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FROM A PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY TO A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: AN UNFINISHED PROCESS

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Abstract: *The Parliamentary Assembly of the European Communities was the precursory body of the European Parliament, but it lacked the legitimacy the latter would gain starting with 1979, the year when the first European elections were held. The two entities differ in many ways, such as the internal organization, the competences and the connections with other European institutions, but the fundamental difference is the one that also determined the rest of the previously mentioned aspects, specifically the way their members were appointed. Although this aspect may seem solved, it will not be so until the suffrage for the European Parliament will not only be direct, universal and secret, but also accessible, assuring all interested stakeholders the same fair conditions for participation, thus eliminating all formal and informal obstacles for independent or party candidates.*

Keywords: political parties; elections; democratic deficit; discourse construction; ideology

Introduction

The European Union is a complex structure that is legally an international organization, but that has developed institutions, policies and practices that resemble those of a state. Nevertheless, this two sided feature leads to what academic literature calls *the democratic deficit*, given the fact that its institutions are composed of European officials that are not politically invested by the European citizens. This problem has been subject to the academic debates, but also to political negotiations in the moments of amending the Treaties of the EU. Thus, in this section, I shall present these aspects in order to formulate the main question that will be answered throughout the following two sections of this chapter: Does ideology matter for the reduction of the democratic deficit of the EP and implicitly, of the EU?

1. The democratic deficit of the European Parliament and of the European Union

While "the earliest charges of a democratic deficit in the EU centred on the weak role of the EP and national parliaments" (Caporaso, 2005, p. 62), given that "when the demos cannot employ its

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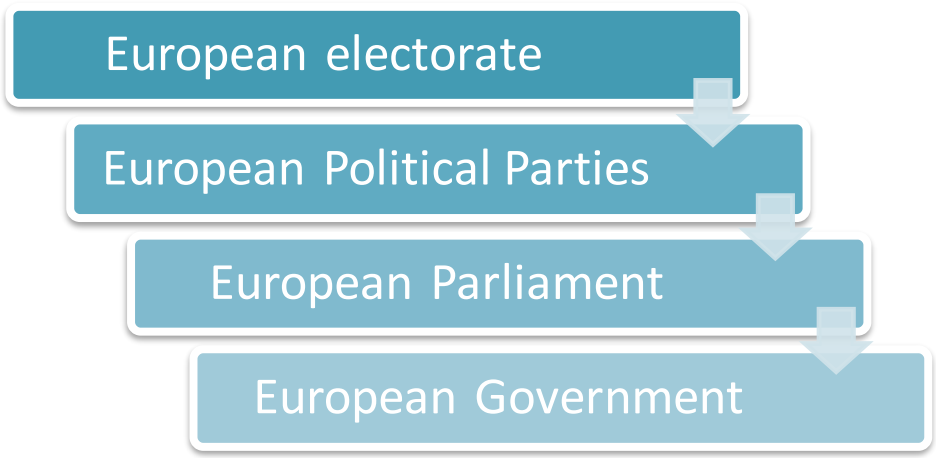
national parliaments to exercise control over the transnational political process it can be said that there exists a loss of national democratic autonomy" (Chryssochoou, 1998, p. 114), the democratic deficit is defined as "a net loss of democracy that comes from transferring powers from state to Union institutions without also democratising the second to the standards of the first" (Lord, 2004, p. 6). The counter response of the European Union was to create the idea of legitimizing its institutions by placing them under the control of the European Parliament, which was seen as a democratic institution due to the fact that its members were chosen by vote. Nonetheless, "sceptics point to the absence of European-wide political parties and general voter apathy in the elections of the European Parliament (…) repeated failures in extending the political identity to a higher level" (Bowman, 2006, p. 197), which are the main elements that the electoral process combines.

