Political Parties in Deeply Multilingual Polities: Institutional Conditions and Lessons for the EU

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Abstract

The EU has long been suffering a legitimacy crisis. In this article we argue that multilingual Europarties, that is, European political parties operating in all the various languages spoken by their members via interpreting and translation, rather than resorting to a lingua franca, could contribute to providing an effective democratic linkage between EU citizens and EU institutions. Moreover, by drawing inspiration from an analysis of Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, we argue that centripetal institutions such as an EU-wide electoral district, presidentialism, and direct democracy could provide favourable institutional conditions for the development of such multilingual Europarties.

Introduction

Over the past few years, a number of political theorists have begun to examine the normative dimensions of partisanship and the pivotal role that political parties can play in representative democracy (for example, Bonotti, 2017; Muirhead, 2014; Rosenblum, 2008; White and Ypi, 2016). Within this growing body of literature, however, little (White, 2014) if any attention has been devoted to the question of whether linguistic diversity poses an obstacle to partisan mobilization within and beyond the nation-state, or whether it might in fact constitute a resource for it. This is a serious shortcoming as language is central to democratic life and multilingualism increasingly characterizes most liberal democracies as well as, a fortiori, the *transnational* sphere.

In this article we address the challenges posed by multilingualism to parties and partisanship by focusing on a key political actor, that is, the European Union (EU). There is a well-established empirical literature on transnational political parties in the EU (for example, Bardi *et al.,* 2010; Bell and Lord, 1998; Bressanelli, 2014; Day, 2014; Gagatek, 2016; Hanley, 2008; Hix, 1995; Van Hecke, 2010). Yet this literature too has mostly neglected, if not utterly ignored, the challenges posed by linguistic diversity to transnational EU parties and partisanship. But why should this be a reason for concern?

To answer this question, we need to understand the important role that political parties have in the process of European integration. Article 8A-4 of the Lisbon Treaty (2007/ 2009), for example, states that '[p]olitical parties at European level contribute to forming

European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union'.[1] In 2012 a European Commission proposal stated that '[t]ruly transnational European political parties […] are key to articulating the voices of the citizens at European level' (Day, 2014, pp. 5–6). Such statements succinctly capture a key function of political parties, namely, that they are the sources of integration and political linkage between society and the state, as a bottom-up channel that conveys citizens' views and demands into the political sphere, both in national and transnational contexts (Dalton et al., 2011; Lawson, 1988; Wolkenstein, 2016). Their linkage function is 'the main standard according to which their legitimacy as representative institutions is evaluated' (Wolkenstein, 2016, p. 297). We fully embrace this normative understanding of parties and partisanship and, on this basis, in this article we develop a twofold argument.

Firstly, we claim that truly multilingual transnational Europarties (that is, European political parties that operate and deliberate in all the various languages spoken by their members, especially at the grassroots level, and that resort to interpreting and translation) perform their linkage function better than transnational parties that employ a lingua franca. Secondly, we argue that for multilingual transnational parties to flourish and accomplish their democratic and legitimating linkage function in the EU certain favourable institutional conditions have to be in place. More specifically, by drawing on evidence from Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, we argue that the presence of multilingual parties is facilitated in polities that rely on centripetal political institutions: electoral incentives such as countrywide electoral districts, presidentialism, and direct democracy. Based on the evidence concerning these three deeply multilingual democracies[2] we then advance some thoughts on the kinds of institutions that might enable multilingual partisanship across nation-states and, more specifically, within the EU.

