitive elections are now in peril, given the extent to which the playing field has been tilted.

Poland's backsliding was explicitly inspired by Fidesz's example. After a defeat in 2011 which consigned his party to a second term in opposition, Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the populist-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS), said 'I am deeply convinced that there will come a day when we will have Budapest on the Vistula'. Since the early years of the 1990s, Kaczyński had evinced scepticism about the liberal elites who implemented Poland's democratic transition, and this gradually congealed into an antipathy for the idea of liberal democracy itself. Having learned lessons in the sequencing and strategy of attacks on key institutions during a brief and ill-fated period of a coalition government in 2006 and 2007 (see Stanley 2016 for details), on returning to power in 2015 PiS embarked upon a programme of illiberal reforms that rivalled Fidesz for ambition and led to a decline in the quality of democracy swifter and steeper than that observed in Hungary.

In the absence of a legislative supermajority, PiS was unable to make direct changes to the constitution that would have allowed it to proceed unimpeded. Instead, one of the first priorities was to paralyse the work of the Constitutional Tribunal by amending the law governing its functioning, and then to capture it through the appointment of political loyalists. Having transformed the Tribunal from "an effective, counter-majoritarian device to scrutinize laws ... into a positive supporter of enhanced majoritarian powers" (Sadurski 2019: 84), PiS then turned its attentions to the judicial system, attempting to purge the court system from the top down by extending the power of an executive-dominated legislature to appoint court presidents and using disciplinary procedures to selectively harass and intimidate independent judges (Scheppelle 2018: 553). These measures brought PiS into conflict with the European Commission, which initiated for the first time its rule of law procedure under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union. Aside from the rule of law crisis, PiS also followed Fidesz in using its dominance in the legislature to marginalise the role of the opposition in scrutinising the government, legislating to facilitate the politicisation of the civil service, transforming public media into a mouthpiece of the executive, and centralising state control over the governance and funding of civil society organisations (Sadurski 2019: 132-146). Poland's rapid descent on all measures of democracy reflects not only the political capture of key democratic institutions, but also the functional hollowing out of those institutions via the abandonment of the norm of pluralism. However, in contrast to Hungary electoral democracy remains relatively unaffected, albeit impaired by the advantage PiS gains from public media bias.

If Hungary and Poland are unambiguous cases of backsliding, the Czech Republic is better characterised as a 'weakening democracy' (Buščíková and Guasti 2018: 315) the quality of which has been eroded over the last decade. While the Czech Republic has tended to be seen as one of the more robust CEE democracies, it has experienced persistent problems of corruption and accountability attributable to the permeability of the border between political institutions and business interests (Dawson and Hanley 2016: 27). Concerns about the descent of Czech politics into a 'plutocratic' (Bugarcic and Kuhelj 2018: 24) or 'technocratic' (Buščíková and Guasti 2018: 315) form of populism were amplified by the

rise of billionaire businessman Andrej Babiš and his party, the Association of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO). While ANO's platform is avowedly anti-ideological and lacks the explicitly illiberal and exclusionist rhetoric of Fidesz or PiS, Babiš's murky background in the interstices of business and the state and 'impatien[ce] with the give-and-take of democratic politics' (Bugarcic and Kuhelj 2018: 24) has prompted concerns about the prospects for the further delegitimisation of liberal democratic institutions and movement towards '[running] the state as a firm' (Buštková and Guasti 2018: 320).

ARRESTED DEVELOPERS: BULGARIA, CROATIA, ROMANIA

De-democratisation is not always a reversion from consolidated democracy. In most countries of the Balkans and South-Eastern Europe, democratic consolidation, which is a process as well as a destination, has taken longer to achieve. The three cases examined here have exhibited different trajectories but arrived at a similar outcome: failure to converge with regional leaders.

In the case of Croatia, the armed conflicts that emerged in the wake of the disintegration of Yugoslavia significantly impeded transition to democracy and the development of democratic institutions, with the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) able to manipulate electoral rules and the output of the mass media to its benefit. Only following the victory of the opposition in 2000 was the process of consolidation 'unfrozen' (Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink 2009: 1613). As the V-Dem data in Figure 1 show, since then Croatia has been more democratic than not on each of the indicators, but in recent years has begun to regress. A number of factors threaten Croatia's weakly consolidated democracy, including persistently high levels of corruption and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

While Bulgaria's transition to and consolidation of democracy was swifter than that of Romania, by their accession to the EU in 2007 both countries had reached a stagnant equilibrium, with democratic quality neither rising to converge with that of regional leaders, nor regressing. However, in recent years there has been a movement in the other direction: the most recent V-Dem report classifies Bulgaria as an 'autocratizing' regime (Lührmann, Gastaldi, Grahn, Lindberg et al. 2019: 11), while Romania escapes such a designation only by the width of a confidence interval.

In both countries, corruption has been a significant enough problem to require ongoing monitoring through the EU's Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. While there have been several recent convictions of high-profile politicians in Romania, corruption has become 'the most important cleavage in Romanian politics' with anti-corruption campaigners falling victim to the temptations of corruption after entering office (Mungiu-Pippidi 2018: 108). The political instability this generates has impeded government efficiency, and the omnipresence of corrupt practices continues to hamper the development of a politically neutral civil service, a genuinely independent judiciary, media pluralism, and a predictable environment for business and investment.

Bulgarian democracy is marked by many of the same deficiencies. While elections remain free and fair (if not, by V-Dem's measures, of particularly high quality) in recent years voices critical of the governing GERB party have been increasingly squeezed out of public and private media, while pro-government media outlets have generated a climate of hostility toward non-governmental organisations that pursue an autonomous line. While Bulgaria has not seen a coordinated assault on the independence of the judiciary to rival that undertaken in Hungary and Poland, GERB loyalists dominate institutions empowered to appoint members of the judiciary and the anti-corruption agencies set up to hold those in power to account (Ganev 2018: 96-98). As a result, Bulgaria risks being trapped in a self-perpetuating semi-consolidated equilibrium, with those in power using their dominance over institutions of control to validate their own legitimacy.

CONCLUSIONS

Backsliding is not the only game in town. As this short, synoptic overview of the quality of democracy in CEE has shown, there are three reasons to reject the 'predominant framing' of a purposeful, consistent departure from the norms and institutions of liberal democracy in the CEE region (Dawson and Hanley 2019: 6).

First, there are several democracies in the region that do not exhibit any sign of change at present. While the lack of further progress in improving democratic quality in the Baltic states, Slovakia and Slovenia requires attention, there are no immediate reasons for concern about de-democratisation in these countries.

Second, in those countries that have experienced a recent decline in the quality of democracy, causal factors differ. Hungary and Poland are clear cases of the intentional subversion and capture of liberal-democratic institutions and the abandonment of the norms of pluralism and individual freedoms upon which those institutions rest. Yet the prominence of these cases has tended to obscure the existence of other forms of declining democratic quality in which deliberate agency plays a less prominent role, as in the Czech Republic.

Third, several cases draw into question the idea that backsliding is something that follows 'substantial earlier democratic progress' (Dawson and Hanley 2019: 6). If, as in the cases of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, the quality of existing democracy has lagged behind that of others, are current problems a case of backsliding, or a symptom of arrested democratic consolidation?

If there is a common conclusion to be drawn, it is that the quality of democracy in the region, and its capacity to persist, is more fragile and provisional than many have assumed. While not all countries have experienced concerted attempts at de-democratisation, it should be of particular concern that those countries which have experienced agent-led backsliding - Hungary and Poland - are the ones which were once generally seen to have made the most progress in the consolidation of democracy (Bugarcic and Ginsburg 2016: 70). Others may not necessarily follow, but we cannot be confident of this.

A recent study has convincingly debunked the notion that satisfaction with democracy has declined in recent years (Zilinsky 2019: 2), but this is not necessarily a reason for optimism about the robustness of democracy in CEE countries. The invariance of public satisfaction with democracy across stably consolidated, weakly consolidated and backsliding countries may instead support the conclusion that these attitudes are insensitive to democratic quality and dependent only on the maintenance of the procedural minimum of electoral democracy, or that contentment with democracy adapts to backsliding. The often profound 'discrepancy between the form and substance of liberal democracy in this part of the world' (Berend and Bugarcic 2015: 780) may be reflected in a similar discrepancy between the form of democracy we have assumed CEE publics will be content with, and the substance of the democracies they are willing to accept.

Those concerned with democratic quality in the region find themselves in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, CEE countries clearly need to rethink and redesign democratic institutions to ensure they enjoy stronger normative commitment on the part of political elites and publics alike (Bugarcic 2015: 191). On the other hand, admitting the possibility of different paths to democracy opens a space for precisely those majoritarian, illiberal ideas of political order that, as the cases of Hungary and Poland have shown, ultimately threaten the most basic principles of democratic order.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Consistent with the aim of this special section, in this paper I focus on those countries of the region that are members of the EU. However, the findings are also applicable to a number of countries on the EU's periphery.

² The development of functioning, if imperfect, electoral democracy is understood here as signalled by a country passing the mid-point on the scale, at which point it can be argued that electoral democracy has crossed a threshold separating countries that are more democratic than autocratic from those which are more autocratic than democratic.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Research Article

Is it all about European Democracy? The Motives behind the Institutionalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten

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Citation

Hamřík, L. and Kaniok, P. (2019). 'Is it all about European Democracy? The Motives behind the Institutionalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 354-377. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.950>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The European Parliament elections in 2014 and 2019 were different insofar as European citizens had the possibility to 'directly' influence who could become the next President of the European Commission. This innovation is based on the idea of 'Spitzenkandidaten', where a vote for a given political party also represents a vote for its lead candidate. This article examines the process behind the institutionalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, with attention focused on the actors involved and their motivations for supporting this institutional innovation. Using a qualitative content analysis of EU institutional and party documentation, the article confirms that the Spitzenkandidaten procedure should be perceived as the culmination of a long-term process beginning in the pre-Amsterdam era. It also concludes that the procedure, as firstly applied in 2014, represents the common effort of two supranational institutions and four European political parties. It is also argued that while the emergence of the Spitzenkandidaten is primarily a result of perceived shortcomings of the EU's democratic quality, actors' self-interest was also driving force.

Keywords

Spitzenkandidaten; Lead candidates; EU democracy; European Commission; European Parliament; European political parties

The European Union (EU) has been contending with issues of legitimacy for over half of its existence. The introduction of direct elections in 1979 was important for democratising and legitimising the integration process. In recent years, the EU has intervened in several areas that are salient for EU member states' citizens. This intervention has led to the simultaneous weakening of support for European integration by citizens. The EU and its member states are therefore endeavouring to implement innovative methods which could bring the EU closer, and make it more attractive, to its citizens. One of these innovations is the so-called 'Spitzenkandidaten' procedure.

The Spitzenkandidaten procedure in the EU political system added new elements to political contestation at the European level and transformed the appearance of European Parliamentary election campaigns. Recently, this concrete effort to make European Parliament (EP) elections more attractive has gained significant attention in academic research. Unsurprisingly, attention has focused mainly on the evaluation of the procedure's impact on overall turnout (Hobolt 2014), voters' propensity to cast ballots (Schmitt, Hobolt and Popa 2015), or on new campaign attributes such as debates between candidates (Maier, Faas, Rittberger, Fortin-Rittberger, et al. 2018). However, little is known about the actors responsible for instigating this innovation and their motivations to participate in the Spitzenkandidaten 'experiment'.

This article aims to fill this gap by answering three questions. First, how did the Spitzenkandidaten procedure emerge? Second, who participated in the process of its institutionalisation? Third, and most importantly, what were the motives behind the activities leading to the institutionalisation of the

procedure, and to what extent were the arguments supporting the Spitzenkandidaten idea driven by the debates about democracy at the EU level? This article therefore focuses on the actors behind this institutional innovation, their contribution to the final form of the procedure, their attitudes towards and their motivations for supporting the idea of Spitzenkandidaten, and the development of these factors.

Based on a qualitative content analysis of EU institutional and Euro-party documents over a longer term, the following conclusions are drawn. First, the idea of lead candidates gained political relevance in the mid-1990s, and therefore its realisation in 2014 should be considered a result of a long-term process. Second, key players acted with different intensity depending on variety of factors. The EP was an active proponent during the whole period. The European People's Party (EPP) promoted the Spitzenkandidaten idea from the post-Amsterdam period. The Party of European Socialists (PES) was supportive of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure since the mid-1990s, however, it became more active (alongside the Commission) mainly in the post-Lisbon era. Third, the willingness of actors to support the Spitzenkandidaten procedure was driven not exclusively by democratising motives, but also by actors' self-interest manifested in an effort to strengthen their own position within the European party system, or within the EU.

The article proceeds as follows: the next section describes the current state of knowledge related to the development of the procedure. As we are interested in democratic arguments as factors influencing the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, we then introduce the democratic deficit debate as point of departure for our analytical framework. The data as well as methods used in this study are then explained, before the results are analysed and discussed. The final section summarises the main findings and offers proposals for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several lines of research related to the Spitzenkandidaten. The first could be characterised as elections- and campaign-related. Within this line, there is a focus on the appearance of an electoral campaign and its impact on voting behaviour and electoral turnout, citizens' preferences and other campaign-related issues (for example Schmitt, Hobolt and Popa 2015; Popa, Rohrschneider and Schmitt 2016; Hobolt 2004). The second line relates to the role of media in EU politics. In this regard, the presence of lead candidates in the media and the media's role in providing information about Spitzenkandidaten are of importance (for example Schulze 2016; Maier, Faas, Rittberger, Fortin-Rittberger, et al. 2018; Gattermann, De Vreese and van der Brug 2016). A third line of research is oriented more towards the EU's political system. Here, attention is focused on the nomination of candidates for the presidency, the composition of the Commission, the internal organisation of the Commission, as well as on the consequences for the EU's political system (for example Thomassen 2016; Kassim 2017; Gómez and Wessels 2015; Dinan 2015; Deckarm 2017; Christiansen 2016).

These avenues of research tend to focus on the Spitzenkandidaten procedure's effects on various aspects of EU politics. Our research questions, however, do not necessarily require a discussion of the overall effect of the procedure. This is not to say these studies do not provide useful information about the Spitzenkandidaten procedure's emergence, the actors involved and their motives. Nevertheless, most relevant for our research are studies investigating development of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure and actors' involvement in that process.

It is argued that the EPP played a pivotal role in institutionalising the procedure, at least until 2009. This argument reflects the fact that it was the EPP which proposed its own candidate for the Commission Presidency ahead of EP 2004 and 2009 elections (Westlake 2016; Kassim 2017: 17). The situation changed in 2009. After the EP elections and the re-election of Barroso, it was the PES who

became the more active proponent of the Spitzenkandidaten idea (Reiding and Meijer 2019; Peñalver García and Priestley 2015: 63-64), while the European Green Party (EGP) seemed to have no reservations about nominating their candidate. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe's (ALDE) position remained sceptical, even after 2009 (Kassim 2017; Christiansen 2016).

Besides the Euro-parties, it was both the Commission and the EP who contributed in the early 2010s to the procedure's institutionalisation and realisation by inviting parties to present their lead candidates for the upcoming elections. From the Commission's point of view, personalising the electoral campaign would create a link between voters and candidates. It would increase the legitimacy of the Commission President and, in turn, the whole decision-making process. The EP argued in a similar vein when it emphasised the need for strengthening the legitimacy of the EU and the EP elections' attractiveness for voters, which could lead to higher turnout (Westlake 2016; Kassim 2017: 3-5; Hobolt 2004: 1532; Dinan 2015). The Council was not actively involved in the Spitzenkandidaten institutionalisation. It discussed the idea twice, but only informally (Peñalver García and Priestley 2015).

It is apparent that the arguments based upon perceptions of democracy played an important role in the institutionalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. As Kassim (2017) argues, the procedure is best understood in the context of efforts to respond to democratic deficit debates since Maastricht. From this point of view, the procedure's institutionalisation can be perceived as a result of long-term tendencies (Reiding and Meijer 2019; Christiansen 2016: 994). However, there are also interpretations stressing actors' individual motives for supporting the Spitzenkandidaten idea. In this regard, the EP's involvement is often interpreted as a power grab within the EU inter-institutional relations. An example of how such a power grab can be realised is the interpretation of the treaty provisions by the EP to its benefit. In case of Spitzenkandidaten, the role of the Article 17.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, which states that that the European Council shall propose a candidate for European Commission President after taking into account the EP elections, and after having held appropriate consultations, and its interpretation by the EP are emphasised. It is argued, that this article provides a legal basis for the Spitzenkandidaten procedure (Schimmelfennig 2014; Reiding and Meijer 2019; Peñalver García and Priestley 2015: 56-64; Gómez and Wessels 2015). In accordance with this line of argumentation, the procedure can be seen as an opportunistic act of the EP and particular political groups to gain greater influence over the selection of the Commission President (Kassim, Connolly, Dehousse, Rozenberg et al. 2017: 659). Another interpretation of the Spitzenkandidaten relates to the EU party politics. Here, the PES's initiative in 2009 can be seen as a response to the nomination of a lead candidate by the EPP in 2004 (Janning 2014), and EGP's involvement as an opportunity to increase its visibility (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018: 1469).

It is evident that the emergence of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure is accompanied by rival, but not mutually exclusive explanations. The first one stresses the need for enhancing the quality of EU democracy while the other highlights self-interest of particular actors. We believe that the origin of the different evaluations lies in the absence of studies focusing on actors' motivations. The above-mentioned findings related to the development of the procedure are to some extent discussed in many studies, however mostly only as a brief description of, or introduction to, the procedure. From this point of view, the motives behind the process of institutionalisation are not the primary research question driving existing research. This has important implications for our knowledge since existing studies rely on similar data, and the data needed for answering such questions was gathered in a non-systematic way.

Our article seeks to fill this gap by focusing primarily on actors and their motives for supporting the Spitzenkandidaten idea. We chose 1995 as the starting point of analysis since we believe that the preparation of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in 1997 represents relevant point in the process of amending the procedure used for nomination and appointment of the Commission

President. We followed the period from here until July of 2014, when the Commission President was elected. By focusing on this rather long period, it is possible to follow the development of actors' motives, to evaluate how those motives relate to the debates about democracy at the EU level and to conclude whether the Spitzenkandidaten procedure's institutionalisation should be perceived as result of democratisation debates in the EU, or rather as a result of actors' self-interest.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

Academic discussion addressing the democratic quality of the EU is relatively recent. Its most important point of departure can be identified as the changes delivered by the Maastricht Treaty. Also, subsequent political development in the EU (for example, repeated rejections of Treaty revisions in several EU member states and the extension of sectoral cooperation on the highly sensitive areas or increased support for Eurosceptic parties) has sparked debate over how much sovereignty nation states can relinquish without endangering popular sovereignty at home and how democracy at the EU level should be organised. This lively discussion has resulted in at least four approaches towards EU democracy. As Rittberger (2010) points out, debate on the EU's democratic quality has followed a particular path, starting from a liberal representative approach towards democracy and later on including also republican/communitarian approaches as well as the deliberative perspective. Hand in hand with this three-stream conceptualisation of EU democratic deficit, a fourth approach has been developed which is critical to applying the standards of democratic legitimacy to the EU polity.

There are five representative arguments which make up the liberal representative approach to the democratic deficit. These form the 'standard version of democratic deficit' (Weiler, Haltern and Mayer 1995). This version consists of a set of claims which Føllesdal and Hix (2006) summarise as follows. First, the process of European integration leads to a situation where there is increased executive power while the power of national parliaments is reduced. EU decisions are made primarily by executive actors in the Council and the Commissioners. As powers have shifted to these actors at the EU level, the power of the national parliaments has been reduced, leading to a phenomenon widely known as de-parliamentarisation. Second, the EP is weak. Increases in the powers of the EP have not sufficiently compensated for the loss of the parliamentary control at the national level. Third, there are no 'European elections' as citizens are not able to vote on EU policies, except in periodic referendums on EU membership or treaty change. Even EP elections are not about EU issues, as national parties and the media treat them as mid-term polls on the performance of the governments in power. Fourth, the EU is too distant, which means that citizens cannot understand the EU. The Commission is neither a government, nor a bureaucracy, and is appointed through an obscure procedure rather than being elected directly by the people or by the EP. Finally, as a result of the previous four factors, the EU adopts policies that are not supported by a majority of citizens in many member states, such as a neoliberal regulatory framework for the single market.