A cause for the EU's democratic deficit is identified within "disparity in power" between the EP and the Commission (Burns, 2002, p. 62), but this aspect seems to have found an improvement in the institutional changes brought by t the Lisbon Treaty. The increase of the influence that the European Parliament has on the European Commission was also a result of the pressures applied by the MEPs that reinforced the motivation that lead to this pledge by reminding the investment vote they receive from the citizens. As evidence to that is the fact that in the plenary, the EP resolution that emphasised the fact that "as many members as possible of the next European Commission should be chosen among newly-elected MEPs so as to give voters more say", was adopted with "316 votes in favour, 90 against and 20 abstentions" (EP, 2014). This direction resembles the path that is foreseen for reducing the EU's democratic deficit, namely transforming the EU "into a more accountable (parliamentary) regime" (Gerven, 2005, p. 349).

Moreover, since "democracy is no longer about the mobilization of citizens towards consensus on the common good, but about aggregating individual preferences in what is now a pluralistic, morally diverse civic universe. In democracies, such aggregation of interests principally takes place through voting in competitive elections (Dahl, 1972), with political parties being the central actors in the process" (Tsakatika, 2007, p. 871), the importance of the consolidation of the ideological representation carried out by MEPs is even higher, especially since "democratic deficit concerns tend to be motivated by abstract principles of democratic representation" (Sajó, 2004, p. 434).

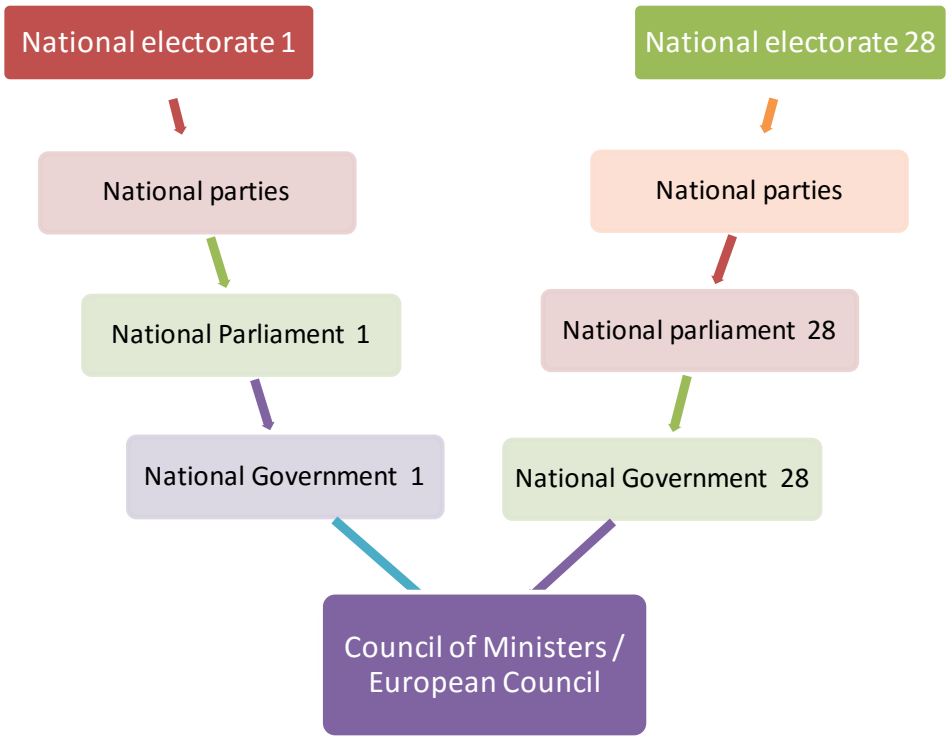
Thomassen and Schmitt (2007, p. 17) separate the two types of political representation for the European Union according to the two types of political entity the EU would aspire to become:

Figure 1 – The federal model of European political representation



Source: Thomassen and Schmitt (2007, p. 18)