I. Multilingualism and the Linkage Function of Parties: Against an Elite-driven Model of EU Partisanship

The linkage function of parties is crucial for the EU. Europarties could potentially contribute to countering the EU's democratic deficit that has been at the centre of much academic debate over the past 20 years (Føllesdal and Hix, 2006; Hix, 2008; Scharpf, 2009). However, their ability to provide that linkage has significantly eroded in liberal democracies in recent decades and could be significantly enhanced by rendering parties more internally deliberative (Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017; Wolkenstein, 2016). This could help Europarties to ensure that the views and demands of EU citizens are included in the articulation of their platforms, manifestoes, and proposals more than they currently are. Furthermore, transnational Europarties mobilizing from the bottom up (rather than via top-down elite-driven processes) could also contribute to the formation of a Europe-wide demos that would be necessary for a supranational EU democracy to be more politically legitimate (Wolkenstein, 2018).

We agree with these arguments and embrace, without further defending it, the view that transnational Europarties are desirable in the EU due to their legitimating role. What we would like to focus on, however, is the fact that stressing the importance of the bottom-up

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[1]http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:FULL&from=EN
[2]By 'deeply multilingual' we mean polities where there are two or more official languages but most citizens are predominantly *monolingual* (that is, hardly able to participate in debates in other languages) and there is *no* lingua franca.

dimension of partisan mobilization in the EU entails taking linguistic diversity more seriously than it has been done so far. If partisan mobilization in the EU is conceived as an elite-driven process (Hix, 1995, p. 543), it is easy to overlook the problems posed by linguistic diversity. After all, one might assume that partisan elites operating in the EU are sufficiently educated to be able to communicate via a lingua franca (for example, English or French, or both)[3] or, as argued by White (2014, p. 388), that the presence of some multilingual individuals acting as 'nodes' might be sufficient to overcome the problems posed by multilingualism.

However, it is not entirely true, firstly, that EU elites, and especially members of the European Parliament (MEPs), who provide the most direct link between EU citizens and institutions, are as proficient in a lingua franca as it is sometimes assumed (Wright, 2007). And, secondly, the more we reject an elitist and top-down understanding of partisanship and reconceive partisanship as a bottom-up inclusive and deliberative process, the more problematic it is to ignore the deep linguistic diversity that exists among ordinary EU citizens. Indeed, recent empirical research has shown that abandoning the current regime of full official multilingualism in the EU and adopting either an English-only or an English-French-German language regime would disenfranchise up to 79 per cent and up to 49 per cent of adult residents in the EU, respectively (Gazzola, 2016). This suggests that transnational EU parties using a bottom-up deliberative model could not resort to the use of a lingua franca without undermining their inclusiveness and remaining elitist. In other words, a lingua franca regime may well facilitate, broadly speaking, the workings of transnational *parties*, but only at the expense of allowing no (or very poor) multilingual *partisanship*, that is, no (or very poor) citizen participation in such parties' activities. This would inevitably hinder, rather than enhance, these parties' linkage function.

Our view is therefore that if, as we assume, parties and their linkage function are desirable for the democratic legitimacy of the EU, it is also desirable that EU parties be truly multilingual, that is, that they operate and allow deliberation in all the various languages spoken by their members, especially at the grassroots level, and that they resort to interpreting and translation rather than to a lingua franca. This would clearly involve certain costs. But these costs should be considered neither as significant as it is often suggested[4] nor as decisive reasons against the adoption of multilingualism, given the benefits that the latter can offer. Multilingual parties, like multilingual social movements, provide greater inclusiveness, equality and transparency, as they prevent meetings and debates – and, as a result, the formulation of political platforms and manifestoes – from being dominated by the speakers of one or a few dominant languages (see Doerr, 2018).

II. Political Parties in Deeply Multilingual Polities: Belgium, Canada and Switzerland

What institutional conditions favour the flourishing of multilingual political parties in the EU? A useful starting point is to examine other polities that, like the EU, present deep

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[3]However, these politicians might sometimes value and exercise the right and freedom to speak in their own native language(s), especially for symbolic reasons, a phenomenon increasingly frequent since the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK (see Mac Giolla Chríost and Bonotti, 2018).