European elections, as a channel fuelling the EU political system with direct legitimacy, play a prominent role in the liberal representative approach to the EU's democratic deficit. The prominent presence of elections underscores the key claim of the democratic tradition, that political decisions should be legitimised by those who are affected by them. It is believed that this link is corrosive in the EU, since European elections attract a small portion of voters and represent (in the best case) second-order voting (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Thus, any innovations increasing their first-order character are desirable. The Spitzenkandidaten procedure represents such an innovation.

When speaking about the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, we were interested in identifying the following factors: actor; the procedure's attributes; actors' expectations and motivation. This leads to the analytical framework presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Analytical framework

Category	Subcategories	Operationalisation
Actor	Collective	EU institution, Euro-party, EP political group, member states.
	Individual	Individual politician as MEP.
Attribute		Procedure attributes related to intra-party procedure and to the shape of electoral campaign
Motivations/Expectations	EU democracy	Arguments driven by a need for greater legitimacy of the EU, its institutions or its decision-making process, a more transparent EU, and a desire to change the second-order character of European elections.
	Ideology/power	Arguments related to eventual changes in the balance of power between individual actors involved, arguments perceiving the procedure as a tool for strengthening their own position vis-à-vis another actor in inter-institutional or inter-party relations.

In the context of the actor category, the question is who placed the idea on the agenda and, respectively, who presented their own attitudes related to the procedure. This could be either a collective actor, such as EU institutions or an individual actor, such as a particular politician. In situations when a document was adopted as a common position of an institution, we tried to identify discrepancies among actors' opinions. This was especially the case of the EP. Therefore, we distinguished between the positions of individual EP groups. Additionally, we also differentiated between, and compared attitudes of, EP groups and political parties at the EU level where possible. When the procedure was discussed by an individual, we were interested in their party affiliation. Our second category, procedure aspects/attributes, focuses on specific traits with possibly important implications for intra-party decision-making processes (such as parties' selection procedures) and the shape of an electoral campaign (for example participation in TV debates or personal visits to member states). Here, we were interested in what aspects of the procedure were proposed and who raised such issues.

The third category, motivations/expectations, is as our key target. Here, we distinguish between two analytical subcategories: EU democracy and Ideology and power. The former subcategory reflects the motives rooted in the democratic deficit debate outlined above, whereas the later reflects motives rooted in ideological or power perspectives. Both subcategories were identified as relevant on the basis of existing research that we outlined above.

This analytical framework enables us to structure the analysis as three step process. This starts with (a) the description of the institutionalisation process, and (b) the identification of actors involved. These first two steps provide us with detailed picture of what kind of actor proposed particular content of the procedure. Afterwards, we turn our attention to (c), the actors' motives/expectations and the role of debates about democracy at the EU level in that process.

DATA AND METHOD

This study is based upon a directed qualitative content analysis of documents produced by the Commission, the EP, the European Council (EUCO) and Council of the EU, the European political parties, and the EP groups. The content analysis allowed us a systematic analysis of documents while following individual categories presented above. By using this method, we were able to not only identify relevant analytical categories, but also follow their development (for example changes in actors' motivations) and compare between them. The documents of the EU institutions were found in official document registers, while political party documents were obtained from party websites. Data employed in the

study comes from documents published between the beginning of 1995 and the end of July of 2014 (for information about how these documents were gathered see the appendix).

The second step in the data gathering process consisted of sorting documents based on their relevance. Documents containing only a general mention of the procedure used for a Commission president nomination and appointment (i.e. documents which do not provide information about an actor's preferences/opinions/attitudes/motivation for supporting eventual change in procedure) were excluded from the final dataset.

The final dataset consists of 152 documents (see the appendix for a complete list of documents used). The content analysis proceeded as follows: in each document containing a proposal for modification of procedure which could potentially lead to the strengthening of the EP position in the process, or in which such a possibility is discussed or mentioned we identified an actor. Next, we explored motives or expectations lying behind supporting that eventual development (a change in procedure in general, Spitzenkandidaten, a particular aspect related to the Spitzenkandidaten procedure). In this regard, we were interested in motives and expectations manifested in a particular document. Identified motives and expectations were assigned into two analytical subcategories as per our analytical framework. Such an approach is especially important considering we follow the process over a rather long period of time. Thus, this helped us to trace the stability and development of an actor's motivation and the arguments presented and, consequently, explain attitudes regarding the Spitzenkandidaten idea more deeply.

One remark regarding the data is worth mentioning. The analysis is based on official documents and other sources of information which were publically available. Hence, one can argue that this kind of data is not most suitable for identifying the true motives of political actors. Indeed, a significant part of interactions between politicians takes place behind the closed doors. Nevertheless, we consider our approach as appropriate for three reasons. Firstly, based upon the data gathering process described above, we were able to support our conclusions on a broader set of documents, which were omitted in previous studies.¹ Secondly, conducting the interviews as a way of gathering data could be in general a better option for investigating actors' motives, but since we study a long period it would be difficult to cover the period of the 1990s and early 2000s. Thirdly, we tried to balance the generality of official documents by also including documents adopted in the course of preparation of an actor's position. We are convinced that it is more likely to identify greater variety of motives, especially in these documents. With respect to the method used, we agree that content analysis is characterised by risks of over-subjectivity and inclination to support (rather than to not support) a theory or previous findings (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1283). In order to increase our findings' replicability and reliability, we provide a list of all relevant documents analysed in the appendix.

ANALYSIS

How did the procedure emerge in the EU?

During the preparatory phase prior to the IGC in Amsterdam, the Commission's nomination procedure was not among the dominant topics. Within the Westendorp reflection group, only the representatives of Greece, Austria and Denmark were in favour of a change in the procedure. The EP was to propose a candidate for the post and be more involved in the appointment process. Nevertheless, this proposal was not reflected in later positions of the member states and the EP. The Greek government proposed that the Commission President should be elected by the EP based on a list submitted by the EUCO. This idea was supported by the EP and, to some extent, by the Portuguese and Austrian governments, while the Commission did not propose any amendments to the procedure.

This proposal figured in the Westendorp report as one of two scenarios alongside the maintenance of the existing procedure without any amendments. However, due to limited support during negotiations, that idea was replaced by the EP's formal approval of a candidate. This resonated in the draft treaty submitted by the Irish Presidency, and later entered into force as amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam.

The official EP position on the Commission appointment was shaped by two working documents, one prepared by EPP MEP D'Andrea (at the time the EPP was the EPP-ED group) and the second submitted by PES MEP Martin. D'Andrea's position was less ambitious than the official EP position. According to him, the President of the Commission must be nominated by the EUCO and subsequently approved by the EP (European Parliament 1995a: 90-91). However, this corresponds with the official EPP position presented prior to the IGC. The EPP expected the president to be proposed by the EUCO after consulting with the EP and subsequently formally approved. The formal approval was also considered to be sufficient by the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). David Martin presented an opinion corresponding with the PES's priority in relation to the 1996 IGC, i.e. an ambition to strengthen the EP through an appointment process, for example by choosing among the candidates of the EUCO. As a more radical version of this proposal, Martin refers to a situation in which an individual political party at the EU level proposes its own candidate for the presidency prior to elections (European Parliament 1995b: 15).

In its evaluation, the EP welcomed the change made by the Amsterdam Treaty. Nevertheless, from the EP's point of view, amendments in the procedure made by the treaty were perceived as only a formal recognition of existing practice. The Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) was expected to bring forward a report on the institutional implications of the approval of the EP, with D'Andrea acting as rapporteur. D'Andrea argued that it is important that potential candidates for the post should be known prior to the elections and that the Euro-parties should present their own preferences (European Parliament 1998: 4). A majority of AFCO members, mainly the representatives of PES, EPP-ED, and European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), supported the possibility that the EP, as well as its political groups, could present its position regarding the candidate before a formal nomination was announced.

In 1998, D'Andrea was replaced by another member of EPP-ED, Elmar Brok. Through Brok's report, the EP showed an effort to create a strong link between the nomination of Commission President and the EP elections. This link can take two forms. The first consists of taking into account the election results when nominating a candidate by the EUCO. At the centre of the second scenario lies the Spitzenkandidaten idea. Such an institutional development was perceived by the EP as an important change in the political dimension of the European integration process. The EP did not make a claim on the EUCO prerogative of nominating a candidate, however it stressed that the member states' governments would probably not refuse to nominate a Euro-party's candidate who had been able to gain the majority support of the MEPs after campaigning (European Parliament 1998: 5-17).

The Spitzenkandidaten procedure became a part of the AFCO's motion for resolution and subsequently it figured in the EP resolution adopted in 1999. The resolution was supported mainly by members of the ELDR, EPP-ED, PES, and GUE/NGL, but due to the lack of availability of relevant data, we were unable to identify preferences and attitudes presented during the plenary. However, although the EP's resolution does not deal solely with the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, we are able to conclude that the idea of lead candidates gained significant support. Our argument is based on the fact that, at the Union for Europe (UEN) group's request, the MEPs voted separately on the presence of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure in the resolution (EUR-Lex 1999).

During the next round of treaty revisions embodied in the Treaty of Nice, the appointment procedure was among the least discussed issues. Only the EP and Benelux countries were willing to place nomination/appointment on the agenda. The EP presented the same position as in the case of the Amsterdam Treaty. The Benelux countries did not explicitly support the EP's proposal but noted that if the EP were to elect a candidate it could increase the legitimacy of the Commission. In accordance with its initial intention, the IGC did not provide a platform for more fundamental changes in procedure. Therefore, 'only' QMV was institutionalised. In the early 2000s, the European Convention on the Future of Europe (European Convention) proved to be a more appropriate forum for amending the procedure and for bringing forward the Spitzenkandidaten idea. During the European Convention, there were many proposals dealing with the nomination, election and appointment of Commission President. The most preferable scenario consisted of the election of the president by the EP. This proposal gained support among members of all groups of actors involved, including the European Convention President.

The most important contribution to the debates came from Elmar Brok and Alain Lamassoure (EPP). In a Draft Constitution for Europe submitted by Brok, a candidate for presidency would be proposed by the EUCO, taking into account the EP election results. Subsequently, the EP would elect the president by a majority of its members. Brok's proposal is in accordance with the EPP's position adopted during the EPP Estoril congress in 2002, to which Brok explicitly refers in the Draft Constitution (European People's Party 2002; European Convention 2002a: 47). Lamassoure argued in a similar vein when he emphasised that voting by the EP also allows the parties to nominate lead candidates. Thus, a vote given to a political party in the elections would become a vote for a candidate (European Convention 2002b: 3-4). Besides the EPP-ED members, the idea of personalisation of politics was also implicitly supported by the PES. Both claims were reflected in the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Treaty amended the procedure so that the EUCO proposes a candidate after having held consultations, while taking into account the EP elections. A candidate is elected by a majority of MEPs (European Convention 2003). It must be emphasised that the other actors supporting the EP's right to elect a candidate (including heads of state and government) had to be aware of potential future changes in the nomination procedure. A consensus reached on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe heralded the most probable scenario, in the centre of which lies the Spitzenkandidaten idea. At the end, the Treaty establishing a Constitution was rejected by Dutch and French citizens in 2005. Nevertheless, the wording of the relevant article, including mentioned amendments in procedure, came into force later with the Lisbon Treaty and its Article 17.7.

After the realisation of the European Convention, the Spitzenkandidaten idea continued to resonate among Euro-parties. The EPP entered the campaign prior to the 2004 EP elections with the expectation that the procedure, as outlined in the Constitutional Treaty, would be applied to the nomination of Commission President regardless of whether the Treaty was ratified or not. The party also announced that it was prepared to not support a candidate who did not belong to the winning party (European People's Party 2004a, 2004b). After José Manuel Barroso's nomination and election as a President of the Commission (see Beukers 2005), the procedure was perceived a great success. Additionally, the EPP's President Wilfried Martens proposed that other political parties should present their own candidates for the presidency in upcoming elections (European People's Party Group 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). In the 2009 EP elections, the EPP campaigned with Manuel Barroso as its lead candidate (European People's Party Group 2009).

The PES intended to adopt a similar approach with respect to the 2004 EP elections, i.e. to propose its own candidate or at least to declare its support to the candidates from the socialist political family. However, the party's representatives were unable to propose their candidate for the Commission presidency (Party of European Socialists 2004). This scenario repeated itself in the 2009 EP elections. Even though leading figures of the PES, namely Martin Schulz and Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, did not rule

out the possibility of nominating a lead candidate, the PES was unable to reach an agreement on who that candidate would be. The reason for this lies in internal fragmentation of the party, since some PES prime ministers were prepared to support the EPP's candidate (Party of European Socialists 2009a, 2009b).

In addition to the EPP and PES, the ELDR was willing to propose its own candidate for the 2009 EP elections, while the EGP was considering the idea (European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party 2007; European Green Party 2008, 2004). While until 2012, four parties declared their position in favour of nominating a lead candidate, a common will to do so among them was missing. It was only the EPP which proposed its own candidate before the 2009 elections.

The final phase of the Spitzenkandidaten institutionalisation began in the early 2010s with the Commission's initiative. From the Commission's point of view, the Spitzenkandidaten procedure was perceived as a priority for the upcoming elections. Hence, Barroso called European political parties to propose their candidates for the Commission presidency prior to elections (European Commission 2012). In response to the Commission mandate, the EP adopted a resolution prepared by Carlo Casini (EPP), who urged European political families to nominate candidates for the post. At the same time, it was expected that candidates would play a leading role during the campaign. This request was supplemented within the AFCO by a proposal on behalf of the Greens/EFA that the candidates would personally visit member states. The resolution was supported by the EPP, S&D, ALDE and Greens/EFA (European Parliament 2012).

The 2012 and the beginning of 2013 saw a broad consensus in relation to the suitability of the lead candidate idea. However, the question of how the practical realisation of Spitzenkandidaten should look remained and there was a need for defining the procedure's basic attributes. EPP members emphasised the European-wide campaign, where the lead candidates should visit all member states and present programme. The campaigns of both the candidates and the Euro-parties should concentrate on European issues, because a campaign oriented on domestic issues would have a negative impact on participation. Vital Moreira (S&D) called on national political parties to declare not only their affiliation to a Euro-party, but also their support of a candidate and their programme. Moreira also stressed that the candidate of the winning party should be considered first for the Commission presidency. Andrew Duff (ALDE) agreed with Moreira's second proposal. Duff also underlined that the parties' internal selection processes should be democratic and transparent. Sandrine Bélier (Greens/EFA) proposed conducting TV debates between candidates. All these aspects were adopted by the plenary in July of 2013 (European Parliament 2013a, 2013c, 2013d).

The Council adopted its position at the COREPER level. The Council's attitudes towards the Spitzenkandidaten is evident (at least implicitly) from conclusions in the EU Citizenship Report 2013. The Council was aware of actions taken by the Commission and the EP and did not present an explicit position regarding the Spitzenkandidaten idea. However, at that time, the procedure was at least not questioned (Council of the EU 2013).

To summarise, the Spitzenkandidaten procedure should be understood as the result of the evolution of the procedure used to nominate and appoint the Commission President. That process started in the pre-Amsterdam era, when the Spitzenkandidaten idea was placed onto EP's agenda by PES members. After the Treaty of Amsterdam, the idea of lead candidates was perceived by the EP as an integral part of the EP's position on developing EU politics. Between 2004 and 2011, the Spitzenkandidaten idea figured on the agenda of four Euro-parties, however, no collective action of all these actors took place. The only party which pushed the idea of lead candidates forward during this period was the EPP. In the early 2010s, as a part of the preparations for the 2014 EP elections, the procedure was institutionalised. The process, starting with the Commission's initiative in 2012, continuing with

designing practical elements related to the character of the 2014 electoral campaign and culminating in the Council's implicit approval, can be considered the final phase of the formal (although not legally binding) institutionalisation in the period we followed.

Who were the actors involved in the institutionalisation process?

It is evident above that EU institutions, Euro-parties and EP groups all participated in the process of institutionalising the Spitzenkandidaten. The EP supported the lead candidates during whole period. The documents related to the EP's activity reveal that the idea of proposing candidates prior the EP elections resonates as relevant in the EU politics since mid-1990s (European Parliament 2013a, 2012, 1998, 1995b). The Commission's active engagement was present particularly in the early 2010s, during which an intention to enhance EU democracy was tied to the Spitzenkandidaten procedure (European Commission 2013a, 2012). Before that period, the Commission did not present an explicit official position, but there were instances when this topic resonated within the Commission. The EPP promoted the Spitzenkandidaten most actively from the post-Amsterdam era until the late 2000s. The EPP proposed its lead candidate twice, and it also encouraged the other parties to propose their own ones. Furthermore, its members were among the most active advocates of the idea during the European Convention (European Parliament 1998; European Convention 2003, 2002b; European People's Party Group 2009, 2004a; European People's Party 2004a, 2004b). The PES pushed the idea forward in the pre-Amsterdam period. Indeed, it was the PES members who promoted the idea in the EP in 1995. The European Socialists were supportive of the Spitzenkandidaten system also during the early 2000s. However, they became the main proponents only after their electoral defeat in 2009. As the experience of 2009 suggests, a reason for their less active involvement could lie in internal party fragmentation and inability to propose their own candidate (Party of European Socialists 2009a, 2009b, 2004; European Parliament 1995b; EUR-Lex 1999). The ALDE (formerly the ELDR) and EGP were involved in the process, though with less intensity. Nevertheless, they were more active in the final phase of the institutionalisation process when the attributes of procedure were defined (European Parliament 2013b; European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party 2007; European Green Party 2008, 2004).

In summary, the emergence of the Spitzenkandidaten system is the result of interaction and cooperation between supranational EU institutions and the two strongest EP groups and European political parties. Intergovernmental institutions and member states played a marginal role. Smaller EP groups and Euro-parties were also less active. This is not to say that they remained silent, but when compared to the institutional and group duos, they followed what the most active players had suggested. Remarkably, the fact that all actors were visibly active in the institutionalisation process can be seen as a promotion of deeper integration processes.

What were the reasons for promoting the Spitzenkandidaten idea and how were they related to the democratic deficit debate?

Turning our attention to actor motivation, it can be concluded that the EP intended to create a connection between choices made in the EP elections and the nomination of Commission President. The main motive behind that effort was the continuing imbalance between citizens' and political forces' participation in EU politics on the one hand, and the level of integration already achieved on the other. In other words, with the continual deepening of the integration process, it would be expected that participation would be higher. As this did not happen, the view was that persistent imbalance could be resolved by creating the mentioned link. The EP argued that in the event that political parties were to nominate their own candidate prior to elections, the battle for Commission

presidency would become a campaign issue that could increase the visibility of the EP elections, leading to an end of citizens' indifference to them. The EU's institutional design was identified as one reason for that apathy. The EU's institutional set-up differs from national political systems, especially with respect to the fact that the EP elections did not contain an aspect of choice between truly rival policy programmes, nor do they provide an opportunity for citizens to influence the composition of the European executive. Hence, changing this would increase the EU's democratic legitimacy (European Parliament 1998, 1995b). During the post-Lisbon era, the EP also stressed the economic crisis and related discussions about the EU's future, and the transformation of Euro-parties into actors capable of leading an electoral campaign (European Parliament 2013a, 2012).

The Commission openly supported the Spitzenkandidaten idea from the beginning of the 2010s. In that period, one of the most discussed issues by the Commission was a need for establishing a political union. The Commission claimed that the sustainability of the Economic and Monetary Union depended on institutions behind it. From this perspective, the economic and financial crisis as well as the related decreasing confidence of citizens in the decision-making process, became the catalysts for the Commission's initiative. This situation could be solved by creating a political union, which however presupposes the existence of a public sphere. The importance of the presence of lead candidates lies in the conviction that the Euro-parties should contribute to the development of the EU's public sphere. In general, the Commission's attitude was driven by citizens' interest in being allowed to choose between political opportunities on European issues, the negative consequences of domestic issues dominating in European elections, an unsatisfactory connection between European and national political parties, and by the belief that Euro-parties are best placed for connecting citizens and EU politics (European Commission 2013a, 2013b, 2012).

The Council of the EU also concluded that the active involvement of Euro-parties and EU citizens is central to the functioning of the EU. Thus, the Council supported Commission's effort to strengthen the European public sphere and to encourage political participation in the EP elections, since it would contribute to enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the EU's decision-making process (Council of the EU 2013).