Figure 2 – The intergovernmental model of European political representation

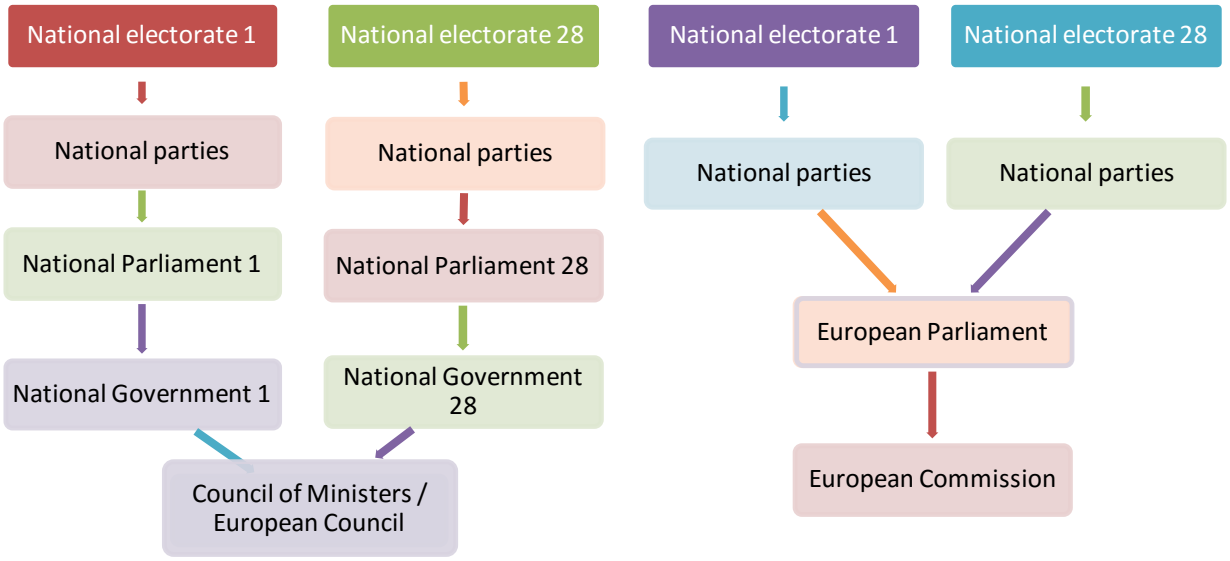


Source: Thomassen and Schmitt (2007, p. 18)

Nevertheless, judging by these models, the EU does not currently fit entirely into only one of these categories, given that it is a polity whose citizens are represented both through the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. This aspect is not problematic, as much as the fact that the political actors involved in the electoral process, which act according to intergovernmental norms within a federal setting, combine the two models in a distorting way.

Thus, the federal model of European political representation is actually incomplete because some of its electoral components still belong to the intergovernmental model. So, the EU's current model of political representation has the following configuration:

Figure 3 – The intergovernmental model of European political representation



Source: Own elaboration by adapting the two previous models provided by Jacques Thomassen and Herman Schmitt (2007, p. 18) to the post Lisbon Treaty framework

The colours chosen for the figures are also meant to highlight the differences between the electoral and institutional dispersion of all 28 national electorates, political parties, Parliaments and Governments, as opposed to the institutional coordination brought by the Europeanization of electoral practices, that would be reflected in a European electorate, European political parties, a politicised European Parliament and European Commission, under political control of the legislative. So, the 3rd figure, corresponding to the current state of the art concerning political representation in the EU, resembles more to the 1st one in terms of electoral dispersion, but reflects the progress made concerning the institutional Europeanization advanced through the EP's increased political control over the Commission. This outlines a clear case of functional spill over effect that requires the need for further Europeanization in the early phases of the electoral process, given the Europeanization of its top phase, the proposal of a President of the EC by the European political group that has won the majority of seats in the EP.