[4]In 2017, for example, the Swiss social democratic party spent 56,000 Swiss francs for translation and interpreting services. This represents only 3.5 per cent of its annual budget (https://www.sp-ps.ch/sites/default/files/documents/schlussdokumentation_d_def_1.pdf, p. 34). Similarly only 1 per cent of the EU's budget is earmarked for language services (Gravier and Lundquist, 2011, p. 81).

levels of linguistic diversity, as this can help us to draw useful insights for the EU. More specifically, our focus should be on those polities that are deeply multilingual *and* display relatively consolidated democratic systems. This rules out some polities that might at first appear to be suitable terms of comparison for the EU.

For example, Indonesia is a very multilingual polity. Yet it is not *deeply* multilingual as it *does* have a lingua franca, that is, Indonesian, which is spoken by the vast majority of its population (Djenar *et al.*, 2018). Another interesting case is India. Even though, as the most recent census data show,[5] knowledge of both Hindi and English is becoming more widespread, neither language can claim to be the country's lingua franca. India therefore is a deeply multilingual polity, and perhaps a suitable candidate for comparison with the EU, especially as its degree of multilingualism is even more similar to the EU's than that of Belgium, Switzerland or Canada. Yet comparability between different countries and their institutions (including the effects of potential institutional reforms) also depends on the similarities and differences between these countries' political cultures. As Joseph Lacey (2017, p. 7), who also uses Belgium and Switzerland as terms of comparison for the EU, argues, 'India is still developing as a democratic system since its independence in 1947, and the impact of linguistic diversity on the quality of its democratic functioning may be more difficult to discern than in the […] cases [of] […] Belgium and Switzerland [which] have been relatively consolidated democracies for a long period, where the interaction between multilingualism and democracy [unlike in India] has been ongoing since the middle of the nineteenth century'. This therefore renders India a much less suitable term of comparison for the EU than the three countries we have chosen.

Acknowledging differences in political cultures, however, also poses a problem. May such differences not also exist between EU member states, thus hindering the implementation and equal success of our proposed institutional reforms across the EU? Not necessarily. As one of the few comprehensive and systematic comparative analyses of political cultures among European polities (Blondel and Inoguchi, 2006) shows, while there are indeed variations among Western European countries on such issues as liberalism, government restraint and social relations, these differences 'have to do with the "idiosyncratic" character of each country's respondents with regard to each question' (Blondel and Inoguchi, 2006, p. 162), rather than to differences that single out different clusters of countries, as in the case of the Asian sample of countries included in the same study. Therefore 'there is among them [that is, Western European countries] paradoxically more cultural unity as a result [… and …] the notion that all Western European countries have a common socio-political culture […] does have some reality' (Blondel and Inoguchi, 2006, p. 162).

Based on these premises, in our view there are only three Western liberal democracies that can be considered 'deeply multilingual' and are suitable for a comparison with the EU: Belgium, Canada and Switzerland.[6] Even though the number of their official languages (three, two and four, respectively) is lower than in the EU (24), these countries provide very useful examples because in each of them societal multilingualism has resulted in a distinct party system, and it is the connection between multilingualism and

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[5]http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/CensusData2011.html
[6]Stein Rokkan, for example, considered Switzerland to be a 'microcosm of Europe' in virtue of its linguistic and religious diversity (Rokkan, 1974, p. xi). Generally speaking, there exists an important literature on Switzerland (Blondel, 1998; Lacey, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2005) as well as on Belgium (Swenden, 2005; Van Parijs, 2000) as possible models for the EU.

the party system, rather than multilingualism (and its scope) per se, that is central to our analysis. But what does this connection involve in each of the three countries?

In Belgium the party system is largely monolingual: the national parties split in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and no major multilingual party has emerged ever since (Dandoy and De Decker, 2009).[7] At the other end of the spectrum we find Switzerland, where *all* major parties are multilingual (Iff, 2009). Canada lies in between: some of its parties are pan-Canadian and bilingual (for example, the Liberal and the Conservative Party) but they have coexisted with a strong, monolingual French-speaking Bloc Québécois and with English-speaking political parties such as the Reform Party in the late 1980s and 1990s (Massicotte, 2009).