When speaking about the political parties at the European level, the EPP was an active proponent of the idea until 2009. The EPP stressed the need to offer citizens the opportunity to express their will. This was later reflected in the process of nomination, and the desire to increase participation in the European elections would thus lead to increased democratic control of the Commission (European People's Party Group 2009, 2004a; European People's Party 2004a, 2004b; European Parliament 1998; European Convention 2003, 2002b).

The PES supported the Spitzenkandidaten idea during whole period. However, the real breakthrough was their electoral defeat in 2009 and the re-election of Barroso. The absence of a PES Spitzenkandidat, the fragmentation of PES and inadequate party visibility were identified as the causes of defeat. From the PES's perspective, the Spitzenkandidaten procedure was perceived as a tool needed for winning the next round. Through the persona of their lead candidate, the PES should be able to present a real alternative to the EPP and attract more voters. Furthermore, the procedure could resolve the problem of decreasing participation in EP elections and contribute to higher public awareness and visible differentiation between Euro-parties (Party of European Socialists 2011, 2010, 2009a).

Similarly, the EGP's position was influenced by more 'pragmatic' motives. They considered the low level of participation in the European elections and their second-order character as problematic aspects of EU politics. However, the primary motivation behind the eventual nomination of an EGP lead candidate was an effort to be prepared for a situation in which other parties would propose lead candidates. That intention was later confirmed when the EGP stated that the procedure could increase

the party's visibility and provide an opportunity to confront other parties (European Green Party 2008, 2004). The ELDR's positive attitude towards the Spitzenkandidaten was driven by an effort to create a political Europe, as well as by the belief that political parties should play a key role in connecting the citizens and EU's institutions (European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party 2007).

The motives behind the actors' activities can be identified by interpreting the above findings. Turning back to both the historical events and the players involved in them, democratic deficit reasons predominantly explain the activities behind the procedure. More pragmatic motives, related to actors' self-interest, were also present. Especially for the PES, EGP and to some extent the EP, the procedure was perceived as an opportunity to strengthen their own positions. However, it is evident that actors who supported the Spitzenkandidaten idea had one thing in common. Their motivations to participate in the Spitzenkandidaten experiment were centred in discussions about democracy at the EU level. During the whole period, there was a desire among all actors to increase the legitimacy of the EU (including the Commission and its President), to strengthen the link between citizens and the EU and to the change second-order character of the EP elections.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Spitzenkandidaten procedure is an important development in political contestation at the European level. Research focusing on its development has stressed the long-term character of that process, in which, above all, the contribution of the EPP prior to and during the realisation of the European Convention, the change in PES position after the 2009 EP elections, and the initiatives of the EP and Commission during the early 2010s were highlighted. This study sought to contribute to our knowledge by focusing on the actors involved in the process of the procedure's institutionalisation, and their motivations for doing so.

Having analysed the development of the procedure over the long term, we argue that the picture is more complex. The Spitzenkandidaten idea had already gained political relevance in the pre-Amsterdam period. At that time, it was the PES that supported the idea of lead candidates and promoted changes to procedure which would lead to the strengthening of the EP in nominating the Commission President. After the Treaty of Amsterdam, the EPP became an active proponent of the idea, and the PES, ELDR and EGP MEPs also had positive attitudes towards Spitzenkandidaten. The Commission's initiative in 2012 came at a time when all relevant actors were already willing to participate in the Spitzenkandidaten experiment. Hence, the emergence of the procedure is not a result of an individual actor's ambition, but rather the consequence of cooperation between the EP, Commission and four political parties at the EU level.

When considering actors' motivations, earlier studies do not provide an unambiguous answer to the question of why the Spitzenkandidaten emerged. On the one hand, there is the explanation that the procedure should be perceived as an effort to respond to problematic aspects of European democracy which resulted in the 'first presidential elections' in the EU where the citizens had the opportunity to decide who would govern the EU as Commission President (see Kassim 2017). On the other hand, there are interpretations which stress actors' self-interest when promoting the Spitzenkandidaten idea (for example Shackleton 2017; Kassim, Connolly, Dehousse, Rozenberg et al. 2017; Janning 2014; Gómez and Wessels 2015).

Our analysis shows that both interpretations have merit. There is clear evidence that actors' motivations were predominantly driven by the effort to resolve the problematic character of European elections, as well as to enhance the quality of democracy at the European level. These motives were present in the agendas of all actors involved in the process of Spitzenkandidaten institutionalisation,

as well as during the whole period we studied. Nevertheless, actors also evaluated the possibility of presenting lead candidates in more pragmatic terms, focusing on their position vis-à-vis other actors. These motives, however, were more marginal compared to the democratising motivations. When it comes to the interpretations of the Spitzenkandidaten emergence, our analysis supports the view that the institutionalisation of the procedure should be evaluated above all as a long-term effort to resolve shortcomings of democracy in the EU. Based upon these findings, we argue that the rival explanations interpreting the Spitzenkandidaten system as a coup d'état by the EP, or because of party relations between the PES and EPP over-simplify the matter. The evidence suggests that all relevant actors, including EU member states, were aware that the Spitzenkandidaten idea was perceived as a desirable development in EU politics. Thus, it was clear that wording of the relevant treaty provision as agreed during the European Convention and eventually in the Lisbon Treaty (current Article 17.7) could be interpreted to institutionalise the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. In the second case, it was PES's inability to propose its own candidate in 2004 and 2009 EP elections which led to their more active engagement in the process. From this point of view, the 2009 electoral defeat should be seen as a catalyst, rather than a cause, of the PES's determination to promote the Spitzenkandidaten procedure.

This study and others (for example Westlake 2016; Kassim 2017; Dinan 2015) stressed the role of democratising motives in promoting the Spitzenkandidaten system. Unsurprisingly, most attention is given to investigating whether this innovation changed EU politics accordingly. However, available evidence provides a rather disappointing answer for the procedure's proponents. Electoral turnout remained low despite the personalisation of the campaign (Hobolt 2014: 1536) and the second-order character of the EP elections seemed to persist (Schmitt and Toygür 2016: 176). Furthermore, candidates' recognition by citizens was low (Hobolt 2014: 1535-1537; Gattermann, De Vreese and van der Brug 2016: 47) and media interest in providing information about the lead candidates was also low (Schulze 2016: 31-32). Lastly, national parties did not pay much attention to the Spitzenkandidaten system either (Braun and Popa 2018: 1138).

At this point, it seems that the procedure cannot resolve the shortcomings of the EU democracy. Nevertheless, recent analysis indicates that more active engagement of actors could lead to a more positive reception of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. In this regard, lead candidates, media and political parties play a crucial role. In a situation when citizens are aware of individual candidates for the Commission presidency, the likelihood of casting a ballot is higher (Schmitt, Hobolt and Popa 2015: 363). Since the information provided to EU citizens about lead candidates matters (Gattermann, De Vreese and van der Brug 2016: 46), it is difficult to imagine a successful story of Spitzenkandidaten without more active media engagement. National parties and their leaders also have a role to play (Hobolt 2004: 1535; Braun and Popa 2018: 1140). It will be interesting to follow whether the procedure fulfilled the expectations of its main proponents in 2019. However, it is not only the direct impact of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure that requires attention. Its role in the European public sphere and its salience for European public discussion should also be evaluated.

For now, it seems that the proponents of the Spitzenkandidaten system identified in this study are determined to preserve it. Since the experience of 2014, the EP repeatedly declared its intention to make the Spitzenkandidaten procedure an integral part of campaigning before the EP elections (European Parliament 2017, 2015). Additionally, the Commission gave its blessing to the Spitzenkandidaten in 2019 as well (European Commission 2018). However, while European political parties were campaigning with their own candidates for the Commission Presidency in 2019, it remains to be seen whether this will enhance the quality of EU democracy and resolve its shortcomings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Grant Agency of Masaryk University (grant number MUNI/A/1067/2016). We are thankful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments and recommendations.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Nevertheless, there is no assurance that our dataset is fully representative due to retrospective data collection (some documents might have been deleted). In addition, some documents might not have been published at all due to 'political sensitiveness' of the topic (especially these containing information about actors' self-interest).

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APPENDIX: AN OVERVIEW OF DATA GATHERING PROCESS AND ANALYSED DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN FINAL DATASET

For Commission documents we used two search tools, specifically the Register of Commission Documents and the DORIE database. When using the register, all types and all versions of documents were considered relevant. Next, we conducted an ‘all words’ rather than ‘exact phrase’ title field search in the document description for ‘European elections’. When searching for documents in the DORIE database, we queried ‘Commission’ for the ‘Author(s)’ field, and narrowed the search to include the theme ‘Commission’, subtheme ‘Nomination-appointment-confirmation of the Commission (President and Members)’, and further to other subsections ‘General’ and ‘President’.

The Public Register of Council documents was used to search for EUCO and Council of the EU documents. We were able to access documents related to the agendas, results and minutes of the meetings of the individual configurations of the Council as well as of the COREPER meetings. In the case of the European Council, we employed EUCO conclusions.¹ We also searched for documents by entering keywords and thematic area. We entered ‘President of the Commission’ and in the second case ‘European elections’ into the ‘Words in Subject’ field. In both cases, we searched for documents related to the institutional questions by choosing for ‘INST’ in the ‘Subject Matter’ field.

In the case of the EP, we used the Public Register of Documents, employing a ‘Document type’ search. We considered ‘Documents relating to parliamentary activity’ (Section 1) as a relevant category. Within this section, the ‘Plenary documents’ and the ‘Committee documents’ (Subsections 1.2 and 1.4) were relevant. In the case of Plenary documents, we were interested in documents related to the ‘Agenda’, ‘Texts adopted in plenary’, and ‘Texts tabled in plenary by a Member, group or committee’ (Subsections 1.2.2, 1.2.6, and 1.2.7). After identifying a particular plenary session in which the procedure for nominating/appointing the Commission President was discussed, we supplemented our dataset by provisional versions of documents, ‘Amendments’ and ‘Motions for resolutions/decisions’. In the case of Committee documents, we narrowed our focus on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) since the institutional issues primarily fall within its competences, and specifically on ‘Minutes’, ‘Working documents’ and ‘Reports’ (Subsections 1.4.2, 1.4.5, and 1.4.8). Again, when a particular meeting of the AFCO proved to be relevant, we searched for additional documents such as ‘Draft reports’, ‘Draft opinions’, and amendments to draft reports and draft opinions. Additionally, we considered ‘Press documents’ (Subsection 2.2 in the register), specifically press releases, as an important source of information. However, in this case, we decided to use a ‘Keyword’ search. Thus, we searched for ‘Commission president’, and ‘European elections’ when choosing ‘Press release’ in the ‘Document type’ field. In addition, we also used DORIE. As author, ‘European Parliament, EP’ was selected, while the thematic specification remained the same as in the previous case.

In searching for documents from the Euro-parties as well as from the EP groups, we used the official websites of these actors. For the purpose of this study, party congress documents, resolutions, declarations and press releases proved to be important.

The documents published in course of treaty revisions are also a part of our analysis. These documents include the preliminary and final positions of EU institutions and member states, EUCO conclusions and reflection groups’ reports. As in the case of the Commission and the EP, we employed DORIE. The thematic criteria remained unchanged, however this time, we used the ‘Arena’ field rather than the ‘Author(s)’ field, specifically ‘IGC/Amsterdam; IGC/Nice; IGC/Constitution/2003-2004; IGC/Lisbon’. Additionally, we also used the University of Zaragoza website (Universidad Zaragoza 2003) to provide references to relevant documents, and the official website of the European Convention.

All documents were gathered in 2015. Unfortunately, some documents are no longer publicly available (especially those published on parties' webpages).

Author/ Source	Document/Website Title	Adopted/ Published
ALDE	EP Election 2014 – procedure on nomination of common liberal top candidate(s)	2013
ALDE	Nominees for the ALDE Party European Commission President candidate announced	2013
ALDE	Agreement between Olli Rehn & Guy Verhofstadt – statement by ALDE Party President	2013
ALDE	Guy Verhofstadt and Olli Rehn to lead election campaign for European Liberals	2014
ALDE	ALDE votes were crucial for Juncker's election	2014
CEU	Informe del Grupo de Reflexión	1995
CEU	Progress Report from the Chairman of the Reflection Group on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference	1995
CEU	Debate on the report of Mr Andrew Duff – Practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014	2013
CEU	Council conclusions on the EU Citizenship Report 2013	2013
CEU	Memorandum from Benelux	2000
EC	Report on the Operation of the Treaty on European Union	1995
EC	Committee on Institutional Affairs – Summary record (24 February 1995)	1995
EC	CIG 1996 – Position des Etats membres sur les thèmes à l'ordre du jour de la conférence intergouvernementale	1996
EC	"For a democratical European Union with Political and Social Content". Greece's Contribution to the 1996 IGC	1996
EC	Note for the Attention of Commissioner Oreja	1998
EC	Committee on Institutional Affairs – Summary record (21-22 July 1998)	1998
EC	Committee on Institutional Affairs – Summary record (28-29 September 1998)	1998
EC	Committee on Institutional Affairs – Summary record (24-25 June 1998)	1998
EC	Committee on Institutional Affairs – Summary record (21-22 September 1998)	1998
	Institutional Affairs Committee – Summary record (30 November/1 December 1998)	1998
EC	Adapting the institutions to make a success of enlargement	2000
EC	Romano Prodi Presenting the Commission Communication to the European Convention	2002
EC	Meetings of the President-designate, Mr Barroso, with the political groups European Parliament, Brussels, 13 and 14 July 2004	2004
EC	Follow-up to the European Parliament resolution on the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union, adopted by the Commission on 14 July 2009	2009
EC	Report on the election of Members of the European Parliament (1976 Act as amended by Decision 2002/722/EC, Euratom) and on the participation of European Union citizens in elections for the European Parliament in the Member States of residence (Directive 93/109/EC)	2010
EC	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations	2012
EC	State of the Union 2012 Address	2012
EC	Why we need a United States of Europe now	2012
EC	A blueprint for a deep and genuine economic and monetary union. Launching a European Debate – Communication from the Commission	2012
EC	A New Deal for Europe	2012

Author/Source	Document/Website Title	Adopted/Published
EC	Letter by President Barroso to the President of the European Parliament, Mr Martin Schulz	2012
EC	Preparing for the 2014 European elections: further enhancing their democratic and efficient conduct – Communication from the Commission	2013
EC	Commission Recommendation of 12.3.2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament	2013
EC	Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections	2014
EC	Minutes of the 2087th meeting of the Commission held in Brussels (Berlaymont) on Wednesday 28 May 2014 (morning)	2014
EDP	EDP welcomed Liberal's decision to present Guy Verhofstadt as their candidate	2014
EDP	Guy Verhofstadt is the best candidate!	2014
EDP	EDP adopted its Manifesto and will officialise its candidate to the Commission Presidency on March 12th	2014
EDP	Guy Verhofstadt, EDP candidate	2014
EGP	Resolution on the Future of the European Greens	2004
EGP	The personalisation of the campaign	2008
EGP	EGP campaign leaders and Green ambassadors	2009
EGP	Imagine a different European election	2013
EGP	Green European party leaders move elections campaign forward – call for candidates is on	2013
EGP	EGP launches Green Primary to select the two Leading Candidates for European elections 2014	2013
EGP	The Green Primary (Resolution as adopted during 19th Council Meeting, 2013)	2013
EGP	Ska Keller and José Bové will lead the Greens in their European campaign	2014
EGP	First European Presidential Debate	2014
EGP	Greens remain force to be reckoned with in EU politics	2014
EL	EL-Declaration: 2014 European elections: for a democratic refoundation of Europe	2012
EL	European elections: concerning the submission of an EL candidacy for the presidency of the European Commission	2013
EL	Tsipras, Nominated by the European Left, as the Voice to Denounce the Policies of the Troika in the European Commission	2013
EL	The Party of the European Left (EL) relies to withstand in a radical way the austerity that is imposing the Troika and to fight in defence of public services	2013
EL	Change Europe – for a Europe of work	2013
EL	Eurovision Debate: Tsipras captures the public's attention, most tweeted leader	2014
EL	European Left poised to take third place in European Elections	2014
ELDR	Putting Citizens First	1995
ELDR	Guiding Principles for the Work of the Convention	2002
ELDR	Presidency of European Commission	2007
EP	Resolution on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference – Implementation and development of the Union	1995
EP	Report on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference – Implementation and development of the Union – Part I A: Motion for a resolution	1995
EP	Report on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference – Implementation and development of the Union – Part I B: Explanatory Statement	1995
EP	Draft Report on the development of the European Union	1995

Author/ Source	Document/Website Title	Adopted/ Published
EP	Report on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference – Implementation and development of the Union – Part III: Co-draftsmen's working documents	1995
EP	White Paper on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference	1996
EP	Portugal and the IGC for the revision of the Treaty on European Union.	1996
EP	Guidelines of the Austrian Government on the subjects likely to be dealt with at the 1996 IGC	1996
EP	Progress Report on the Intergovernmental Conference	1996
EP	Resolution on Parliament's opinion on the convening of the Intergovernmental Conference; and evaluation of the work of the Reflection Group and definition of the political priorities of the European Parliament with a view to the Intergovernmental Conference	1996
EP	Resolution on the general outline for a draft revision of the Treaties	1997
EP	Initial Analysis of the Treaty of Amsterdam	1997
EP	Note on the European Parliament's Priorities for the IGC and the new Amsterdam Treaty: Report and initial Evaluation of the results	1997
EP	Resolution on the Amsterdam Treaty	1997
EP	Report on the institutional implications of the approval by the European Parliament of the President of the Commission and the independence of the members of the Commission	1998
EP	Resolution on the institutional implications of the approval by the European Parliament of the President of the Commission and the independence of the members of the Commission	1998
EP	Report on the European Parliament's proposals for the Intergovernmental Conference	2000
EP	European Parliament resolution containing the European Parliament's proposals for the Intergovernmental Conference	2000
EP	Report on the Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union	2001
EP	European Parliament resolution on the constitutional process and the future of the Union	2001
EP	European Parliament declaration on the election of the President of the Commission by the European Parliament	2003
EP	Report on the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the European Parliament's opinion on the convening of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC)	2003
EP	Report on guidelines for the approval of the European Commission	2003
	Report on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe	2004
EP	Report on the institutional aspects of the European Union's capacity to integrate new Member States	2006
EP	Report on the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union	2009
EP	Resolution of 7 May 2009 on the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union	2009
EP	Working document on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the development of the institutional balance of the European Union	2009
EP	Motion for a resolution on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014	2012
EP	Draft motion for a resolution – Amendments 1-17	2012
EP	Statistics – 2012/2829(RSP) – B7-0520/2012	2012
EP	Amendment 1 – on behalf of the PPE Group	2012
EP	Amendment 5 – on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group	2012
EP	European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014	2012