These four institutions have their particular representation functions at different levels and in different policy areas, like for example in the Foreign Affairs domain, but the European Parliament stands out as the only directly elected institution and the one that benefits from the direct investment

of the European citizens whom it should represent. Thus, this electoral process should comprise Europeanized practices, especially since its result is a presumed politicised institution that would rather compare to the legislative model in a federal type polity.

2. Process of empowerment of the European Parliament: causes and effects

The previous section revealed that the debate regarding the democratic deficit of the European Union is built around its remoteness with respect to its citizens, their low influence over the European institutions and their lack of accountability. The solution foreseen by the Member States and the European institutions has been the empowerment of the European Parliament given that "as the political culture of the EU evolved and concern about its lack of democratic accountability deepened, the role of the Parliament and the manner in which its members were chosen came under greater scrutiny, and the logic of direct elections became more compelling" (LeDuc, 2007, p. 140).

Also, another effect was that the EP's legitimacy would also pass to those institutions or policies that would in this way fall under its control, monitoring or approval. In the following pages I will analyse the competences that the EP has received over the years and the implications that these transfers have had in the development of the EP as a representative institution.

The Treaty of Rome that entered into force in 1958 was the starting point of the empowerment process of the European Parliament, given that it introduced the "consultation procedure" (Hix, 2002, p. 261), making it possible for this institution to have a say on European topics, although at this stage, it could have been ignored (Hix, 2002, p. 261). This gives nothing else than evidence of the political weakness that the EP had in the European system, as a consequence of its initial format and of its representativity, which was low and so, did not demand a higher involvement in the interinstitutional relations. The Single European Act that entered into force in 1987 brought significant increases in the power of the EP although 7 years had passed since the first organization of direct elections for it and provided that the "Parliament's powers were enhanced by including the requirement of Parliament assent when concluding an association agreement. Besides, the act institutes the cooperation procedure, which reinforces the position of the European Parliament in interinstitutional dialogue and gives it the possibility of two readings of the proposed legislation. However, the scope of application of this procedure remained limited to cases in which the Council acts by qualified majority, with the exception of environmental matters" (EUR-Lex a). Thus, the Single European Act empowered the EP regarding both external issues, such as the relations of the European Union with third countries and internal issues, notably initiating the relationship with the Council in matters of decision-making.

The Maastricht Treaty that entered into force in 1993 focused on the construction of the political dimension of the European Union that was then created. In this sense, it comprised progresses for the European Parliament, such as (EUR-Lex b): a) providing for more areas to be subject to the cooperation procedure and the assent procedure, b) the creation of the codecision procedure, c) involving the EP in the validation of the Commission, d) recognising the "role played by the European political parties in European integration" and of the fact that they "contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the Europeans". Thus, the Maastricht Treaty provided especially the EP with more powers in the European institutional system.

The Amsterdam Treaty that entered into force in 1999 continued the direction of empowerment of the EP through elements such as (EUR-Lex c): a) the large extension of the codecision procedure through the fact that it became "the general rule both for matters where qualified-majority voting applies and for the new areas brought into the Treaty for the first time", except for the Common Agricultural Policy and for "certain questions where the Council decides by unanimous vote", b) the elimination of the Council's third reading within codecision, putting the EP "on an equal footing with the Council, which will have to seek a compromise if it wishes the proposal to be adopted", c) the restriction of the number of MEPs to 700 in the perspective of the enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, d) the fact that the EP could "draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage, in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States or in accordance with principles common to all Member States", e) the freedom to "lay down regulations governing the performance of its Members' duties (…) with the approval of the Council, and acting by unanimity after consulting the Commission". Thus, the Amsterdam Treaty provided the EP with powers in the European institutional system, but especially in the internal plan, opening the way for an independent design concerning its internal configuration and the electoral process it is based on. However, the EP did not take advantage of these opportunities, given that it did not reform its electoral process in the direction of its Europeanization.

The Nice Treaty entered into force in 2003 and introduced few modifications regarding the European Parliament in terms of (EUR-Lex d): a) the status of European political parties, b) the extension of the areas where codecision was applied, c) provisions concerning the adaptation of the EP to the countries that were going to accede to the EU in the following years. Thus, its enhanced dimension was the political and ideological one.