Our purpose is to identify the institutions (or lack thereof) in these three countries that might have favoured or hindered the formation of multilingual parties. To accomplish this task we rely on the vast literature on institutional design in plural societies. Two main approaches have emerged in that literature (O'Flynn, 2007): the consociational school (Lijphart, 1977) and the centripetal school (Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2012). We leave aside the former and focus on the latter. The reason is straightforward: the very premise of consociational theory is that the various segments of a plural society will tend (and should be encouraged via institutional measures) to form mono- (ethnic, lingual, religious) parties that will then share power.

On the contrary, centripetalism is interested in institutions 'that can encourage cooperation, accommodation and integration across ethnic divides, and can thus work to break down the salience of ethnicity rather than fostering its representation institutionally' (Reilly, 2012, p. 263). These institutions include (1) electoral incentives in legislative elections (Horowitz, 2004, 2009); (2) presidential rather than parliamentarian regimes (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 635–8; Reilly, 2012); and (3) direct democracy (Lacey, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2005; Stojanović, 2011). In the following three subsections we examine the presence of such institutions in Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, focusing mainly on those that are relevant to our subsequent analysis of the EU.[8]

Electoral Incentives

As a general rule, centripetalists favour electoral systems that provide incentives for 'vote-pooling, to make politicians dependent on communities other than their own' and for 'non-ethnic or multiethnic parties or party coalitions' (Reilly, 2012, p, 269). Typically, they warn against the use of proportional representation (PR) systems, precisely because they tend to promote mono-ethnic (or mono-lingual, if language is the source of cleavage) parties (O'Flynn, 2007, p. 735). Their preferred system is the alternative vote, which follows majoritarian logic and allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference (Reilly, 2012, p. 263). It is used in single-member districts, that is, in relatively *small* constituencies. But centripetalists are also favourable to a *large*, countrywide electoral

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[7]An exception is the Workers' Party, which at the time of writing (Spring 2019) held two seats (out of 150) in the first Chamber of Parliament.

[8]Another important institution is federalism. We do not include it in our account because Belgium, Canada and Switzerland are all federations. Therefore, federalism is not a good candidate for explaining the monolingual or multilingual differences of the three countries' party systems.

district, if this is construed in a way that provides incentives for the formation of parties or coalitions that cut across ethnic or linguistic boundaries (Horowitz, 2009).

This latter point has been central to a public debate in Belgium over a proposal for a reform of the electoral system, which currently involves 11 electoral districts that use a list PR system. Ten of these districts are largely monolingual. We would like to focus on the Belgian case because, like the EU (for the European Parliament elections), and un-like Canada and Switzerland (Stojanović, 2006), Belgium uses *only* PR in all its elections and therefore among the three polities it is the most similar to the EU in this respect. The reform proposal was launched in February 2007 by the Pavia Group, a think-tank of prominent political scientists from the two main language communities (French and Dutch speakers).[9] Given that the current electoral districts are of medium size and mostly monolingual, and therefore (also given the presence of a PR system) parties are also in-centivized to be monolingual rather than trying to obtain support across linguistic bound-aries, the Pavia Group founders have advocated 'a country-wide electoral district for Belgium's federal Parliament' (alongside the existing 11 districts), in which 15 of 150 seats would be allocated (Deschouwer and Van Parijs, 2009; Van Parijs, 2018, pp. 80–4). The reform would provide '*pre-electoral incentives* [… that would encourage the parties …] to display a disposition to compromise that is needed to govern, in power-shar-ing fashion, at the federal level' (Deschouwer and Van Parijs, 2009, p. 14, original em-phasis). The leading centripetalist scholar, Donald Horowitz (2009), considers it a positive, centripetalist move in the right direction, even though he thinks that its incen-tives do not go far enough to yield the effects that their authors hope for.