Author/ Source	Document/Website Title	Adopted/ Published
EP	Debates – Thursday, 22 November 2012 - Strasbourg	2012
EP	Debates (Explanations of vote) – Thursday, 22 November 2012 – Strasbourg	2012
EP	Draft report on improving the organisation of the elections to the European Parliament in 2014	2013
EP	Draft report – Amendments 1-79	2013
EP	Draft report – Amendments 80-85	2013
EP	Report on improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014	2013
EP	Debates – Wednesday, 3 July 2013 – Strasbourg	2013
EP	European Parliament resolution of 4 July 2013 on improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014	2013
EP	Gianni Pittella: “The last European elections have been a turning point for the EU”	2014
EP	EP Conference of Presidents: arrangements for electing next Commission President	2014
EP	Conference of Presidents statement on Commission President election	2014
EP	European Parliament press kit for the 26-27 June European Council	2014
EP	Parliament elects Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission President	2014
EPP	Ability to Act, Democracy and Transparency: The European Union – the road to European integration	1995
EPP	A Constitution for a Strong Europe	2002
EPP	Manifesto. EPP Statutory Congress 17-18 October 2012, Bucharest, Romania	2002
EPP	Capacity to act – Democracy - Transparency	2004
EPP	Appointment of the future President of the European Commission	2004
EPP	For a Europe of the Citizens: Priorities for a Better Future (Rome Manifesto)	2006
EPP	EPP Action Programme, Dublin Congress, 6-7 March 2014, Dublin, Ireland	2014
EPP Group	EPP leaders meet in the aftermath of the European Elections (16-17 June 2004)	2004
EPP Group	Twelve Prime Ministers meet in EPP Summit in Meise	2004
EPP Group	Hans-Gert Poettering on the adoption of the European Constitution – “A historic achievement for Europe”	2004
EPP Group	EPP-ED Group confirms its support for Mr Barroso	2004
EPP Group	Hans-Gert Poettering on the new Barroso Commission	2004
EPP Group	EPP-ED Study Days Budapest – Full Group meeting endorses José Manuel Durão Barroso as President of the European Commission	2004
EPP Group	Nomination of Prime Minister Barroso for Commission President – Comment from EPP President Wilfried Martens	2004
EPP Group	EPP-ED Study Days Budapest – Converting electoral success into political results now	2004
EPP Group	EPP-ED Study Days in Athens: Next EU Commission needs quick but stable majority	2009
EPP Group	Juncker for President: “The voice of European citizens has been heard”	2014
EPP Group	EPP Group expresses full support to Jean-Claude Juncker	2014
EUCO	2595th Council meeting – Heads of State or Government (29 June 2004)	2004
EUCO	Presidency Conclusions. Brussels European Council, 11 and 12 December 2008	2008
EUCO	Presidency Conclusions. Brussels European Council, 18/19 June 2009	2009
EUCO	European Council decision proposing to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the European Commission	2014
EUCO	Ausführungen von Präsident Herman van Rompuy im Anschluss an die Tagung des Europäischen Rates	2014
EUR-Lex	Minutes of the sitting of Wednesday 13 January 1999.	1999
EUR-Lex	Minutes of the sitting of Wednesday 13 January 1999.	1999

Author/ Source	Document/Website Title	Adopted/ Published
Greens/EFA	Commission presidency. EU governments must make decision based on outcome of European elections	2014
PES	The Party of European Socialists and the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference	1996
PES	Spring 2004: new challenges for the PES	2004
PES	A New Way Forward, A Stronger PES	2009
PES	Un candidat social-démocrate unique à la Présidence de la Commission européenne	2009
PES	PES Strategy 2010-2014. A Mandate for Change	2010
PES	A democratic and transparent process for designating the PES candidate for the European Commission Presidency	2010
PES	Selecting our common candidate in 2014	2011
PES	Europe, our common Future. Celebrating 20 years of the Party of European Socialists	2013
PES	European Socialists elect Martin Schulz as Candidate for Commission President	2014
PES	PES Presidency sets out Battle Plans for European Election Campaign	2014
PES	Schulz connecting best with EU voters	2014
PES	Juncker must deliver more progressive Europe, say PES Leaders	2014
PES	PES will be “unrelenting” in ensuring Juncker Commission takes a more progressive path	2014
S&D	Socialists issue a warning as they urge ministers to put off nomination for Commission Presidency	2009
S&D	Barroso deal “a political, legal and institutional outrage”	2009
S&D	S&D Group claim victory as fast-track Barroso decision is blocked	2009
S&D	The choice for Commission President must be political	2009
S&D	Swoboda on EP elections? “Direct election of Commission President to make EU more democratic”	2014
S&D	“European Council must give Juncker a mandate to negotiate”	2014
S&D	“We will support Jean-Claude Juncker if he respects our policy programme for change”	2014

Abbreviations: ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe ; CEU – Council of the European Union; EC – European Commission; EDP – European Democratic Party; EGP – European Green Party; EL – European Left; ELDR – European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party; EP – European Parliament; EPP – European People’s Party; EUCO – European Council; Greens/EFA – Greens/European Free Alliance; PES – Party of European Socialists; S&D – Socialists & Democrats.

The EUCO conclusions adopted in 2004 and later are available in the Public register. The conclusions prior to 2004 are available through official website of the EUCO/Council of the EU.

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Interview

Educating for European Democracy: A Conversation with Dr Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan

Abstract

In this interview Dr Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan discusses her Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Action funded programme “My big friendly guide to the European Union” which is aimed at developing knowledge curiosity and debate about Ireland and the EU among primary school children.

Keywords

EU, Primary Education, Erasmus+, Jean Monnet



[Click here to watch the video interview](#)

Citation

JCER (2019). ‘Educating for European Democracy’: A Conversation with Dr Emmanuelle Schön-Quinlivan’, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15 (4): 378.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1128>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Interview

Social Media and European Democracy: A Conversation with Jon Worth

Abstract

Views on how social media contributes to European democracy are mixed. On the one hand social media platforms are seen to offer a new way to democratise political debate and communicate politics to a wide range of people. On the other hand, questions have been raised around the quality of democratic debate and political communication fostered by social media, especially in the context of fake news, disinformation and how social media can be manipulated. In this video interview we talk to Jon Worth, a blogger and active social media commentator on EU affairs, about what democracy means in the context of European Union politics, and what role social media plays in contributing to European democracy.

Keywords

Democracy; EU; Social media



[Click here to watch the interview](#)

Citation

JCER (2019). 'Social Media and European Democracy: A Conversation with Jon Worth', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15 (4): 379. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1142>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Research Article

Comparing the Politicisation of EU Integration during the Euro and Schengen Crises

Leonard Schuette

Citation

Schuette, L. (2019). 'Comparing the Politicisation of EU Integration during the Euro and Schengen Crises', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 380-400.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1036>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

Although European integration has become an increasingly salient and controversial topic in domestic politics, the consequences of this politicisation of the European Union for the integration process have not received adequate scholarly attention. To fill this lacuna, this article devises five hypotheses on the effects of politicisation for the integration process, which are subsequently tested against the evidence of the Euro and Schengen crises. Both crises had comparable origins, but the Euro crisis caused substantial deepening of integration, while the Schengen crisis has not engendered any meaningful reforming steps. The empirical analysis finds that politicisation assumed different forms across the two crises, which is shown to be one causal factor that explains the variation in crises outcomes. The article thereby contributes to a multifaceted understanding of the politicisation of international institutions, EU integration theory and the dynamics of the Euro and Refugee crises.

Keywords

Politicisation; EU integration theory; Euro crisis; Schengen crisis

The recent crises of the European Union (EU) – be it the Euro crisis, the Schengen crisis or Brexit – are symptomatic of a crucial meta-trend that increasingly affects global politics: the public contestation of international institutions. Long characterised by executive and technocratic decision-making processes beyond the purview of mass politics, international cooperation has become salient and controversial in domestic politics, a process that is here conceived as politicisation. Scholars agree that the root cause of the politicisation of international institutions and the enhanced cultural conflicts is that states have ceded ever greater sovereign prerogatives to international bodies like the EU, the World Trade Organisation or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2014; Zürn 2014). As the most institutionalised form of international cooperation in the world, which increasingly assumes core state powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018), it is unsurprising that the EU has become strongly politicised (Hutter, Grande and Kriesi 2016; de Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke 2016; Statham and Trenz 2013).

The consequences of politicisation for the European integration process are, however, not yet adequately understood. The bulk of the comparative politics literature instead concentrates on the drivers and mechanisms of politicisation (Grande and Kriesi 2016: 300; de Wilde et al. 2016: 5; Hobolt and Wratil 2015; Statham and Trenz 2013, 2015). In the field of European integration theory, the accounts of mainstream neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism have mostly neglected politicisation as an explanatory factor because it challenges their shared axioms of an integration process driven by elites and primarily economic interests (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018: 180-1). More recent theoretical contributions, however, place greater emphasis on politicisation. Bickerton Hodson and Puetter's (2015) new intergovernmentalist theory characterises the post-Maastricht era by the parallel development of ever greater domestic contestation of the EU and deepening of integration. In contrast, Marks and Hooghe (2009) regard politicisation as a fundamentally constraining

force. Their post-functional theory suggests that greater politicisation is driven by exclusive identity concerns over the perforation of the nation-state by globalisation and Europeanisation. While the contributions of new intergovernmentalism and post-functionalism are important and welcome, in both accounts, politicisation is reduced to an expression of Euroscepticism without extensive theorising under what conditions it occurs and when it becomes consequential.

The main puzzle that emerges from this survey is whether, and if so when and to what ends, politicisation constitutes a causal factor in the integration process. To this end, this article seeks to derive empirically testable hypotheses on the conditions when politicisation affects the integration process, thereby developing post-functional theory, and responding to calls by Kriesi and Grande for a 'more systematic treatment of domestic politics in European studies' (2016: 300). Politicisation is not treated a priori as synonymous with Euroscepticism. Politicisation does often imply resistance towards specific international institutions, but it may also involve demands for further or different international policies and more democratic decision-making procedures (Rauh 2019). The article seeks to devise a more open-ended framework that allows for various forms of politicisation.

To test the hypotheses, this article employs a comparative case study design. The empirical focus is on the Euro and the Schengen crises. The origins of both crises were remarkably similar. External shocks in the form of the collapse of the American subprime mortgage market and the Syrian civil war respectively exposed, in both cases, substantial dissonances in the institutional architecture of the Eurozone and common asylum system and led to severe conflicts among the member states' governments. The crises, however, resulted in strongly divergent results. The Euro crisis engendered significant institutional reforms – like the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) or the Banking Union – and regulatory reforms, including the Sixpack and Twopack legislations. Conversely, the Schengen crisis has been characterised by disagreements on meaningful reforms (e.g. the overhaul of the Dublin Regulation), lack of ambition (e.g. the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), or failure to implement decisions taken respectively (e.g. the emergency relocation scheme).

At first sight, comparing the politicisation of the Euro and Schengen crises appears counterintuitive given that both crises were clearly politicised, leading scholars like Schimmelfennig (2018) and Biermann, Guérin, Jagdhuber, Rittberger and Weiss (2019) to dismiss politicisation as an explanatory factor for the divergent crises' outcomes. Such a judgment, however, rests on an oversimplified understanding of politicisation as a binary phenomenon (Börzel and Risse 2018). Instead, the following analysis suggests viewing politicisation in more differentiated terms based on scale, agency, framing and effect on institutions. Such a nuanced understanding of politicisation as a multifaceted rather than unitary phenomenon promises greater insights into the European integration process at large and the Euro crisis and Schengen crisis specifically.

Indeed, the article finds that the nature of politicisation not only differed across the two crises (correlation) but also that this difference can help explain the variation in crises outcomes (causation). During the Euro crisis, governments marginalised Eurosceptic parties, framed politicisation in economic terms more than those of identity and hence effectively limited the constraining influence of politicisation. Conversely, Eurosceptic parties were not only electorally stronger but were also in government in several key states during the Schengen crisis. Politicisation, concomitantly, was framed in exclusive nationalist terms premised on a principled opposition to delegating further sovereign powers to the European level.

To substantiate this argument, the article is structured in two parts. The theoretical section develops existing literature to derive five testable hypotheses on the effects of politicisation on the integration process. The empirical section tests the hypotheses against the evidence of the Euro crisis and Schengen crisis.

FIVE HYPOTHESES ON THE EFFECTS OF POLITICISATION

The political landscape in Europe has dramatically changed over the past few decades. Since the 1990s, the 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970: 41) in favour of further integration has eroded. According to Hooghe and Marks (2009: 11ff.), the perforation of the nation-state by the processes of globalisation and europeanisation has affected deeply ideational notions of national community and has thereby created a new cultural-political cleavage in Europe (Hutter et al. 2016; Kriesi et al. 2012). This cleavage reflects a conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism – represented by Traditional/Authority/National (TAN) and Green/Alternative/Libertarian (GAL) parties respectively.

Post-functionalism suggests that TAN parties have been instrumental in mobilising exclusive nationalist sentiments and polarising debates about European integration. The theory thus problematises when and why politicisation emerges but then assumes that politicisation will inhibit integration. This article takes issue with that assumption. Politicisation does not just come in one form but is a multi-faceted phenomenon with open-ended consequences for the integration process. As such, it can be disaggregated into its component parts, which can be individually examined to provide greater theoretical depth and ample opportunities for empirical testing across a variety of case studies.

The most evident baseline assumption is that the scale of politicisation is one crucial determining factor of how much politicisation affects integration outcomes. To compare the scale across the two crises, politicisation can be broken down into three components – salience, polarisation and expansion of actors and audiences – that can be empirically observed (Börzel and Risse 2018: 85). Indicators for the salience of European integration include newspaper attention, citizen's awareness of the politics of the European Union, or political parties' attention to European issues as reflected in the number of public statements or questions in parliament (Grande and Hutter 2016; de Wilde et al. 2016: 6; Wonka 2016). Polarisation could be operationalised by analysing the positions reflected in national party systems or measuring positions on the European Union and its politics in public opinion surveys (de Wilde et al. 2016: 6-7; Kriesi et al. 2012). The expansion of actors and audiences who follow and engage with European politics is somewhat more difficult to capture and is often linked to salience. New voices in mass media, greater attention to European politics on social media and the visibility of civil society and protest movements signify greater actor and audience expansion (Dolezal et al. 2016; de Wilde et al. 2016: 7). In sum, the first hypothesis is:

H1: The greater the aggregate scale of politicisation, the more it will affect the integration process.

Moreover, the power differentials among member states put a premium on politicisation in the key member states that drive or put a brake on integration efforts. Hence:

H2: Politicisation is more consequential when it occurs in the most important member states.

Depending on the theoretical point of departure, supranational actors that convert functional pressures into spill-over pressures (neo-functionalism) or national governments which cooperate to maximise their material benefits (liberal intergovernmentalism) drive the integration process. Politicisation potentially affects both drivers.

Some of the European institutions may be subject to politicisation pressures. The European Parliament elections every five years provide a gateway for the politicisation of European integration to affect the Parliament's pro-integration course if the composition of parliamentarians significantly alters. As an independent bureaucracy, the potential influence of politicisation on the Commission is less obvious. Yet, as Rauh aptly notes, 'the more alert the public becomes to supranational political authority, the

more rational it is for a competence-seeking bureaucracy to care about the public acceptability of its policies' (2019: 348; also Zürn 2014). Moreover, the Spitzenkandidaten process, whereby the parties in the European Parliament rather than the governments in the Council of the EU appoint the President of the Commission, provides a democratic gateway for politicisation. If politicisation was to assume a Eurosceptic form, it would thus in both cases undermine the integrative dynamics emanating from the supranational institutions. Of course, other European institutions could be affected by politicisation. The selection of the European Parliament and the Commission is based on their significance in both crises, whereas the European Central Bank (ECB), for example, played no role during the Schengen crisis. The Council is excluded here since governments are treated separately. It follows that:

H3: Eurosceptic politicisation reduces spillover pressures exerted principally by the European Parliament as well as the European Commission.

Politicisation could also affect national governments in the liberal intergovernmentalist framework if the assumption is relaxed that domestic preferences are solely shaped by corporate economic interests. Instead, the interaction of a plurality of economic, social and political actors shapes what emerge to be national interests. Whether politicisation thwarts integration dynamics, as presumed by post-functionalism, however, is not predestined. In fact, one school of thought considers politicisation as a central (normative) ingredient for the progress of European integration. The public sphere tradition argues that the politicisation of European affairs will provide the necessary democratisation of the EU, which in turn will foster support among the electorates (Statham and Trenz 2015; Risse 2010). Thus, whether politicisation is an integrative or disintegrative force depends on two interrelated factors: who politicises and how agents frame issues they politicise.

Three ideal-type constellations of actors exist (Taggart and Szczerbak 2018: 11ff.; Grande et al. 2016: 198; Statham and Trenz 2013). Firstly, right-wing Eurosceptic parties reject European integration on the basis that it undermines national community and sovereignty. As such, their Euroscepticism has a distinctly cultural nature that emphasises exclusive nationalist sentiments and is on principle opposed to further integration. Secondly, left-wing Euroscepticism criticises the neoliberal nature of the EU and accuses it of dismantling the welfare state. Unlike old communist parties, however, most contemporary left-wing critics of the EU are not on principle opposed to European integration. Instead, they call for a different Europe, one that is more social and solidary. Thirdly, politicisation could also be framed in cosmopolitan terms. Green parties, elements within civil society and intellectuals tend to advance a multicultural-universalist argument in favour of deeper integration. Thus:

H4: A strong presence of far-right parties that politicise the EU in exclusive nationalist terms subverts the integration process. Conversely, politicisation framed in cosmopolitan or solidary terms is (potentially) conducive towards further integration.

This article moreover assumes that mainstream political elites harbour a preference to limit the influence of politicisation. In most neo-functional and liberal intergovernmentalist writings, European integration has always entailed constraining mass politics. In response, national and European elites have developed a repertoire of 'conflict-minimising strategies' (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016; Bickerton et al. 2015) to limit the influence of politicisation. Most obviously, governments can exclude challenger parties by forming coalitions with pro-EU parties. Since the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, avoiding referendums, unanimity requirements and the need for domestic ratification has also become a central strategy to quell domestic politicisation. Furthermore, to insulate European integration from domestic politics, governments have resorted to delegating powers to non-majoritarian actors, which are shielded from political pressures. Finally, integration steps can either be pursued by regulatory means or capacity-building by the EU itself. Integration by regulation has been the central strategy to de-politicise European integration. Integration by regulation is less visible as member states remain in charge of enforcement of their tasks. Moreover,

and in contrast to capacity-building, regulatory integration obfuscates the redistributive consequences of integration by relying on seemingly neutral rules binding all member states.

The success of these strategies is not pre-determined, however. Linked to the previous hypothesis (H4), one can expect that economic framing is more conducive towards conflict-minimising strategies than identitarian framing. Economic frames are primarily about policy questions of taxation, investment or redistribution, which can be masked relatively easier as regulatory issues (Börzel and Risse 2018: 88-90). Identitarian frames, in contrast, principally address the EU as a polity, touching upon core state issues such as citizenship and national community (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018: 182). These questions are more emotive, in turn more politically explosive, and thus cannot sustainably be circumvented by political elites. The sequence between framing and the success of conflict-minimising strategies is not necessarily unidirectional. Governments could seek to frame in economic rather than exclusive nationalist terms. As such, the relationship should be understood as mutually reinforcing. Consequently:

H5: If politicisation is framed in utilitarian or economic terms rather than in exclusive nationalist or cosmopolitan terms, governments are more likely to be successful in limiting the influence of politicisation and vice versa.

THE ROLE OF POLITICISATION DURING THE EURO AND SCHENGEN CRISES

This section tests the five hypotheses against empirical evidence of the Euro and Schengen crises. It proceeds by comparing the following across the two crises: the scale of politicisation on aggregate and in the key member states, the effect of politicisation on agents of integration, the framing of politicisation and strategies to limit politicisation. It finds that the framing of politicisation and interrelatedly the effectiveness of conflict-minimising strategies not only differed but also help explain the variation in crises outcomes.