The Lisbon Treaty that entered into force in 2009 is, after the Maastricht Treaty, the one that brought major institutional changes for the European Parliament. It is the successor of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe that would have established a clearer trajectory for a federal

model that would have put an end to the controversies concerning the type of polity the EU aims to become and implicitly, the shaping that its components must have, including the European Parliament as a representative body. The Lisbon Treaty has a prominent political character due to the fact that it sets as an aim to "strengthen European democracy, particularly in order to improve the legitimacy of decisions and to bring the EU and its citizens closer together" (EUR-Lex e) and to the fact that it has increased the EP's role in the European political system, regarding (EUR-Lex f): a) the recognition of the political dimension of European citizenship, b) stimulating the European Commission as for it to invite "national and European political parties to inform the electorate of their affiliation links and to publish, before the elections, the name of the candidate for President of the Commission they are supporting", c) "the strengthening of legislative power" through the transformation of the codecision in the ordinary legislative procedure, d) "a greater role at international level: the Parliament shall approve international agreements in the fields covered by the ordinary legislative procedure", e) "the strengthening of budgetary power: the Parliament is henceforth placed on an equal footing with the Council in the procedure for adopting the EU's annual budget".

Thus, the Lisbon Treaty provides the legal framework for the deepening of the politicization of the European Parliament and the extension of its political control over vital policy areas such as the European budget or over other institutions, like the Commission, which joined the EP in its endeavour to enhance the visibility of the ideological dimension of the European elections, promoting the electoral battle between the parties' candidates for the position of President of the Commission.

Although the empowerment process has been a continuou one, it has not been constant in each treaty's case. However, Aldecoa (2011, p. 25) highlights that the dynamic characteristic of the European integration process is due to the treaties' modifications, that had two directions: on one hand, to "deepen the European project through its opening towards more and more areas" and on the other, to "democratize the decision making system through conferring an increasing power of decision and control to the European Parliament that is elected by direct universal suffrage". So, the way that the EP was formed was used in order to justify the attribution of competences towards it or the call for the necessity of such a procedure.

3. The process of democratization of the European Parliament

The empowerment process analysed in the previous section conditioned the European Parliament to live up to its status of being representative institution, a status due to which it had received its functions in the first place. This challenge of democratization compelled the EP to

reinforce its bonds with the European citizens, by improving the organization of the European elections and by developing its political system. These two elements are analysed in the parts that follow.

3.1. Electoral reforms of the European Parliament

During the functioning of the Parliamentary Assembly, its members were not selected through a procedure that involved the interaction with European citizens, so the starting point of this Europeanization process had quite a strong intergovernmental dimension, given that the Assembly's composition depended entirely on the Member States. This perspective changed in 1976, with the approval of the Act that announced the introduction of direct elections three years later, with the aim of transforming the EP into an institution that will be "the custodian of fundamental liberties. It will also exercise control, not only over the Community budget (...), but also over the Community executive, thereby preventing the Community from drifting into technocracy. That is what democracy means" (EP, 1977 a, p. 5), fact that was anticipated even in "the goal of European integration in the form of political union planned for 1980 will require, speedy measures to extend the peoples' participation in the construction of Europe" (EP, 1977b, p. 30). Thus, the political dimension was foreseen since then through the explicit intention of placing the European Commission under parliamentary control that would reflect ideological perspectives as opposed to technocratic approaches.