Presidentialism

In presidential regimes the president has significant political powers. Presidential elec-tions, therefore, might provide important incentives for parties to organize in a way that allows them to win. Typically, this can foster the emergence of cross-ethnic and multilin-gual parties (Bogaards, 2003; Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2012).

Of the three deeply multilingual polities examined here, both Canada and Belgium are parliamentary rather than presidential democracies whereas Switzerland occupies a middle ground (Kriesi, 1994, pp. 167–8). Compared with the Canadian and Belgian federal exec-utives, the seven-member Swiss Federal Council, which holds power for four years, is far more independent vis-à-vis the parliament. Even though the Federal Council is elected by the parliament (a non-presidential feature), there is no constitutional provision allowing the parliament to defy it by a vote of no confidence (a key feature of parliamentarian re-gimes) and, as in many presidential regimes, the Federal Council cannot dissolve the par-liament. One could thus argue that the Federal Council is a president with seven heads.

The way the elections to the Federal Council impact on the multilingual character of the Swiss party system is nicely illustrated by an episode that took place in December 2015, when the multilingual Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC) included Norman Gobbi, an Italian speaker, in its official list of three candidates put forward to replace a resigning member of cabinet (Stojanović, 2016). Mr Gobbi is one of the leaders of the ethnoregionalist movement Lega dei Ticinesi and since 2011 has been a member of the

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[9]See www.paviagroup.be.

cantonal executive of Ticino. In order to run as a candidate for the SVP/UDC, Mr Gobbi became a member of that party, a move that was accepted by the Lega. We stress this episode as the existence of the Lega dei Ticinesi, an entirely Italian-speaking party, has been considered in the literature as the main *exception* to the rule that all Swiss parties are multilingual (Lublin, 2014). In a way, this exception has ceased to exist as both parties agreed that a member of the Lega could be at the same time a member of the SVP/UDC, thus showing that *multilingual* parties are the key players in centripetal systems oriented towards the election of executives in deeply multilingual polities.

Direct Democracy

The third centripetal institution that provides incentives for the formation of multilingual parties is direct democracy. By direct democracy we mean frequent popular votes triggered by bottom-up referendums and citizen initiatives, and supplementing (rather than supplanting) institutions of representative democracy.

Belgium and Canada have a very limited experience with popular votes held at the national level. Belgians have voted only once (in 1950) and Canadians three times (in 1898, 1942 and 1992) in national referendums. In Switzerland, instead, as many as 654 countrywide popular votes have been held between 1848 and 2019.[10] Swiss citizens vote three to four times every year, typically on two to three national issues each time. Popular votes are held in a single, countrywide voting district (we have already stressed the importance of large districts when discussing electoral systems) in which either a simple majority (in facultative referendums) or the majority of the people and of the cantons (in all other votes) decides. Stojanović (2011, pp. 106–7) calls it a 'single voting district' and stresses its centripetal effects, whereas Lacey (2014, p. 62) speaks of a 'unified and robust voting space' and considers it one of the key components of Swiss democracy that explains its longevity. Lacey also argues that 'the existence of a national party system, primarily framed in ideological [that is, not linguistic] terms, is what makes the unity of Switzerland's voting space sufficiently deep to avoid splitting the national consciousness' (Lacey, 2014, p. 70).

We agree with Lacey's intuition that a unified voting space plays a key role in Swiss democracy. But we want to argue that the relationship between the voting space and the national party system goes in *both* directions. Not only does a national and multilingual party system strengthen the unified voting space. The party system itself is crucially shaped by the very presence of that unified voting space, whose existence is closely linked to direct democracy. In other words, we believe that direct democracy may explain why Swiss parties have become multilingual.