The Aggregate Scale of Politicisation (H1)

Euro Crisis

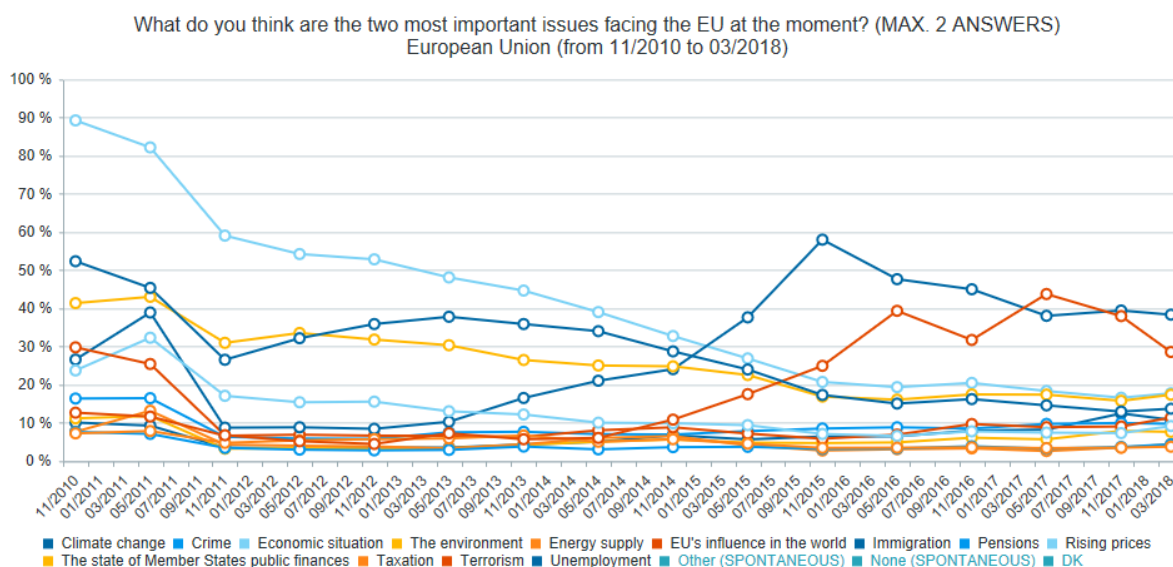
Most scholars agree with Risse that '[t]here is no doubt that the Euro Crisis has politicized European affairs and the EU' (2015: 142). Rauh and Zürn (2016) as well as Kriesi and Grande (2016) empirically demonstrate the unprecedented salience of European issues like bailouts, governments, Eurobonds or austerity measures. They base their findings on coding of core sentences in key European mass media. Schimmelfennig (2018: 979) corroborates these findings with use of public opinion data. In terms of polarisation and expansion of actors, scholars' views diverge, however. Schimmelfennig (2018), referencing the emergence of challenger parties and the fall of various incumbent governments during the Euro crisis and Rauh and Zürn (2016), referencing Eurobarometer data, argue that polarisation was well-pronounced. Concomitantly, Rauh and Zürn draw attention to a variety of protest events, including marches against austerity across Europe during the Euro crisis that provide evidence for greater mobilisation of non-governmental actors. In contrast, Kriesi and Grande (2016: 253) contest that a marked polarisation and actor expansion took place. Rather than becoming part of mass politics, their data shows that debates about the Euro were primarily held in intergovernmental channels dominated by executive elites, which is supported by Hurrelmann, Gora and Wagner (2015). This deviant finding could partially be explained by the fact that Kriesi and Grande's data set only spans to 2012 and excludes data from debtor states, where one would expect polarisation to have run particularly high. Indeed, the outcome of the European Parliament election in 2014, that saw a surge

of Eurosceptic parties, seems to provide evidence for the wider polarisation and actor expansion during the Euro crisis (Hobolt and de Vries 2016; de Wilde et al. 2016). Thus, scholars agree that the Euro crisis covered a period of unprecedented public visibility, but they remain divided on whether it was also extraordinarily broad and intense. Overall, one can infer that the Euro crisis was (moderately) strongly politicised.

Schengen Crisis

Unfortunately, no comparable dataset on politicisation of the Schengen crisis exists, which renders an exact comparison impossible. Nonetheless, the limited available data is indicative of a similarly strong level of politicisation. As to the salience, Figure 1 below draws from Eurobarometer data and illustrates that – in parallel to the onset and subsequent development of the Schengen crisis - citizens came to regard immigration and terrorism as the most important issues facing the European Union.

Figure 1: Eurobarometer data on ‘most important issues facing the EU at the moment’



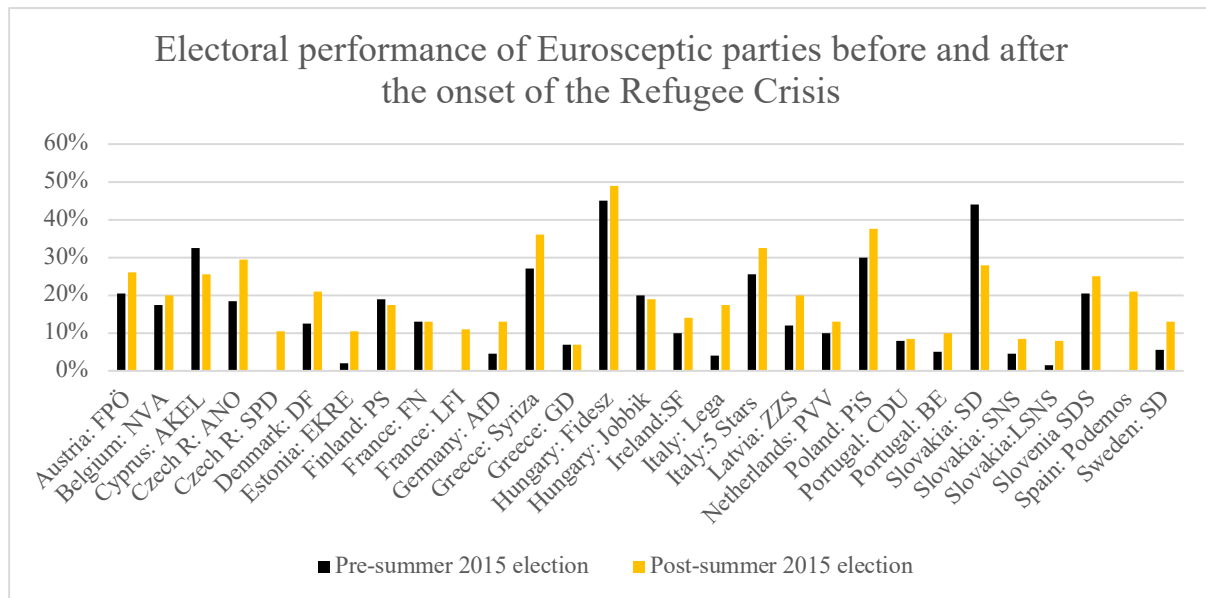
Source: Eurobarometer 2018

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the political party landscape is one key proxy for polarisation. The rise of challenger parties across Europe therefore testifies to the polarising influence of the Schengen crisis. Of course, the causal chain remains unexplored here – other events and deeper structural developments may have contributed to the emergence of extremist sentiments too – but the significant electoral gains made particularly by far-right parties in elections from 2015 onwards cannot be disentangled from the Schengen crisis (Krastev 2017; Mudde 2017). Figure 2 provides an overview of the performance of challenger parties in legislative elections between 2010 and 2018 in those EU member states which are a member of at least one of the Eurozone and the Schengen zone. The characterisation and selection of challenger parties draws upon Taggart and Sczcerbiak (2018) but is non-exhaustive. Despite some outliers, the overall trend of strengthening of nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic parties appears unequivocal (Hobolt and Tilley 2016).

The expansion of actors during the Schengen crisis seems equally pronounced. The crisis mobilised citizens across the continent in the form of solidarity movements like the Refugees Welcome campaign and Protest Movements like the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA), which was particularly visible in Germany (Della Porta 2018). Since the Schengen crisis is not included

in the politicisation indexes of Kriesi and Grande (2016) and Rauh and Zürn (2016), the crises cannot be compared numerically. And yet, the scale of politicisation appears broadly similar across both crises – an interpretation shared by a range of scholars (Börzel and Risse 2018; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018; Schimmelfennig 2018). The scale of politicisation therefore cannot account for the variations in integration outcomes across the Euro and Schengen crises.

Figure 2: Electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties before and after the onset of the Refugee Crisis



Source: Author’s calculations based on results published by respective national election commissions

Politicisation in Key Member States (H2)

Euro Crisis

The key creditor states that underwrote the loans for the debtor states were Austria, Finland, France, Germany and the Netherlands (Frieden and Walter 2017; European Commission 2016). Kriesi and Grande’s (2016: 255ff.) data on politicisation in Austria, France and Germany shows that politicisation in Germany stood out. Germany’s politicisation index (0.61) dwarfs that of Austria (0.34) and France (0.24). This may appear intuitive given the centrality of Germany during the Euro crisis (Bulmer and Paterson 2013). These findings on the levels of politicisation are corroborated by further observations specific to Germany. Oppermann (2012: 511) stresses that the Euro crisis was the most covered issue in the main German news shows in 2010 and the first half of 2011, underlining the salience of the topic. Wonka (2016) shows that European integration has become an increasingly debated and divisive issue in the Bundestag. Furthermore, Bulmer (2014: 1257) documents the progressing polarisation of the political landscape as the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) – both in government with Chancellor Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) between 2009 and 2013 - became increasingly Eurosceptical in defiance of a long-held pro-integration consensus among the mainstream parties. With the advent of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in 2013, which called for the dissolution of the Euro, the political landscape polarised further (Arzheimer 2015). The importance of the German political parties vis-à-vis the executive was conditioned by the constitutional requirement that the Bundestag had to consent to every individual bailout decision (Abels 2016: 119; Hölscheidt 2016: 112). This expansion of actors beyond the executive also included

the Bundesbank and its outspoken President, Jens Weidmann, as well as the German Constitutional Court (Calliess 2016).

The levels of politicisation elsewhere were also considerable. Miklin (2014) highlights that salience and polarisation were very pronounced in the Austrian Parliament due to much greater divisions among political parties on European integration – within the mainstream parties but also caused by the strong presence of the Eurosceptic Freedom Party (FPÖ) – than in Germany. Various scholars empirically show that the Euro crisis boosted politicisation in France (Hutter and Kerscher 2014; Rothacher 2015). Unsurprisingly, in countries like Greece and, to a lesser extent, Italy, where the socio-economic repercussions from bailout conditionalities or austerity policies respectively were particularly pronounced, the Euro crisis was also strongly politicised (Gianetti, Pedrazzani and Pinto 2017; Kousis and Kanellopoulos 2014).

Schengen Crisis

During the Schengen crisis, the key actors not only included countries of first-entry and destination, but also those that actively sought to obstruct deeper integration: the Visegrad countries, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The country where the Schengen crisis was most evidently politicised in regard to the relocation quotas appeared to be Hungary. The ruling Fidesz Party under the leadership of Victor Orban had for years been at odds with the European Union over its dismantling of the rule of law and democratic safeguards in Hungary (Müller 2015). The pinnacle of confrontation was reached during the debates on Schengen quotas in late 2015, which were rejected by Orban. After a series of public relations campaign railing against the perceived interference with Hungarian sovereignty and national identity, Orban put the question to the Hungarian people in early 2016. The opposition boycotted the referendum, which partially explains the low turnout of 44 per cent. The result was hence particularly one-sided: 98 per cent voted in favour of rejecting the Schengen quotas (Batory 2018). When outvoted at an extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on 22 September 2015, Hungary (alongside its Visegrad partners) refused to implement the temporary relocation scheme and went so far as to file a lawsuit against the decision together with Slovakia before the European Court of Justice.

The open confrontation between member states and the European institutions that politicised the EU also occurred elsewhere. In the context of a wider socio-cultural conflict and a specific struggle with the European Commission over constitutional questions of the rule of law and democracy, the ruling Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) politicised the Schengen crisis to stir up antipathy against 'Brussels' (Krzyzanowski 2018). Similar strategies were employed by Czech President Milos Zeman and Slovakian Prime Minister Fico (Stanley 2017: 146-7). Overall, the Schengen crisis was successfully politicised by Eurosceptic parties in Central and Eastern Europe, which were arguably the key blocking actors of further integration (Mudde 2016).

Integration measures were not only opposed by Central and Eastern European member states though. France under the Government of Francois Hollande also rejected a permanent relocation mechanism. The strong presence of the Eurosceptic Front National in the French public sphere, terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo in January and in Paris in November 2015 that many associated with Muslim immigration and the well-mediatised Schengen camp in Calais created a politicised and hostile domestic atmosphere. France was also part of a group of countries that suspended the Schengen regime and re-introduced national borders. The others were Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden, where the Schengen crisis was demonstrably politicised (Taggart and Sczcerbiak 2018). In Germany, the crisis was more salient, polarised and involved more actors than perhaps anywhere else given the arrival of 890, 000 people in 2015 (BMI 2016). The AfD transformed from a party run by economics professors in favour of abolishing the single currency into a more typical anti-immigration far right-

wing party. Civil society was significantly involved in the physical care for refugees, in pro-refugee movements and in anti-immigration protest marches organised by the Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident. Newspapers were, furthermore, replete with open letters and articles by public intellectuals (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). And in Italy, the failure to craft a policy at the EU-level to redistribute asylum-seekers provided fodder for the fiercely anti-immigrant League under the helm of Matteo Salvini, which gained 17 per cent of seats (compared to just 4 per cent in 2013) in the 2018 elections and subsequently formed a government together with the Five Star Movement.

In sum, European integration was considerably politicised in key member states across both crises. From Germany to Hungary, European issues caused ripples in the domestic public spheres. Despite the lack of comparable quantitative data on politicisation, the range of sources consulted implies that the levels of politicisation did not differ sufficiently enough to explain the variation in integration outcomes.

Politicisation and the Agents of Integration (H3)

The European Parliament

The transmission belts for politicisation in the European Parliament are the parliamentary elections every five years. As such, greater politicisation is likely to shake up the composition of the Parliament and thereby potentially influence its assumed pro-integrationist drive. Elections to the European Parliament have long been conceived as low-salience 'second-order' elections. Yet, the election in 2014 arguably constituted a rupture in this trend (Hobolt 2015). The reasons for this were two-fold. First, the introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten process, whereby the largest parliamentary group would nominate the president of the European Commission, was devised to politicise the election by personalising and Europeanising the campaigns (Dinan 2015). Secondly, the elections were held in an already politicised environment amid the Euro crisis.

Despite a similar turnout to the 2009 election, the outcomes were arguably indicative of a politicised election, in which European issues were of great salience. In Denmark, France Greece, Hungary and the United Kingdom, Eurosceptic parties gained the greatest vote share. Overall, almost 30 per cent of the seats in Parliament were won by Eurosceptic parties (220 out of 751) (Hobolt 2015: 12). The European Parliament has therefore been affected by politicisation from at least 2014 onwards. An important caveat to this observation, however, is that a mere presence in the Parliament does not equate to influence. The Eurosceptics constitute a heterogeneous group and are fragmented across four political groups, which has prevented them from exercising significant political influence. The pro-European parties have also reacted by de facto institutionalising a grand coalition between the centre-right, centre-left and liberal political groups that has succeeded in marginalising the Eurosceptics (Brack and Costa 2016). In fact, the chairs of the all-powerful parliamentary committees are held by Europhile parties (Mudde 2018). Indeed, the European Parliament injected integrative impetus by continuously advocating deeper reforms of the architectures of the Eurozone and the asylum regime (Niemann and Speyer 2018: 35-6; Niemann and Ioannou 2015: 210). Politicisation has therefore not so far affected the European Parliament's pro-integrationist outlook.

The European Commission

For the European Commission, politicisation may appear less consequential at first sight given its set-up as an independent technocracy and guardian of the treaties. Yet, the Commission also possesses the monopoly over initiating supranational legislation, which endows it with considerable agenda-

setting powers. If one subscribes to the view that institutions can exert institutional agency, politicisation should affect its use of these powers. The early crisis years witnessed unexpected inertia by the Commission. Under the apathetic leadership of President Barroso, the Commission failed to play an integrative role. Faced with significant opposition from key member states to its plans to deepen the Eurozone, the Barroso-Commission responded to politicisation pressures, quietly shelving its plans, for instance, for Eurobonds (Hodson 2013: 309-311; European Commission 2011). Conversely, Juncker's Commission drew opposite conclusions from the politicisation within the member states, as he positioned the Commission as the defender of the European common interest. The politicisation of European integration in debtor countries like Greece and in countries of first-arrival or destination seemed to provide essential impetus to Juncker's reform agenda. Written under the auspices of Juncker (Dinan 2016: 109), the recommendations of the Five Presidents' Report on strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union went far beyond what many member states – most notably Germany – found palatable (European Commission 2015). The call for a European Deposit Insurance Scheme to complete the Banking Union, for example, signalled the level of ambition of the new administration (*ibid.*). The Commission also deviated from Barroso's fiscal conservatism when deciding not to sanction France and Italy for exceeding the mandated budget deficit level of 3 per cent in January 2015 and when lending political support to Greece during the negotiations of the third bailout package for Greece (Dinan 2016: 108-9). As such, politicisation appears to have propelled rather than constrained the Commission in spurring integration.

Framing Politicisation (H4)

Euro Crisis

The severe intergovernmental distributional conflicts between creditor and debtor states raised once again the spectre of a renaissance of nationalism in Europe. Protestors in southern member states accused Germany of neo-Nazism and German tabloids mobilised against 'lazy Greeks' and 'crooks' (Polyakova and Fligstein 2016). Yet, the available data largely rebuts the intuition that the Euro crisis was (more than previous integration steps) framed in exclusively nationalist terms (Börzel and Risse 2018). Kriesi and Grande's comprehensive dataset shows that the Euro crisis was 'overwhelmingly framed in economic (50.7%) or political efficiency (21.2%) terms' (2016: 271). In contrast, only 7 per cent of frames were nationalist (*ibid.*). These findings are largely corroborated by Closa and Maatsch (2014), whose study investigates how parliamentarians framed the debate on the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in eleven Eurozone member states. They find that the justifications provided were by and large pragmatic, relating to economic interests and necessities. Only Eurosceptical parties framed the debate in exclusively nationalist terms (*ibid.* 834ff.). Wonka's (2016) detailed study of plenary debates in the German Bundestag provides further support for these findings. According to his data, in 40 per cent of all cases, German parties framed the debate in economic and institutional terms. Only 19 per cent of the frames employed were identitarian, of which 78 per cent were in fact positive, emphasising a common European identity and solidarity.

It is, however, necessary to note that economic and cultural framings cannot always be easily disentangled. Debates about economic policies oftentimes relate to wider identity arguments about the nature of the envisaged polity (see Matthijs and McNamara 2015). The argument here, therefore, is about relative importance: by and large, the available data arguably suggest that the debates were still primarily about economic policies, even if they were secondarily informed by identity concerns (Börzel and Risse 2018; Hobolt and Wratil 2015). This focus on problem-solving certainly did not prevent massive conflicts among member states, but clashes were mostly about EU policies, not the EU as a polity.

The dominant frames employed during the Euro crisis provide ipso facto evidence that far-right Eurosceptic parties were largely marginalised. Indeed, Kriesi and Grande (2016: 272) observe that while these parties resorted to exclusive nationalist frames in 26.3 per cent of the cases, they played only a minor role in the debates. Moreover, the authors suggest that national and supranational executive actors dominated the debate: 76 per cent of all coded sentences pertained to governments (usually the German one), European institutions and the IMF. Thus, executive actors clearly dominated and non-governing parties were negligible. Political parties featured prominently in public debates only in Germany, but not as scholars would expect. Instead of challenger or opposition parties, the CSU (in government since 2005) and FDP (in government between 2009-2013) opposed their own government in many instances and thus boosted politicisation (ibid. 270).

These findings deviate from the expectation of the bulk of the literature on politicisation, which assumes that the politicisation of the EU requires either the existence of radical challenger parties or conflicts between the government and the main opposition party (Grande and Hutter 2016). With the exception of the German intra-governmental conflict, the (admittedly limited) data demonstrates that these two mechanisms were hardly present during the Euro crisis. The lack of agency thus hints at the importance of structural factors to explain the politicisation of the Euro crisis. Indeed, Hobolt and Wratil (2015) propose that the economic crisis was a sufficient exogenous shock, which entailed tangible effects on personal circumstances and visible consequences for political systems to politicise the crisis (ibid. 241, 252). Due to its inherent negativity bias, other scholars also suggest that the media acted as critical agents in politicising the crisis (e.g. Cross and Ma 2015). This would explain why a crisis that was dominated by executive actors was heavily politicised.

Schengen Crisis

Conflicts over migration lie at the heart of the nationalism-cosmopolitanism cleavage and tend to be dominated by constitutive questions focussing on self/other distinctions more than political or economic policies (Risse 2010; Wodak 2015). The framing of the Schengen crisis has been reflective of these characteristics. The early welcoming culture in countries like Austria, Germany or Sweden, where the crisis was initially framed in moralising terms, which depicted Schengen as deserving victims of hardship, swiftly gave way to a framing of 'threat' that had been dominant in Central and Eastern European states from the very beginning (Schuette 2018; Triandafyllidou 2018: 211-2; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018: 120-1). Asylum-seekers were presented as unmanageable natural disaster-like menaces (hence the language of flows and tides) to the 'native' Europeans. Unlike the moralising frame, which invokes notions of solidarity and common humanity, the 'threat' framing invokes a zero-sum game, whereby any benefits for the asylum-seekers come at the cost of the native Europeans. The proposed solution then is to construct (European or national) fortresses to keep the foreigners out.