Nevertheless, although the suffrage was universal, direct and secret, the Member States and the national political parties still had a very important role because of the fact that the elections were organized at national level. The step had been made towards an institution that would be seen as representative based on European elections, but the European electoral setting was missing. Yet this was subject to Article 7 of the Act on direct, universal suffrage, which stated that "the Assembly shall draw up a proposal for a uniform electoral procedure. Pending the entry into force of a uniform electoral procedure and subject to the other provisions of this Act, the electoral procedure shall be governed in each Member State by its national provisions" (EP, 1977a, p. 14-15), fact that was enforced by the EP's requirement in its *Resolution on the adoption of a draft convention introducing elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage*, namely that it "instructs its Political Affairs Committee immediately to carry out the necessary preliminary work for the introduction of a European electoral system" (EP, 1977c, p. 29). Therefore, the national organization of the European elections was supposed to be a temporary measure until the Parliament itself would

reach a consensus upon a uniform electoral design. Nonetheless, the obstacles for further progress on the matter were presented by Schelto Patijn, Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee, given that "it has not yet proved possible to convince the responsible politicians of the need to take this step which is so fundamental to integration" (EP, 1977b, p. 30). This had been also clearly stated by H. Lautenschlager, draftsman of the opinion of the Legal Affairs Committee, in the debates in the European Parliament on the 14th January 1975 sitting: "One of the greatest problems over the years has been the uniform electoral system. It is understandable that each Member State felt its own system was best and tried to have it accepted by the others. To escape from this impasse, it was essential to study whether the term 'uniform' necessarily referred to an entire system" (EP, 1977d, p. 71), outlining the fact that the main influence on delaying the decision for the configuration of the European electoral system belonged to the countries.

Thus, it was considered that the national electoral systems could be borrowed since they gave democratic result on national level, provided the "all the electoral laws in the Member States satisfy the five minimum requirements for democratic elections: they are free -as are all citizens-, they are equal-we do not have an electoral system based on classes-, they are secret, they are direct- no electoral college is involved- and they are universal" (EP, 1977d, p. 71). However, the asymmetries they created at the moment when all results were aggregated in order to form a representative institution were not taken into consideration.

So, the elections became European in theory, but national practices prevented them from being European in terms of content given the unfolding of the electoral campaigns and in terms of results, given the effects determined by characteristics of the electoral systems used in the 28 countries.

The Political Affairs Committee estimated that the election to be held after 1980 could already be held "in accordance with this uniform procedure (...) taking account of political developments in the Member States" (EP, 1977 b, p. 40). Yet, what followed was a period of 36 years in which the reforms were small and targeted at particular aspects such as the **harmonization of the general category of voting model**, namely recommending through the Council's Decision 772 of 2002 that the elections for the European Parliament were organised using proportional representation models, either the list system or the Single Transferable Vote system (Council Decision 2002, p. 1), but without revising the whole set of factors that influence the elections' result. For example, the **threshold limit** was established at a maximum of 5% (Council Decision 2002, p. 1), but that did not cancel the effects produced by the differential use of thresholds in the range between no thresholds at all and having others up to 5%.

Another reformed electoral element regards the fact that „the office of representative in the Assembly shall be compatible with membership of the Parliament of a Member State" (EP, 1977a, p. 14) that has been eliminated given that „from the European Parliament elections in 2004, the office of member of the European Parliament shall be incompatible with that of member of a national parliament" (Council Decision, 2002, p. 2). The **withdrawal of the possibility of being both a MEP and a member of a national parliament** is significant for the Europeanization process because holding both a supranational and a national mandate from the citizens meant that the two could have merged in the practice, making harder the distinction of European issues and areas of interest for national citizens and thus, complicating their shift of loyalties towards the supranational level and preventing them to perceive themselves and act as integrating parts of a European electorate.

The harmonization of the category of ballot was the most visible progress for the European Parliament, given that it drove even the United Kingdom, a country with many opt-outs along the history of EU integration until present, to change its scrutiny to a proportional representation one of closed lists in Great Britain and Single Transferable Vote in Northern Ireland (European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999). Although it organised a referendum for consulting the electors on the possibility of changing the First-Past-The-Post type of ballot with an Alternative Vote one (Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011), the results were against it with 67.90% of English rejecting the proposal (United Kingdom Electoral Commission, 2011). Therefore, the United Kingdom preserved its plurality voting system for national elections, while ceding to the adoption of a proportional representation voting system for European elections.