Indeed, challenger parties were at the forefront of framing the Schengen crisis in exclusive nationalist terms in Western Europe. Yet, these Eurosceptic sentiments have also gradually entered the political mainstream in many countries (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018: 10; Börzel 2016). Rheindorf and Wodak (2018) demonstrate how the Austrian FPÖ's initial radical calls to limit the number of Schengens allowed to enter the country and to build a border fence became discursively normalised as they were adopted (in somewhat weaker form) by the mainstream conservative and social-democratic parties. A similar process occurred in Germany, where the AfD's framing of Schengens as cultural and security threats entered the mainstream as the Bavarian Christian Social Union and the Free Democrats tangibly moved to more exclusionary positions. In Central and Eastern Europe, the key parties in the framing process from the beginning included governing parties. The Polish PiS party successfully mobilised anti-immigration sentiments in the run-up to the October 2015 election to win the majority

of seats and subsequently hardened its stance to oppose the imposition of Schengen quotas (Krzyzanowski 2018). Similarly, parties in government in Hungary (Fidesz), the Czech Republic (ANO) and Slovakia (Direction) assumed exclusionary nationalist positions.

In light of the absence of a counter cosmopolitan movement, the dominant framing of the Schengen crisis closely corresponded to the exclusive nationalist frame. As right-wing challengers became electorally stronger (see figure 2) and mainstream parties (particularly on the centre-right) increasingly adopted the nationalist rhetoric, the image of Europe as a fortress became entrenched in public discourse (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018). Unlike the Euro crisis, the Schengen crisis was consequently debated in constitutive, identitarian terms that involved principled opposition to deeper integration that would result in ceding powers to control immigration. The fact that the Visegrad countries maintained their opposition towards the Schengen quotas despite being threatened by economic sanctions (via reducing the subsidies from structural cohesion funds) is emblematic of the primacy of identity over material concerns. As expected by post-functionalism, politicisation framed in exclusive nationalist terms actively impeded the creation of new supranational institutions (i.e. a stronger European Border and Coast Guard), rules (i.e. Schengen allocation quotas), as well as the implementation of decisions already taken (Börzel 2016).

Politicisation and Conflict-Minimising Strategies (H5)

Euro Crisis

Despite continuing overall support for the single currency, electorates in the periphery vocally objected to the imposition of austerity measures and concomitantly the concession of political control to the centre, while populations in the centre protested against providing the financial means to bail out the periphery (Streeck and Elsässer 2016). Economic pressures, however, incentivised governments to attempt to deepen integration regardless. Henceforth, they employed a variety of measures to circumvent the constraining dissensus (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016; Bickerton et al. 2015).

First of all, governments largely succeeded in preventing Eurosceptic parties from joining or forming governments. Figure 2 above demonstrates the level of volatility in the European party system during the Euro crisis, characterised by the emergence of challenger parties on both ends of the spectrum, the decline of mainstream parties and fall of incumbent governments. In response, pro-European parties formed grand coalitions or tolerated minority governments to isolate Eurosceptics. The emergence of the far-left Syriza party as the strongest force in Greek politics during the January 2015 election and the subsequent formation of a coalition-government with the far-right ANEL party constituted the major exception.

Second, governments minimised the need for parliamentary ratification and referendums on new reforms. EU law usually requires the unanimous ratification of treaty revisions or new treaties, involving constitutionally required referendums in a number of member states. The two major treaties – the Fiscal Compact and ESM Treaty – were both designed as intergovernmental treaties with their own legal personality outside the purview of EU law (Jörges and Kreuder-Sonnen 2017: 120). As a result, these reforms did not necessitate domestic ratifications (only Ireland held a referendum on the Fiscal Compact). Beyond these legal-institutional acrobatics, individual governments were pressured not to hold referendums or to ignore the outcomes. This was most evident when the coalition of creditors de facto forced Greek Prime Minister Papandreou to cancel a planned referendum on the terms of the second bailout or when the Troika harried the Tsipras government to disregard the rejection by the Greek people of the third bailout.

Third, the EU cemented the technocratic nature of governance by delegating further powers to non-majoritarian institutions and strengthening binding rules. The ECB acquired new competences to supervise and resolve the European banking sector. More significantly, the ECB's controversial interpretations of its mandate to assume the role of lender of last resort transformed its nature from a pareto-improving agency to a crucial political actor, whose policies had massive redistributive competences. The Outright Monetary Transactions and Quantitative Easing programmes amounted to building up fiscal capacities on the supranational level, circumventing the opposition of domestic publics and parliaments in creditor states. The regulatory reforms (Sixpack, Twopack) transferred budgetary powers to the European level by enshrining rules on deficits and debt levels and endowing the European Commission with the monitoring and, in case of violation, sanctioning powers to override parliamentary grip on budgets. Non-elected experts rather than national parliamentarians increasingly determined crucial policies in debtor states (Streeck 2016: 113ff.).

However, this disarmament of domestic political actors has been asymmetrical. The example of the German Bundestag during the bailout negotiations is particularly telling. No other national parliament possessed both the *ex ante* and *ex post* veto powers during the bailout negotiations under the ESM, as per the legal requirement of a series of German Constitutional Court rulings. Moschella (2016) demonstrates that the involvement of the Bundestag on the third bailout package for Greece hardened the German negotiation stance relative to countries that were closely aligned to the German position (e.g. Finland) but which did not require parliamentary ratification. As such, the asymmetrical politicisation in national parliaments could provide one explanation as to why the integration outcomes reflected by and large the preferences of the creditor states, as they were not only in a preferable bargaining position but also much less willing or able to compromise due to the need for parliamentary ratification (Kanthak and Spies 2017).

Fourth, the creditor states framed the Euro crisis as a regulatory crisis (Chang 2016: 495). Not only did this interpretation lend itself to shifting the burden of adjustment onto the debtor states, but it also masked the necessary fiscal capacity-building that was likely to be politicised and opposed by electorates in creditor states. Accordingly, most reforms undertaken were of a regulatory nature to ensure compliance with budgetary rules and force structural reforms in debtor states, including the Fiscal Compact and the Banking Union (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016: 175-80). When member states agreed to create fiscal capacities via the rescue packages for Greece, the EFSF, or the ESM, they were designed to provide the bare minimum support on a strictly temporary basis. Rather than being governed supranationally, these funds were under tight control of the creditor states. Moreover, the ECB with the tacit support of the member states created fiscal capacity concealed as monetary policy.

This array of individual measures to shield European integration from domestic politicisation and constraining dissensus amounted to a comprehensive strategy of pursuing 'integration by stealth' (Majone 2014). The disempowerment of national legislatures in debtor states, the neglect of established legal procedures and strengthening of non-accountable actors raises significant normative questions vis-à-vis the EU's democratic legitimacy (Schmidt 2015). Yet, this form of Schmittian 'emergency politics' (Jörges and Kreuder-Sonnen 2017; White 2015) or 'executive federalism' (Habermas 2015) allowed governments to deepen integration in the face of domestic resistance.

Schengen Crisis

Across the continent, the arrival of more than a million asylum-seekers in 2015 was also particularly politicised, whereby the majority of European citizens, if to varying extents, favoured either reducing arrival numbers or maintaining low arrival numbers (Zaun 2018: 50-4). A coalition of the European Commission and member states with high levels of asylum applications resorted to the tried and tested strategy of limiting domestic politicisation by delegation to non-majoritarian institutions and

advancing integration by regulation. In contrast to the Euro crisis, however, the strategy to limit politicisation largely failed.

Since the onset of the Euro crisis, Euroscepticism had been spreading across the continent, thereby empowering challenger parties mostly on the far-right (see Figure 2), which transformed the political landscapes in two distinct ways. Firstly, the rise of challenger parties incentivised governments to adopt a more uncompromising stance on immigration to maintain electoral appeal (Zaun 2018; Hartevelde, Kokkonen and Dahlberg 2017). The surging of the AfD, the FPÖ, French Front National, Dutch Freedom Party, or Italian Lega Nord is therefore likely to have had a constraining effect on governments to reach compromises at the EU level in the first place and to implement these decisions at the domestic level subsequently. Secondly, and unlike during the Euro crisis, Eurosceptic parties were also part of governments in key member states. The Visegrad countries were all governed by Eurosceptic governments (or mainstream-Eurosceptic coalitions) at some point during the Schengen crisis. Historically, Eurosceptic parties that had entered the government tended to moderate their Euroscepticism as part of the process of mainstreaming (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2013). This was not the case during the Schengen crisis. As a result, the politicisation of the Schengen crisis specifically and the European polity more generally could no longer simply be ignored. Börzel (2016: 18) and Hobolt and Tilley (2016) highlight the importance of the sequence of the two crises. Voters increasingly turned to challenger parties not only due to the perceived economic failures of mainstream parties but also to protest against the de-politicisation strategies that had narrowed the political choices available to citizens, reflective of the pervasive 'there is no alternative' discourse. Ironically, the strategies to limit politicisation therefore had the opposite effect by fuelling citizens' desire to reclaim decision-making powers (Statham and Trenz 2015: 296-8; de Wilde and Zürn 2012).

Nonetheless, governments in favour of deeper integration and the Commission sought to limit the influence of politicisation by relaxing unanimity requirements. In an unprecedented move in asylum and immigration policy, the temporary emergency relocation scheme was decided by Qualitative Majority Voting, overruling countries like Hungary and Poland. To counteract the widespread non-compliance with decisions already taken in the Council and to circumvent domestic opposition, the Commission furthermore attempted, as during the Euro crisis, to delegate greater monitoring and enforcement powers to non-majoritarian bodies. It proposed to endow the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency with independent powers to intervene directly in member states that fail to comply with the legal standards of external border management (Börzel 2016: 24-5). The Commission also suggested reforming the Dublin Regulation to include an automatic relocation mechanism beyond the control of individual countries to de-politicise the allocation of Schengens. Yet, the level of opposition towards a permanent relocation scheme or a powerful border agency prevented the adoption of either reform, even by Qualitative Majority Voting (Schimmelfennig 2018: 981).

Those member states in favour of deeper integration also struggled to paint the crisis in regulatory terms. A number of regulatory reforms were agreed upon in the Council regarding external border management, procedures of assessing asylum applications, or a list of safe countries of origin (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018: 188). Yet, these were largely measures designed to manage future movements of asylum-seekers not to address the allocation of Schengens that had already arrived in the EU. Only supranational capacity-building to share the burden would effectively address this issue. Member states did agree to provide modest financial and administrative support to countries of first entry but failed to implement or reach agreement on physical burden-sharing, which would have had the most evident redistributive consequences. Unlike during the Euro crisis where the ECB could fill the lack of capacity-building, the supranational agencies during the Schengen crisis were far too weak to exert such agency. Accordingly, the attempt here to imitate the 'integration by stealth' strategy largely failed.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The starting point of this article was the observation that scholars have paid insufficient attention to the effects of politicisation on European integration. The aim of this analysis, therefore, has been to devise a theoretical framework based on testable hypotheses on the consequences of politicisation. The findings of the empirical section confirmed some of the expectations. The aggregate scale of politicisation (H1) as well as the individual-level scale in key member states (H2) did not differ across the crises, while the effects of politicisation on the supranational agents were inconclusive (H3). However, two crucial factors varied: the framing of politicisation (H4) and the differing success of governments to employ conflict-minimising strategies (H5). During the Euro crisis, politicisation was largely framed by executive actors in terms of economic or political efficiency, which was conducive to the several strategies that limited the constraining effects of domestic politicisation. Conversely, empowered challenger parties during the Schengen crisis framed politicisation in exclusive nationalist terms. They fiercely resisted supranational compromises or failed to implement agreed-upon reforms. Politicisation was thus not only different across the crises but arguably also constitutes one causal factor for the differing outcomes. Of course, this does not suggest that other factors highlighted by liberal intergovernmentalism, i.e. the different bargaining constellations and neofunctionalism, i.e. the different economic costs of inaction and power of the ECB, were insignificant. Instead, the article makes a case for a multi-causal explanation, which, however, must include politicisation.

The sequence of the two crises was central in producing the different outcomes, as the short-term success of limiting the influence of politicisation during the Euro crisis only strengthened politicisation in the mid-term. This finding supports the wider argument that the 'attempt to reverse politicisation is not viable' (de Wilde and Zürn 2012: 137). Since the origin of politicisation is the transfer of authority from the nation-state to supranational institutions, de-politicisation strategies can only affect the intermediating opportunity structure – e.g. the holding of referendums – but not the fundamental cause. Unless the trend of institutionalising international cooperation and strengthening supranational actors is rescinded, politicisation is here to stay, which testifies to the need for any theory of regional integration to take politicisation seriously as a causal factor.

Hence, important implications for the bigger picture of European integration flow from this article. Of course, the reliance on only the Euro and Schengen Crises demands caution when generalising beyond the case studies. While further empirical work is needed, the conclusions of this article make the case for the extension of mainstream theories to consider domestic politics in earnest. It arguably requires theories to move beyond the parsimonious assumptions of an integration process that is driven by economic interests and political elites. The more international institutions assume core state powers, the more publics will become interested in them and the more political agents will draw them into the realm of mass politics. The subsequent political conflicts will likely be more about political values and identities than economics. The rise of right-wing, Eurosceptic governments across the continent, whose political demands are hardly graspable by conventional neo-functional or liberal intergovernmentalist theories, epitomises this development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based on research undertaken when I was a graduate student at the University of Cambridge, where I greatly benefited from Geoffrey Edwards's guidance. I would also like to thank Sebastian Spence, the JCER editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Commentary

Understanding the European Integration in the Asylum Policy: State-of-the-Art and Avenues for Future Research

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Citation

Silvestre, S. (2019). 'Understanding the European Integration in the Asylum Policy: State-of-the-Art and Avenues for Future Research', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15 (4): 401-409.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1070>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This commentary reviews the literature on European integration in the asylum policy area and offers a roadmap for future research. Whereas early studies explain integration through a state-centred approach, recent studies rely on the theory of institutionalism to address the circular causality in the European process. The Council has so far been at the heart of decision-making in this policy area. However, there are still important dimensions of the Council's dynamics unexplored in the literature. Therefore, this commentary proposes a research agenda to better understand not only the member states' negotiation behaviour, policy preferences and positions in the Council but also the interplay between the EU institutions and its impact on the European integration.

Keywords

European integration; Asylum policy; Literature review

In the mid-1980s five member states (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) shared their desire to abolish the internal borders within the EU to facilitate the full achievement of the single market (Faist and Ette 2007). With the abolishment of the borders, states orientated by a 'realist' policy frame of internal security, pushed for the so called 'compensatory measures' that included strengthening external border controls and cooperation in the field of asylum and immigration (Lavenex 2001a: 27; Niemann 2006: 196-98). Accordingly, these five countries signed the Schengen agreement in 1985, which established common rules regarding visas, the right to asylum and checks at external borders – though, only after signing the Treaty of Amsterdam was this agreement incorporated into the EU *acquis*.

Other non-binding cooperation initiatives were launched during the 1990s. These first intergovernmental efforts to cooperate at the European level on asylum policy coincided with the influx of refugees into several member states, especially Germany and France, following the conflicts in the Balkans, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the fall of the Berlin wall (Lavenex 2001a; Hatton 2005). However, only with a new chapter on asylum and immigration policies in the Amsterdam Treaty, which came into force in 1999, were legislative powers granted to the EU institutions in this policy area – asylum was now part of the first pillar of the EU (Bačić 2012). In other words, the Treaty gave the European Commission (EC) the right of initiative to propose a set of harmonised legislation in this policy area.

Despite this new supranational approach, the Amsterdam Treaty foresaw a transitional period of five years in which 'member states were still left with a wide range of powers and remained the main actors in the asylum policy area' (Bačić 2012:48; see also Ripoll Servent & Trauner 2014; Trauner & Ripoll Servent 2016). By way of explanation, during this transitional period the EC had to share its right of initiative with the EU states, and the European Parliament (EP) only had an advisory role (Guiraudon 2000: 263-264; Kaurert & Léonard 2012: 1404-1405).

Only with the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, was the ordinary legislative procedure introduced (article 294 of TFEU), and the veto power was replaced by qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council of the EU (hereafter referred to as the Council). Nevertheless, the Amsterdam Treaty showed that member states were ready to take the next step in this policy area.

This commitment was reinforced during the special European Council meeting held in Tampere (1999). Since this meeting, 'the EU has been working to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), and improve the current legislative framework' (European Commission 2014: 3). We are currently in the third phase of the conception of this common system. The first policy harmonisation happened in 2000 – 2005; followed by a second phase in 2009 – 2013; and finally, a third phase that started in 2016 when the EC tabled two legislative packages to reform the CEAS to the Council and EP.

This commentary traces back how scholarship has explained these developments in EU cooperation and integration in the area of asylum policy and proposes avenues for future research. The existing literature provides knowledge on why member states accepted cooperation at the EU level in this policy area, and how it influenced domestic policies and institutions; but less is known on how this cooperation is translated at the EU level, not only between member states but also between EU institutions.

VENUE-SHOPPING AND THE ROLE OF THE EU INSTITUTIONS

European integration in the area of immigration and asylum policies has been often explained in the literature by an intergovernmental, state-centred approach. Building on the theory of 'policy-venues' (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), Guiraudon (2000: 251) argues that 'venue-shopping' seems the most appropriate thesis not only to explain the beginning (mid-1980s) of EU cooperation on migration and asylum policy, but also to account for the shape and content of this policy. The idea behind the 'venue-shopping' theory is that member states are in control of European integration and pursue a new policy venue to overcome the existing institutional constraints in their domestic policy-making arena. It is argued that this new type of vertical policy-making allows actors to foster their restrictive political goals by avoiding national judicial restrictions, eliminating possible national opponents, and by finding new international allies (Guiraudon 2000).

While some scholars claim that this new EU venue permitted the development of a more restrictive domestic asylum policy (Guiraudon 2000; Lavenex 2001b), others argue that cooperation on EU asylum has actually raised protection standards for asylum seekers in several member states (Kaunert & Léonard 2012). According to this last study, two main factors explain why the adopted EU asylum legal instruments have not turned out to be as restrictive as anticipated by Guiraudon, namely because: i) the 'changes in the EU institutional framework'; and ii) the 'increasing "judicialization" of the EU asylum policy venue' (Kaunert & Léonard 2012: 1404).

With the analysis of the development of the EU asylum policy, the authors demonstrate that through the years there was an 'increasing communitarization of asylum, with growing roles for the European Commission, the European Parliament and the ECJ' (Ibid.: 1406). The growing role of these institutions prevented the most restrictively-minded member states from influencing the development of a more rigid legal framework. Furthermore, the strengthening of the role of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the influence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the incorporation of both the Geneva Convention and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) in the EU treaties resulted in the 'judicialization' of this venue and in the promotion of a more liberal agenda.

A more recent study also recognises that 'the dynamics of supranationalism have become more discernible' in this policy area (Trauner and Ripoll Servent 2016: 1429). However, it is argued that member states still remained the key players, and that the existence of new actors was not sufficient

to change the 'core' of the policy (Ripoll Servent & Trauner 2014: 1154). The authors emphasise the states' ability to unite forces when in need of confronting the other EU institutions. In other words, despite the new institutional framework, national governments have proven to be successful in shaping the policy debates and setting standards of legitimacy in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) (Trauner & Ripoll Servent 2016). This new research line calls for new analytical perspectives to account for the major institutional changes, particularly the enhanced powers of the EU supranational institutions, their role and capacity to impact the decision and policy-making in the asylum policy (e.g. Kaurert & Léonard 2012; Maurer & Parkes 2007; Ripoll Servent & Trauner 2014, 2015).

Even if cooperation in asylum policy may have raised the legal standards in a number of member states, different 'securitisation' dimensions have been observed in the decision-making process of this policy area (Huysmans 2000; Lavenex 2001c; Boswell 2003; Guild 2006; Chou 2009; Karamanidou 2015; Trauner 2016). For example, one academic noted that there was a notable concern during the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) accession negotiations to safeguard the security of the rest of the Union (Lavenex 2001a). The EU made clear to the CEECs that the accession would not take place before they had 'fully implemented the Schengen acquis and secured their borders' (Ibid.: 38). This position was prompted by a twofold concern. The first apprehension was with the fact that the CEECs still needed to implement more liberal values to respect the rule of law, international human rights and fundamental freedoms. Secondly, they lacked the practices and institutions to maintain internal security and immigration control, which ultimately could affect all member states.

The securitisation of the EU asylum policy has been also endorsed by linking migration and asylum with issues such as economic and financial crisis (Trauner 2016), criminal activity and terrorism (Karamanidou 2015). The financial burden of increasing the rights of asylum seekers during the economic crisis has become a relevant discursive argument in the EU (Trauner 2016). The first countries that felt the pressure of the new economic situation in their administrative asylum structures were the Southern member states. During the 2015 refugee crisis, this pressure increased and frontline countries, such as Greece and Italy, were not able to contain the influx of asylum seekers seeking to reach the northern part of the EU (Ibid.).

Europe's migration crisis resulted in a division in the Council culminating in a 'consensus-breach' (Trauner 2016: 322). There was a clear opposition from the Eastern European states to the relocation scheme, nonetheless the legal instrument was adopted. Another example of the 'consensus – breach' in the asylum policy is the non-decision in the refugee quota system (Zaun 2018). Clearly the refugee crisis has exacerbated division in the Council, and it is difficult to see what pattern will emerge in the decision-making amongst all the new legislative proposals.

This logic of securitisation translated into different arguments and migration control tools seems to contradict the policy efforts undertaken to enhance and harmonise the protection of asylum seekers (Boswell 2003). In other words, The EU normative commitment to rights has been visibly constrained by discourses and practices of securitisation (Aramanidou 2015; Trauner 2016).

EUROPEANISATION

From a historical perspective, the development of the EU political system had a profound effect on member states, resulting in an evolution of the dynamic between the EU and its members (Ladrech 2014). Theories of European integration, by and large, do not take into consideration what has been called the circular causality in the European Process, i.e., there is a loop whereby integration defines a new phenomenon (Europeanisation) that ultimately leads back to integration (Coman 2009). As a result, a new theoretical framework was needed to better understand how member states have adjusted to integration.

It was provided a conceptual starting point when it was stated that 'Europeanisation is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making' (Ladrech 1994: 69). However, by assuming that national states are both actors in EU decision-making and drivers of European integration, other scholars comprehend Europeanisation more broadly as a two-way process, i.e., it not only encompasses a process of domestic adjustment of member states to the EU (downloading), but also a process of uploading national preferences to the EU level (Börzel and Risse 2000; Börzel 2002a, 2002b; Bulmer and Lequesne 2005).

In accordance with Börzel and Risse (2000), some scholars argue that when studying the asylum policy one should not dissociate the EU from the national policy level (for a wider debate see Lavenex 2007; Menz 2011; Radaelli 2004; Toshkov & de Haan 2013). Put differently, the analysis of the Europeanisation process in this policy area should consider not only the impact of the EU into domestic institutions and policies, but also the member states' response to EU policy pressures (Ibid.). As Lavenex (2007: 318) points out 'the evolution of the harmonization agenda in asylum policy may be interpreted as a reaction to the imbalances created by Europeanization based on negative integration'.

However, it is noted that one vulnerability of the current Europeanisation debate is to assume that this process is sequential. In short, it is claimed that the process may well overlap or occur simultaneously (Menz 2011). The idea behind this argument is that national governments play a multilevel game by actively shaping EU policy, according to national preferences, even before the impact of Europeanisation is felt. Germany, for example, successfully stalled the EU process on the Qualification Directive (QD) adopted in 2004. Only after a domestic compromise was reached on labour market access rights for individuals eligible for subsidiary protection and on the recognition of persecution by non-state actors as a legitimate legal basis for asylum, did Germany proceed with the negotiations (Ibid.: 450-452).

An early contribution on the interplay between bottom-up and top-down processes of integration is the study of Lavenex (2001b) on Germany and France. Regarding the European level, the author found that due to a prioritisation of internal security over human rights considerations, specific national histories and identities, and the high politicisation of this issue in the member states, cooperation in this field was shaped by intensive 'transgovernmentalism'. This has reinforced the influence and restrictive position of JHA officials at both national and European level. At the national level, while the European restrictive asylum frame 'resonated well with the long-lasting politicisation of asylum seekers' in Germany; in France it required a modification of the traditional republican discourse and understanding of France as a land of asylum (Ibid.: 203). To sum up, this scholar argues that the requirement to adapt to European asylum legislation changed the cleavage structures and validated the ideational basis for a more restrictive asylum policy in both countries.

By building on the 'misfit model' (Börzel & Risse 2000), Zaun (2016) also makes a valuable contribution to the Europeanisation literature. The scholar has shown that whereas strong regulators (mostly Western and Northern countries of the EU) have actively and successfully uploaded their status quo policies into the EU legislation in order to avoid domestic administrative costs; weak regulators avoided adaptation costs by not complying with EU law, resulting in an ineffective domestic policy transposition. Contrary to what the venue-shopping theory suggests, this academic demonstrates that member states did not rely on the EU asylum policy to lower their domestic standards, but rather pursued 'policy stasis' according to their status quo (Zaun 2017). She has not only studied member states' preferences and positions in the Council, but also their implementation capacity and transposition to domestic policy.

It is indeed a notable contribution to the literature, but her focus is on the first phase of the CEAS in which decisions were only made by the Council and under unanimity voting. This 'two-way' Europeanisation process (Börzel 2002a) has yet to be studied in the subsequent phases of the CEAS.

With the promulgation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 a new institutional setting needs to be studied. Specifically, the impact of the ordinary legislative process, the changed voting rule in the Council, and the accession of twelve new member states in the development of this policy. However, this is not the only direction for future research as the following section of this commentary will show.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Whereas early studies focused on explaining integration through a state-centred approach, recent studies rely on institutionalism theory to address the circular causality in the European process. Despite the new supranationalism dynamic, according to the majority of scholars, member states continue to have a key role in this policy area. Nevertheless, the existing studies left certain dimensions of the Council's dynamics unexplored. Specifically, topics such as decision-making in the different levels of the Council (see Roos 2018b), the impact of QMV on the consensus norm (see Roos 2018a), as well as the interplay between EU institutions and its impact on integration in the asylum policy area.

Three main lines of research on Council dynamics in the asylum policy area can be highlighted in the existing studies, namely: policy formulation and negotiation behaviour in the Council (Zaun 2016, 2017, 2018; Silvestre 2019); decision-making in the Council (Aus 2008; Ripoll Servent and Trauner 2015; Trauner 2016; Roos 2018a; Zaun 2018); and finally the impact of the 2015 refugee crisis in the EU integration (Lavenex 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018).

A first contribution to the literature has shown that issue-salience along with regulatory expertise and administrative capacity is important to understand negotiation behaviour, bargaining success and policy output during the first phase of the CEAS (Zaun 2016, 2017). However, it is argued that after the Lisbon Treaty these factors are no longer sufficient to fully explain old member states' negotiation behaviour (Silvestre 2019). It is proposed a bargaining model that not only considers issue-salience, but also formal and informal institutional rules to explain the changed behaviour in the Council. For example, if under unanimity voting rule strong regulators adopted hard bargaining strategies (Zaun 2016), under QMV the use of these more confrontational strategies is constrained (Silvestre 2019). There is a shift from an intergovernmental, state-centred approach to institutionalism. However, there is still a gap in the literature. The new member states were not included in both studies, and might respond differently to these factors. Furthermore, the current reform is under more pressure than the previous phases, so it would be interesting to study if there was a significant change in the negotiation behaviour in the Council.

This last dimension takes us to the following two topics. Like other policy areas, there is evidence that Council decisions in the JHA are also mainly reached without vetoing or explicitly voting (Aus 2008; Ripoll Servent and Trauner 2015). However, recent studies demonstrate that this assumption is no longer 100 per cent accurate (Trauner 2016; Niemann and Zaun 2018; Roos 2018a; Zaun 2018). The analysis of 12 years of Council voting records show that in the post-Lisbon period (2010-16) member states voiced more opposition than in the period pre-Lisbon (2004-2019) (Roos 2018a). It is noted that this increasing contestation in the JHA policy area is mainly related to concerns with sovereignty; with regulatory and political misfit; overall functionality of the proposal; and budgetary concerns (Ibid). According to the literature these concerns were enhanced by the 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis.

Moreover, in case of a more divisive and confrontational Council, the consensus norm might be undermined (Trauner 2016; Niemann and Zaun 2018; Zaun 2018). The assumption that the enlargement had little impact on EU decision-making (see Mattila 2008) no longer applies in the current reform of the asylum policy area. The negotiations on the quota system have demonstrated that the 'new' members have become more vocal, organised and consequently more successful in the

Council (Zaun 2018). The ‘new members’ have clearly contributed to a more divisive Council in terms of policy preferences and positions (Ibid.).

Though there is still room to study the current reform and assess if there are differences in the decision-making between the different legislative instruments, and which countries were crucial in changing the Council dynamic and influencing the policy output. Last but not least, future studies could also take a closer look not only to the empowerment of the EP and its impact on European integration in this policy area but also in the inter-institutional relations throughout the different phases of the CEAS.

Studying these institutional dynamics is the key to understanding the future of the European integration in the asylum policy. There has been an increasing intensification of the ‘securitisation’ debate in the asylum policy area, which can ultimately result in a paradigm shift in terms of protection for refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, the current division in the Council and between the EU institutions might also have important future policy implications. Therefore, evidence-based policy-making is what researchers, practitioners including policy analysts and policy-makers should aim for.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Robert Ladrech, Florian Trauner, João Carvalho and to the anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this commentary.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 15, Issue 4 (2019)

Teaching, Learning and the Profession

Role-Play Simulation of Negotiations between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union: Teaching while Enhancing a Transnational Dialogue

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Citation

Romanova, T. and Gudalov, N. (2019). 'Role-Play Simulation of Negotiations between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union: Teaching while Enhancing a Transnational Dialogue', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 410-424. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1093>

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The article reviews the experience of the role-play simulation (RPS) 'Modelling negotiations between the EU and EAEU', arranged in 2018 and 2019. Its specific goals were building knowledge (about the European Union (EU) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and enhancing a transnational dialogue between EU (Western) and Russian students in the context of a deteriorated EU-Russian relationship. This latter aspect of international RPS has received insufficient attention in the literature, yet it might contribute to the improvement of real-life EU-Russian relations through fostering a transnational dialogue and mutual understanding among young citizens. The article outlines the setting of the RPS and addresses three major difficulties that the organisers faced (designing the RPS, preparing students and fostering their dialogue), the solutions that were developed and the assessments of the results.

Keywords

Role-play simulation; Modelling; EU-Russian relations; Eurasian Economic Union; Free trade area; Transnational dialogue

Role-play simulations (RPS) have been widely practised since the second half of the twentieth century. They model the work of a state, an international organisation (or their institutions), in limited time and space and, based on scripts and role descriptions that are close to the rules and procedures, practised in real life. This article focuses on the simulation of negotiations between the European Union (EU) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) that took place in 2018 and 2019 at Saint Petersburg State University. It pursued two goals: 1) to enhance students' knowledge of the EU, EAEU and their relations (in particular prospects for a free trade area between them); and 2) to stimulate a transnational dialogue through building contacts among Russian and EU (Western) students and developing relevant transferable skills. The article first reviews the literature on RPS; it then explains the context in which this RPS was prepared, its goals and setting. Next, it outlines how organisers dealt with three major difficulties, which are: designing the RPS; ensuring that students are prepared; and enhancing the transnational dialogue and ultimately building trust at the societal level. Finally, the article looks at how the results of the simulation were assessed (including the solutions adopted for the difficulties that were identified).

APPROACHES TO RPS

The existing literature offers three approaches to RPS, which can be identified as academic, educational and mixed. According to the first one, RPS is a tool of analysis that, through simplifying real processes, allows for a focusing on their most significant aspects and on forecasting future developments. Historically, this is the first approach to RPS, which dates back to studies of biological logics in social organisation through observing the animal world (Tolman 1948) and to studies in modern behavioural psychology (Watson 1913; Thorndike 1905). At a later stage, econometric logic

and technical modelling were applied. As far back as half a century ago, Sidney Verba, reviewing books on simulations in international relations (IR), stressed that they 'may be most crucial for macro-political phenomena' and that they allow a researcher to control 'the direction of causality between variables', which other theoretical and methodological approaches could not provide (1964: 500).

The second, educational, approach to RPS dates back to 1953 when Harvard University held the first UN Model. This experience gradually spread throughout the world. The UN Model was followed by RPS of other national and international institutions. Currently, in Europe, a lot of attention is paid to modelling the EU as well as its institutions (Council, EP, European Council) and procedures (citizens' initiative, multi-level governance). This is the result of the EU's legislative influence, its complexity and transparency, which encourages institutional studies, as well as the EU's dialogue with citizens, supported by educational programmes and grants. According to the educational approach, RPS is a pedagogical technique that demonstrates key features of the process in question and enables learning through students 'playing' a simplified scenario in the classroom with the assistance and supervision of the course instructor. RPS are a part of the educational transformation from passive learning where an instructor is at the centre to active learning with an instructor facilitating the process. The Bologna process, with its emphasis on students' active learning and acquired competences, provided an additional impetus to the RPS (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Baroncelli, Farneti, Horga and Vanhoonacker 2014; Lightfoot and Maurer 2014). In most cases, RPS are integrated into a university course. Occasionally, modelling brings together students from various schools as a part of extra-curricular activities (see, for example, Jones and Bursens 2014; Jones 2008; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000).

The third, mixed, approach to RPS marries the academic and educational approaches. It remains a pedagogical technique but students themselves, as well as their output, become the object of study. Vernon L. Smith received the 2002 Nobel Prize for the results of experiments in economic sciences that involved students. Experiments in political science were initially criticised on both practical (the difficulty of establishing a control group, insufficient representativeness etc.) and ethical grounds (Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Lijphart 1971). However, they were gradually adopted as a legitimate method (Druckman, Green and Kuklinski 2011; McDermott 2002). The constructivist approach also treats learning as an 'active process in which learners construct their own meaning, and build internal and personal representations of knowledge' (Vermetten, Vermunt and Lodewijks 2002: 265). The study can investigate how participants' preferences are formed, how they become responsible citizens, change their attitude towards various structures and develop a European identity (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Van Dyke 2014; Asal and Kratoville 2013).

These approaches, however, fail to capture one more facet of an RPS that brings together representatives of competing actors, that of socialisation and transnational dialogue, which in the long run enhances mutual understanding and trust. In today's relations, this is the essential basis for stable and long-lasting relations. The RPS that is analysed in this article falls into the educational approach yet, at the same time, has the potential to lead to long-term consequences for real-life interaction as a result of the transnational interaction that it encourages.

RPS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

RPS target diverse aspects. Firstly, the RPS enhance transferable skills such as communication, retrieving and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, public speaking, negotiating, leadership, time-management (Gastinger 2017; Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015, 2014; Elias 2014; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000; Dorn 1989). Individual psychological benefits are also pointed out, such as affective learning, interest and motivation, and

student and teacher emotional satisfaction (Brom, Šisler, Slussareff, Selmbacherová et al 2016; Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015; Kaunert 2009; Dorn 1989). Students also become active citizens (Van Dyke 2014) because RPS bring politics closer to them (Jones and Bursens 2015; Galatas 2006; Zeff 2003; Hess 1999; Dorn 1989).

Secondly, RPS enhance students' substantive knowledge. For example, the key idea behind modelling the European Union is to demonstrate systemic institutional interactions (Zeff 2003). The complexity of rules often leads to the focus of many RPS on an institution. This may be the European Parliament (Jozwiak 2013), the European Council (Zeff 2003), the Council (Elias 2014; Galatas 2006). RPS help to apply theoretical knowledge to 'real life' processes and to experience those processes hands-on (Kröger 2018; Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015; Elias 2014; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000; Dorn 1989).

Some have commented, however, that there is frequently 'a trade-off between teaching transferable skills and substantive knowledge' (Gastinger 2017: 233). Other scholars have even disputed whether RPS work to develop skills or knowledge. In academic terms, therefore, RPS have both strong and weak points in IR and political science (Verba 1964), like any other method of research. The debates are more impassioned when RPS are approached through the educational or mixed approaches. It has been argued that the research is equivocal on whether the RPS develop relevant skills (Baranowski and Weir 2015; McCarthy 2014; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Gosen and Washbush 2004). Moreover, some argue that RPS and other active learning techniques do not improve students' knowledge and results overall, as their tests demonstrate. Some even go so far as to treat simulations in IR as educational populism and entertainment of students (Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013; Prince 2004; Rochester 2003; Kille 2002; Dorn 1989).

In spite of all the criticisms, RPS maintain their positions as a complement to more traditional forms of study, lectures and tutorials, for instance. There is, however, a clear link between traditional methods and RPS: the success of RPS depends on prior knowledge about the subject matter of the modelling (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015). For this reason, it is advisable to integrate RPS into a more traditional course.

With such debates in mind, the 'Modelling Negotiations between the EU and EAEU' RPS targeted both knowledge-building and transferable skills. The substantive knowledge covered the EU's relations with Russia and the EAEU, and in particular a (possibility of a) free trade area (FTA) between them. Among the transferable skills covered were public speaking and negotiation but also how to build a (transnational) dialogue - through encouraging close listening to opponents, thereby ultimately improving trust. Although the importance of communication during RPS has been noticed before (Kaunert 2009), this modelling accorded particular significance to it in the context of the present, highly deteriorated state of EU-Russian relations.

Finally, RPS practitioners have long debated what has to be done to enhance the educational value of RPS. The choice of the subject matter is an important factor for success. The issues discussed should be topical, controversial, open for various solutions and at the same time stay clear of two extremes, i.e. being overly political or technical (Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000). The need to set clear educational objectives and to integrate the RPS into a course are always stressed (Elias 2014; Usherwood 2014; Asal and Kratoville 2013; Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013). Students' preparation is crucial for the success of both an individual participant and the RPS as a whole (Elias 2014; Kaunert 2009; Asal 2005; Switky 2004). Another major concern is how to measure the results of the RPS in terms of skills and learning outcomes (Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Elias 2014; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Chin, Dukes and Gamson 2009; Raymond 2008).

This article seeks to contribute to this latter strand of literature, summarising the experience of organising the RPS, incorporating several schools in four different countries, targeted at building knowledge and enhancing a very specific transferable skill, that of building a transnational dialogue between Russian and EU (Western) students. The next section explains the context, goals and setting of this RPS while the remaining two outline the steps that were taken to deal with three major difficulties of this simulation and the way this RPS was assessed.

GOALS AND SETTING OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND EAEU

Saint Petersburg State University (SPbU) started UN Modelling in 2004 and EU Modelling in 2007 and since then has annually organised them. EU Modelling was partly integrated into the curricular of the MA programme on European studies (it was compulsory for its students but open to others). SPbU also experimented creatively with modelling events, introducing the roles of lobbyists, mass media as well as making some events bilingual. The launch of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) led the team of SPbU to design an RPS, simulating the functioning of its bodies (a series of small-scale activities were conducted between 2015 and 2017). Hence, by 2017, the team¹ had considerable experience in organising RPS.

Two reasons led the team to design an RPS of negotiations between the EU and EAEU and shaped the goals of this RPS. First, EU-Russian relations have deteriorated for a number of years and were nearly frozen in 2014 with the events in Ukraine being conceptualised differently in Moscow and Brussels (coup d'état vs. revolution, repatriation of Crimea vs. its annexation) and provoking sanctions and counter sanctions. In this context, a dialogue between the EU and EAEU emerged as a possible channel to preserve at least some constructive, long-term economic agenda. Russia repeatedly called for a launch of negotiations leading to closer economic relations between the EU and EAEU. The EU has remained sceptical of the EAEU, arguing that the latter did not have sufficient competences, was not recognised in the WTO and was meant to preserve Russia's geopolitical influence throughout the post-Soviet space. Only modest technical contacts have been established between the EU's Delegation in Moscow and the Eurasian Economic Commission.

At the same time, studies (Emerson 2018; Vinokurov, Balas, Emerson, Havlik et al. 2016; Pelipas, Tochitskaya and Vinokurov 2014) confirmed the potential of an FTA between the EU and Russia. Yet the actors understood their goal differently: Russia was only ready to restate what it committed to in the WTO while the EU wished to go further. Deep and comprehensive free trade area agreements between the EU and its eastern neighbours emerged as a model for this cooperation for the EU. Hence, it was interesting to explore what sort of FTA could be established between the EU and Russia and how it could impact their relations. In other words, this RPS was meant to expose differences on both sides, to teach students the arguments of both sides and, in a way, to divine some real-world events (negotiations on an FTA).