As Duff conceived the need for electoral reform even since the modifications brought up by the Amsterdam Treaty, "the Treaty requirement of a uniform electoral procedure (Article 138 3) was intended to make the elections a fully European event in which citizens would vote on European issues" (Duff, 1997, p. 60). Nevertheless, given the stagnation periods in this respect, in order for this to become a reality, there is the need for an unblocking factor which can be represented by the supranational political groups that can determine the Europeanization of the electoral campaign that would mean a Europeanization of the electoral process' content, leading to the consolidation of the European political actors recognised as such, who will put pressure for creating a common electoral law that would not favour only some of them anymore.

3.2. Development of European political actors for the EP

The European public sphere has not made significant progress regarding its formal institutionalization until after the Maastricht Treaty that encouraged the national and supranational actors to construct the political infrastructure of the European Union.

A cause for the slow evolution of this coagulation can be that "the timing and content of politicization would have been controlled by the Eurocrats and their interest group allies. Blocked in their aspirations by the resistance of national politicians to supranationality, they would appeal directly to the publics benefiting from expanded trade, lower transaction costs, cheaper consumer prices, greater personal mobility, regional subsidies, etc., and mobilize them to clamour for an even greater transfer of sovereignty or funds to the emerging centre" (Schmitter, 1998, p. 140). This waiting from part of the supranational political groups must be replaced with a proactive attitude in order to achieve considerable advances.

3.2.1. The formalization of European political parties and families

In the debate about Europeanization, why is it important to strengthen the EP groups, even if there is a European political party? The groups can focus on European matters and European citizens' interests, while the parties obviously would also have to respond to their national institutional restraints and interests that exceed the European Union space, as European transnational parties are composed also by states that are not members of the EU.

So, what should bond the parties in the European public sphere are the European issues of interest, not mere bureaucratic organizations in supranational structures that function in fact still at national level and only join supranational reunions and eventually subscribe to general principles assumed by the supranational political group or party. That would be the characteristic for the political parties at European level (PPELs) that would differentiate them from other types of international organizations of political parties.

Nevertheless, "the adoption of a common European statute for all PPELs, based on EU law and defining a common legal, organizational and financial status is a fundamental precondition for the creation of a European polis and a common political space" (Bardi *et al*., 2014, p. 28), given that this formalization would mean the recognition that these entities have an independent existence, that does not double the one of the national parties they comprise. Due to the fact

that "where parties have a long-standing organisational tradition, their primary interest is to maintain their structural articulation, by adapting their form and functioning to external changes" (Bardi et al. 2014, p. 75), a supranational statute for the European parties would determine an ongoing process of politicization of their own activity in order to fold according to changing inputs from the citizens. Moreover, they could use this opportunity for demanding more competences for the EP, which would lead to their further Europeanization, given that "as the EP's role is growing, the political parties tend to be more active in the process of unification" (Sidjanski, 2010, p. 228).

Moreover, the Giannakou Report, adopted by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs in the European Parliament, underlines that „the Treaty of Lisbon provides for this role of the political parties and their foundations with a view to creating a European polis, a political space at EU level, and a European democracy; (...) the European political parties, as they stand, are not in a position to play this role to the full because they are merely umbrella organisations for national parties and not directly in touch with the electorate in the Member States" (Giannakou, 2011, p. 6), while at the same time „stresses the important challenges in terms of organisational capacity that the European political parties will have to face in the light of the reforms that may be made to the European electoral system - creation of an additional constituency, establishment of transnational lists" (Giannakou, 2011, p. 7), highlighting the need for a formalization that would make the parties valid competitors for the citizens' interests and that would also prepare them for dealing with new financial conditions applicable to European parties, given that the report provided that „the Commission should propose the creation of a new title in the Financial Regulation devoted solely and tailored specifically to the funding of European parties and foundations" (Giannakou, 2011, p. 8). Thus, the debates in the European Parliament emphasize the formal requirements that would be needed in order to consolidate the European parties as truly political actors, not only international supra-party organizations.

Furthermore, Amie Kreppel argues that the increase of the EP's role in the decision-making process determined the enforcement of the supranational party system because it made it accountable, given that before the Single European Act "the EP was constrained to giving its opinion without an effective avenue of independent influence over legislative outcomes" (Kreppel, 2004, p. 36). This is a valid point of view, especially since it follows the line of the previously formulated relation between the empowerment of the EP and its democratization.

Therefore, formalizing the European political parties would mean giving them a political stake in developing their own political programme that would differentiate them among the other actors in

the European public space in the fight for the citizens' attention and votes. As long as European parties are not formalised accordingly in order to gain its own institutional powers, they will depend on the national parties to gain seats in the European Parliament. In an analogy with the European Parliament, it was only after its formalization as a directly elected institution that the Member States agreed to increasingly transfer competences towards it and even more, it was only then that the EP itself enhanced its attempts to gain more power.

3.2.2. Adding content to the forms: Europeanization of loyalties in the EP plenary

The transfer of loyalties is not a feature only for the European electors, but also for the political parties that compete in the electoral process, so it is important to also assess their point of interest in terms of loyalties, especially since a study on the reactions to the empowerment of the European Parliament showed that "at the party level (…) there is evidence that partisan ideologies affect parties' perceptions of the European Parliament" (Winzen *et al*., 2015, p. 86).

Moreover, Ladrech finds that "the stimulus for changing party rules regarding the activity of its politicians would be the demands placed upon MEPs by the desire of the EP groups to increase voting discipline" (Ladrech 2012, p. 578), but how big are the differences among political parties from the same country in this sense? In order to answer this question, based on the data of the ongoing European Parliament's term provided by VoteWatch Europe (updated to 2015), I will analyse the obedience of the parties of the EP towards the political group on two axes: a) the parties that register the minimum rates of compliance and b) the variation of rates of compliance of all political parties from each Member State with their correspondent political group.

So, the minimums of the compliance rates rank between (VoteWatch Europe 2015) 27,94% in Latvia, 30,94% in Greece, 34,33% in Lithuania, 38,80% in Italy, 57,46% in Slovakia, while Belgian and French ones reach 68,99% and 64,20%. Czech Republic, Poland, Netherlands and Sweden they go as low as between 75% and 79%. Estonia, Ireland, Croatia and Denmark have a minimum loyalty threshold between 81% and 83%, while Portugal reaches 85,21% and Germany, Luxemburg, Finland, Slovenia, Spain and United Kingdom go up to values between 86% and 89%. Parties in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Romania are above 94%. Thus, the states where parties register the lowest rates of compliance are minimum are Latvia and Greece and the ones where the lowest rates of compliance are maximum are Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Romania.

Therefore, a hierarchy cannot be established between the central level of the parties and their loyalty to the political group they are affiliated to, given that the parties from all Member States have

different loyalty rates and the lowest value for each of the 28 Member States also varies with an average of 70%, as previously observed.

Conclusions

The European Parliament's evolution since the organization of the first direct elections in 1979 has been of a significant importance, given its electoral reforms regarding the elimination of the compatibility between the position of the MEP and the MP, the establishment of a maximum threshold or the harmonization of the wide category of electoral systems used in the European elections. These changes were necessary in order for the EP to be able to demand and gain, by means of treaty amendments, more competences in the European institutional system. Once the EP got those competences, it had to further modify its attributes as to reduce its democratic deficit.

Nevertheless, vital aspects of the organization of these elections are nationally configured, such as the number and design of the constituencies or the financial and signature guarantees required. Therefore, the democratic deficit of the European Parliament can be reduced through the Europeanization of its elections and through the consolidation of the European political parties and families.

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