Second, the deterioration of EU-Russian relations led to information warfare (the scope of which is debated). Above all, it has affected ordinary citizens and increased their mistrust of the other side in these relations (Letterman 2018; Levada 2018). The RPS that would bring together students from various universities from Russia, the EU and beyond was seen as a way to counter this unfavourable climate in EU-Russian relations and to enhance mutual understanding through a transnational dialogue that would be established in the context of the RPS. The RPS was therefore seen as a way to improve not only the usual (for RPS) transferable skills (public speaking, negotiations) but also to get both sides to foster a dialogue, which is the first step for trust and any constructive discussion in the future, and to teach students how to build such a dialogue. The team believed that contacts, dialogue and trust-building had to be promoted among young people particularly. In that sense, this RPS developed a very

particular transferable skill, that of building a transnational dialogue among Russian and EU (Western) students.

The choice of the subject matter of negotiations – negotiating an FTA agreement between the EU and EAEU – was to strike a balance between being too political and too technical. The specific goal of the simulation was to develop an FTA agreement between the EU and the EAEU. On the one hand, the topic allowed for debate of sanctions and of the overall climate of EU-EAEU trade and investments. On the other hand, any FTA presupposes plenty of technical details, many of which were on the table during this RPS. In fact, the choice of the subject matter gave students plenty of flexibility. The RPS presupposed the simulation of the three key institutions of the EU (Commission, Council and Parliament) as well as two institutions of the Eurasian Economic Union (Eurasian Commission and Supreme Eurasian Council) and the national parliaments of the five EAEU members. In that sense, the simulation was unique in its institutional complexity. The negotiations were conducted by the EU Commission and the Eurasian Economic Commission, and the resulting draft text was submitted to the EU's Council and the European Parliament and to the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council for a final vote (see Table 1 for details of the script).

Table 1. The Script of the RPS of the negotiations between the EU and EAEU

Timing	Activity	Output
Day 1. Morning session	Meeting of the EU's Council (with representatives of the EP attending the meeting)	Decision of the Council on the start of negotiations and draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
	Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (with representatives of the EAEU's national parliaments attending the meeting)	Decision of the Supreme Council on the start of negotiations and draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
	Meeting of the European Commission	Draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
	Meeting of the Eurasian Economic Commission	Draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
Day 1. Afternoon session	Meeting of EU Council and European Commission (with representatives of the EP attending the meeting)	Negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
	Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and Eurasian Economic Commission	Negotiation directive (2-3 pages)
Day 1. Evening sessions – online	Discussions within the respective parliaments on the start of the negotiations and the overall context of EU-EAEU relations (with participation of remote participants online)	Position on the negotiations (1-2 pages each parliament)
Day 2. Morning session	Negotiations between the EU Commission and EAEU Commission members in 3 groups (freedom of goods, services and capital) – 2 rounds	Interim results of the 1 st and 2 nd negotiation rounds in each group (2 pages each group, each round)
	Discussions within the EU Council (with participation of the EP) on the sanctions, their possible removal and prospects for further relations – 2 meetings	Draft proposals (2 pages) – 1 st meeting; proposals (2 pages) – 2 nd meeting
	Discussions within the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (with participation of the national parliaments) on the sanctions, their possible removal and prospects for further relations – 2 meetings	Draft proposals (2 pages) – 1 st meeting; proposals (2 pages) – 2 nd meeting
	The European Commission informs the EU Council and the EP about the progress of negotiations and	Draft corrected negotiation directive (2 pages)

Timing	Activity	Output
Day 2. Afternoon session	receives instructions from the Council, assisted by the EP	
	The Eurasian Economic Commission informs the Supreme Council and national parliaments about the progress of negotiations and receives instructions from the Council, assisted by parliaments	Draft corrected negotiation directive (2 pages)
Day 2. Evening session – online	Discussions within the respective parliaments on the interim results of the negotiations (with participation of remote participants online)	Position on the negotiations (2 pages each parliament)
Day 3. Morning session	The parliaments' representatives deliver their positions, and the instructions for the respective Commissions and the positions of the respective Councils are corrected	Corrected negotiation directives (2 pages each)
Day 3. Second morning sessions	Negotiations between the EU Commission and EAEU Commission members in 3 groups	Interim results of the 3 rd negotiation round in each group (2 pages for each)
	Meeting of the European Council (the European Parliament is present) and the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (the EAEU parliaments are present)	Declaration (2 pages)
Day 3. Afternoon session	Negotiations between the two Commissions	Draft agreement (appr. 8 pages)
	Meeting of the EU Council and the EP	Declaration regarding the other side (2 pages)
	Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and the EAEU parliaments	Declaration regarding the other side (2 pages)
Day 3. Evening session – online	The European Commission informs the EU Council and the EP about the results of negotiations, answers questions and critique and puts the agreement to a vote in the Council and the EP	Decision on signing or refusal to sign
	The Eurasian Commission informs the Supreme Eurasian Council and national parliaments about the results of negotiations, answers questions and critique and puts the agreement to a vote in the Supreme Eurasian Council	Decision on signing or refusal to sign

The goal of transnational dialogue meant that the project involved students from SPbU (which provided the venue for negotiations between the councils and commissions) and five other universities (which were venues for the parliamentary discussions). Three of these universities were located in Russia (Perm, Kazan and Tomsk), two were based in the EU (Tampere and Leuven) and one in Canada (Carleton).² The support of the EU's Jean Monnet Programme facilitated the presence of a substantial number of external participants. Partner universities sent students to the main event in Saint Petersburg and participated in the RPS by representing the EP and five national parliaments of the EAEU remotely. Internet-based means of communication (mainly Skype calls and conferences) were used to connect them with SPbU where the core negotiations, involving councils and commissions, took place in the course of three days in April 2018 and then again in March 2019. The setting allowed for the participation of a relatively large number (80 in 2018 and 150 in 2019) of students, based in Russia, the EU and Canada, all of whom specialise in EU-Russian relations. Students who did not belong to any partner university could enrol on an individual basis. Some foreign students were in Saint Petersburg as exchange students but did not have much contact with their Russian peers due to a separate training programme.

In the course of the RPS, there were lots of public presentations, a painful search for compromises in the text, impassioned negotiations. In substantive terms, participants proved able to discuss quite specific issues. The number of issues was large; they ranged from trade in hydrocarbons, through issues of roaming or accounting services, to eventual relations between the European Central Bank and the Eurasian Development Bank. The negotiations led to quite predictable disagreements among the parties. For instance, the EU's representatives made a reference to values. The EAEU Commission asked for guarantees that the EU would continue to buy energy resources from the EAEU. Russian representatives questioned the idea of the EAEU sticking to 'European standards' and said that relations with the EU should be more balanced and 'equal'. These discussions neatly mirror the reality of present EU-Russian (and possibly future EU-EAEU) relations.

Participants worked on documents in quite a detailed way. For instance, a draft document from a group on freedom of capital movement reflected the authors' hesitation where it read: 'aiming to achieve full / partial / selective liberalization of movement of capitals' (the alternative words 'full', 'partial' and 'selective' were highlighted in different colours). Such arduous work on wording taught participants how complicated negotiations can be. At the same time, drafts were not free from vague phrases. Take as an example the following: 'Explore the possibility of the establishment of a common technical platform for discussing the issues of implementations of financial integration measures'. This may reflect a lack of ideas and precision on the part of the participants but it may also point to the more real-life difficulties of specifying the terms of cooperation given the EU's and the EAEU's different interests and visions.

During the first year, the final draft agreement was not approved due to a miscommunication among simulated EU institutions. Although some participants were disappointed with this, this failure is of pedagogical value as it reflects the importance of better self-organisation and internal communication, as well as the complexity of institutional and transnational interaction. In the second year, improved coordination procedures among participants playing in different sites led to the approval of the agreement on an FTA.

The planning and execution of this RPS presented three major difficulties: designing the RPS itself to reflect its goals; ensuring that participants were prepared; and fostering a transnational dialogue. These problems and the solutions that the project team developed are addressed in the next section.

CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES

Designing the RPS

The literature informs us that the RPS have to be well prepared. The problem of this RPS was how to achieve that when modelling something that does not exist (EU-EAEU negotiations) and taking into account the involvement of six different universities, located in time zones that stretch from Toms (GMT+7) to Ottawa (GMT-5).

First, the script had to be developed from scratch. The EU's trade and economic negotiations were the point of departure; they were then combined with official provisions of the EAEU on this matter and its thin experience of negotiations (with Singapore, Egypt, Israel and India). Key institutions on both sides were identified and a way forward for their interaction was suggested. Any RPS requires substantial simplification of the rules and procedures. Simplification enhances the educational value of the RPS by allowing concentration on the task in hand and helping to deal with the time constraints. The EU-EAEU modelling only confirmed this rule. For example, the EU Council and the European

Council were merged; procedures of parliamentary consultations were standardised among the EU and EAEU members.

Furthermore, the project team also developed a detailed description of rules and roles, which included the script itself, general rules, descriptions of the EU's and the EAEU's institutions (including their detailed functioning during the days of the RPS); rules for lobbyists and journalists. This set of documents is available in full at the website <http://model.euactive.ru>. It was distributed to all participants and served as their manual in the course of the RPS. Moreover, the task of developing an FTA was clearly specified.

The RPS programme contained time slots, rooms and specific results that participants were expected to deliver at each stage (in terms of written texts – mandates, positions, drafts etc, see table 1 above). Specific and tangible results were crucial to avoid empty discussions and structure students' interaction to achieve the goal of the script. They also provided an important basis for students' assessment in the end. The first year of the RPS demonstrated students' difficulties when drafting the documents (and facing the blank page in the beginning). To remedy this, templates of all the documents were developed by 2019. The schedule took into account the wide time difference among institutional participants. Online consultations with external participants took place at the end of each day in Saint Petersburg, which was late evening in Tomsk and Perm and early morning in Ottawa.

Finally, the selection of chairs was crucial for each institution. They had to be well versed in the rules and roles description, programme and task but also needed the charisma to drive the process and possess relevant communication and language skills. Chairs were nominated from students who attended preparatory trainings in Saint Petersburg (see below).

Having done its preparatory work, the organising team decided not to intervene in the RPS. In this way we opted for the role of observers and at time facilitators but not that of 'the sage on the stage' (King cited in Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015: 210). However, a representative from the team was always present in each room of the RPS to help the chair should any problem arise.

Participants' preparation

As the literature demonstrates, student preparation is key for any simulation. This is particularly the case when such a complex script is on the table. Thus, the question that had to be resolved was how to prepare students when they came from different universities and faced negotiations which had not yet taken place in real life.

First and foremost, the organising team made all script materials available on the website of the project several months before the start of each of the two RPS. These texts were complemented with support materials on the EU, EAEU and free trade areas. They were divided into compulsory and supplementary parts to take into account students' interests and time constraints. The materials consisted of articles, official reports of the EU and EAEU but also short videos. The amount of preparatory reading had to be manageable, given that for many students it is an extra-curricular activity. Use of a variety of media (books, video, graphs) catered for different types of learners.

Next, the team provided a series of preparatory trainings in Saint Petersburg to students for whom participation in the RPS was mandatory (those enrolled in the courses 'EU Institutions', 'EU-Russian Relations' and 'Analysis of the Developments in the Post-Soviet Area'). A series of mock sessions and discussions on the EU, EAEU and FTA were arranged to make sure that students were well versed in the rules and subject matter. The team also distributed roles in such a way that students who had

attended trainings were present in each institution and served as its backbone. The team also asked external players to write a short essay to check their level of knowledge and ability to analyse similar substantive problems. The roles were allocated on the basis of participants' knowledge that was collected from the information that they supplied at registration, their essays and attendance at trainings.

Much of the preparation of external participants depended on the commitment of partner universities. Some of our interlocutors integrated this RPS into a class, others just delegated responsibility to their students and recommended remaining students follow the simulation in an extra-curricular way. The latter approach had negative consequences for these students' motivation and commitment (including to support their peers, delegated to SPbU). Hence, some parliaments were very powerful in the RPS while others were virtually missing from negotiations. The situation did not necessarily reflect the real-life situation but again was of great pedagogical value for participants. Our experience confirmed the literature on the importance of integrating the RPS into a course and combining it with more traditional learning.

Finally, several lectures were arranged on the morning of the first day of the RPS to provide some key information to participants on the EU, and EAEU as well as on the possibilities for and associated problems of an FTA between them, and hence to cater for knowledge discrepancy among participants. For that purpose, we also invited a Russian and an EU academic to deliver presentations on the context and issues of an FTA between the EU and the EAEU. That guaranteed a more balanced approach to the topic. In addition, on the morning of the first day, the project team specified one more time the learning objectives of the RPS in order to focus participants on the task ahead.

Enhancing the dialogue

A peculiar goal of this simulation that distinguished it from others described in the literature lay in the importance that it accorded to fostering transnational dialogue. Involving several universities was only a stepping stone; in itself it was not sufficient. In order to maximise the interaction of people who did not know each other before, several things had to be done.

First, from the very beginning, the project team opted for mixing students among all of the institutions. This way, Russian participants presented their views on both EU and Eurasian institutions, interests and constraints while their Western peers provided an alternative picture. That fostered much of the discussion and personal discoveries as students' feedback demonstrated. To make sure that parliaments can also profit from varying compositions, we added Russian and EU / Western students to the on-site delegations of the EU and EAEU legislative bodies.

An important second lesson, learnt in the first year, was the complexity of coordination among six universities. So, in the second year some participants from partner universities that travelled to Saint Petersburg played the roles allocated to their universities (i.e. Carleton played the European Parliament while Leuven, Tampere, Tomsk, Kazan and Perm universities were responsible respectively for the Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Armenian and Belorussian parliaments). Some students from these universities who were in Saint Petersburg during the day assisted at various meetings and then reported to their peers online, took their instructions and delivered them to their Councils and Commissions on behalf of their simulated institutions. We also developed two storage platforms on the projects' website (one for the EU and another one for EAEU players) so that they exchanged their documents there, which ensured better communication and guaranteed that no instruction or text was lost.

Third, language skills proved crucial for the exchange of ideas, mutual understanding and ultimately transnational dialogue. English was chosen as the only language of the RPS. Sufficient language proficiency was a requirement for all participants, which, regrettably, limited the number of players on the Russian side. It also meant that socialisation and dialogue were limited to those who were exposed to information from outside Russia and could read English-language sources anyway. Frequently, they did not present an extreme Russian official point of view that needed to be explained to EU (Western) participants. As with the preparation, the project team relied on external participants to guarantee the English language skills of their participants. (If resources are available, those who decide to replicate this RPS could assess participants' language skills beforehand.) The project team limited it to a self-imposed check in the case of external participants, stating clearly that all negotiations would be in English.

Finally, the script made sure that sufficient time was left for informal discussions among participants. This time was used to exchange ideas on the subject matter of the consultation, including among representatives of institutions who did not come into contact according to the script of the RPS, to build coalitions but also to communicate with the press. The latter issued a newsletter outlining key debates and also their problems and provided an additional space for communication.

EVALUATING THE RESULTS

Three types of assessment were used in this RPS. They helped to improve the modelling of the second (2019) year significantly. First, organisers were continually present at all meetings, looking at whether they progressed steadily, followed the scenario in terms of procedures and rules and drew on their knowledge of the EU, EAEU and FTAs. Given the tasks of the RPS, of particular importance was whether the substantive knowledge and transferable skills were improved as well as whether transnational dialogue was being constructed. Three criteria were used to assess participants: their knowledge of the formal rules and subject matter, the intensity of their participation and attendance at the meetings. Certificates were awarded to participants on the basis of these criteria.

Second, students actively participated in the evaluation. On the one hand, some students were given the roles of the press. In the course of the RPS, they visited various negotiations, interviewed participants and raised some important issues. They put this in the form of a daily press report, which allowed us to gauge progress and identify some unexpected problems (for example, at one occasion, students complained about gender discrimination in the course of debates). On the other hand, all students filled out evaluation forms at the end of the game where they identified what they had learnt about the substance of the RPS, how they had improved their transferable skills, how they felt about the transnational dialogue. In addition, students from SPbU for whom the RPS was a part of the course, submitted detailed reports on both their individual learning and on what to improve in the RPS to target its goals better.

Finally, dialogue with our colleagues in five remote universities was important to assess the level of their involvement in the RPS, the script, as well as the individual learning results of their students. This part was particularly key when assessing the adequacy and reliability of the script and the efficiency of the transnational dialogue (including between SPbU and other partners).

All three types of assessment had to answer first and foremost whether the goals – to develop knowledge about the substance of EU-EAEU economic negotiations and transferable skills, in particular that of transnational interaction – were achieved. Furthermore, the assessment had to reveal any weak points in the organisation. In our case, these weak points were grouped into three categories (development of the script, students' preparation, and enhancing the transnational dialogue) and

addressed as documented above. The evaluation of the second year demonstrated the success of the adopted solutions.

In terms of the learning, all participants noted an increase in their knowledge about the EU, EAEU and FTAs. The project team could also verify that through their participation in the RPS and consequent in-class discussions with Saint Petersburg students for whom the RPS was a part of the class. The share of students' negative self-assessment, claiming that they did not learn much, was around 9 per cent. The habit of traditional (lecture-type) instructions and to lecturers being at the centre of the process manifested itself in those negative feedbacks; students complained about insufficient active guidance on the part of the organising team during the simulation.

Similarly, students were very detailed about their transferable skills. On the one hand, they noticed the difficulty of cross-cultural communication, particularly in English. On the other hand, they claimed that their language and negotiations skills improved considerably as a result of the practice and they benefited from meeting and working with 'people with different perspectives'. Students also stressed the value of transnational dialogue that emerged in the course of the RPS. Students in particular were fascinated both by learning from their peers and by the need sometimes to represent 'the opposite' side (i.e. Russian students simulating EU institutions and the other way around). These transferable skills were also very noticeable to our partner universities for the students who participated in the RPS.

Finally, both our assessments and feedback from our partner universities also demonstrated that measures adopted to strengthen the transnational dialogue (redistribution of roles, composition of groups, platform for the exchange of documents) delivered positive results in the second year.

CONCLUSION

Some techniques that were used to meet the two goals of the EU-EAEU negotiations' modelling (knowledge-building and development of transnational communications) are universal for RPS and well documented in the literature. These are ensuring students' preparation through reading and video material as well as essays, preparatory lectures and mock sessions, integration of the RPS into a course, reliance on partners to prepare their students, the importance of sufficient language and negotiation skills. Others were developed on the basis of our own experience, taking into account the feedback that we received, to meet the challenge of modelling something that does not exist, of managing the participation of Russian and Western students and of six universities, as well as of enhancing a transnational dialogue. Among the key solutions that the team developed are the particular script design, which outlines clearly the output that has to be achieved at every stage and takes into account the different time zones, the setting up of a shared space to exchange documents, the particular composition of each institution (to ensure a dialogue among students of the hosting and remote universities and to cater for the goal of fostering the transnational dialogue). Different assessments were also instrumental for perfecting the script and the overall organisation.

The results of the RPS – as reflected in participants' feedback – demonstrated that students positively assessed the game and benefited in terms of substantial learning and transferable skills. The project team witnessed participants actively exchanging various points of views, arguing about concepts and technicalities but also trying to understand the opposite point of view. The adjustment made in the second year allowed us to increase the efficiency of this transnational engagement. It is crucial that discussions reflected many real-life issues and lines of EU-EAEU confrontation. Personal discoveries about how relations are seen from the other side and efforts to understand alternative positions form the most important result of this RPS. They enhance transnational contacts (and the skills required for

their construction) and contribute to trust-building, which are essential when polls tell the tale of a deep mistrust of EU citizens towards Russia and the other way around (Letterman 2018; Levada 2018).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research and the described project were supported by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (Jean Monnet Project, 'Simulating EU-Eurasian Economic Union Negotiations to Encourage Transnational Active Learning and Civil Dialogue' (agreement 2017-2618)).

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ENDNOTES

¹ The team initially consisted of three scholars from the Department of European Studies (Tatiana Romanova (project leader), Nikolay Gudalov and Dmitri Levi). It was then enlarged to include one colleague from the Department of CIS Studies (Evgeny Treschenkov) and two colleagues from the Department of World Politics (Tamara Nemchinova and Maria Lagutina).

² These five universities were selected because they specialised in studies of the EU and Russia, had a relevant MA programme, and were ready to commit their staff and students to the exercise. They also had established contacts and experience of cooperation with SPbU by 2017.

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