More specifically, if a party wants to become a significant player in a system of direct democracy, it does not suffice for it to have success in elections every few years. It is also necessary, and in fact possibly even more important, for it to win popular votes in referendums that are held regularly (for example, as in Switzerland, three to four times *every year*). Winning popular votes requires an important effort in terms of personal and financial resources, but also *strong coordination across language borders*. And while this could in principle also be achieved via collaboration between sister-parties (for example,

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[10]Center for Research on Direct Democracy (www.c2d.ch).

two monolingual socialist parties, each based exclusively in language region A and in language region B, respectively, joining forces to win a referendum against tax cuts that benefit corporations and wealthy citizens), this would give rise to high transaction costs in terms of efficiency that are hardly sustainable in the long run in a system with a frequent use of direct democracy. It is much more efficient to form a single (multilingual) party at the national level.

We acknowledge that occasional referendums focused on key constitutional issues could sometimes deepen rather than reduce linguistic cleavages, and thus hinder the emergence of multilingual parties, as in the case of the 1950 Belgian referendum on the return of King Leopold, in which a majority of French speakers – who are a 40 per cent minority in Belgium – voted against the King's return but were outnumbered by a majority of Flemish speakers who were in favour of it. According to Philippe Van Parijs (2018, p. 85), Belgium was 'traumatized' (*traumatisée*) by this experience. However, the kind of direct democracy that we envisage is less concerned with big constitutional issues or one-off major (and potentially very divisive) political decisions than with ordinary political issues, such as the government strategy on future sources of electricity supply, tax cuts for corporations, the purchase of military aircrafts, or the building of a new motorway tunnel.[11]

Furthermore, it is highly probable that a significant portion of voters *within* each language group will have divergent opinions on *each* of these ordinary issues, based on traditional *ideological* (rather than ethnic or linguistic) cleavages (for example, labour versus capital, or pro-environment versus pro-growth).

Finally, even if a specific referendum does reveal the presence of divided political opinions *between* language regions, the high *frequency* of popular votes in the kind of direct democracy we envisage implies that citizens who are outnumbered today may be part of a majority tomorrow, and this would structurally undermine the formation of *permanent* minorities (Stojanović, 2011, pp. 104–5).

In summary, and to be clear, we do not claim that in this section we have provided definite evidence that a single large electoral district, presidentialism and direct democracy (or lack thereof) have had a *certain* impact on the formation and durability of multilingual parties (or lack thereof) in the three deeply multilingual polities examined. That would require systematic empirical testing that cannot be accomplished within the limits of this mainly normative article. More generally, we believe that there should be a division of labour between empirical social scientists and political theorists. On the one hand, when the former carry out their empirical analyses they are (or, at least, should be) guided by hypotheses that political theorists and philosophers can help develop (Lepoutre, 2018, p. 406). This section has focused on formulating such hypotheses. On the other hand, such hypotheses cannot and should not be the result of purely theoretical reflections but should be grounded instead in the evidence provided by existing empirical work, in our case, work on the contribution of centripetal institutions to the formation of multi-ethnic parties (Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2012). To put it differently, the kind of theorizing we engage in in this article belongs to the category of 'empirically engaged theorizing' (Browers, 2003, p. 11; Shapiro, 2002). It provides both useful theoretical and empirically informed insights that set the stage for future (more empirical and comparative) studies and a blueprint for potential reforms in this direction within the EU.

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[11]Swiss citizens could vote on each of these issues in referendums held between 2015 and 2017.

III. Multilingual Parties in the European Union

Based on the analysis conducted in the previous section, we can now advance some suggestions on the kind of institutions that might enable or enhance multilingual parties within the EU.

Electoral Incentives

The general electoral rules used for the elections to the European Parliament are defined at the EU level and apply to all member states.[12] The main rules that apply to all countries are (1) direct universal suffrage (as of 1979) and (2) proportional representation (as of 2002). However, member states can choose between list PR and single transferable vote (STV) systems of proportional representation, and they can decide whether to hold the elections in a single country-wide electoral district or divide their national space into various electoral districts.

As we have already seen in Part II, the fragmentation of the electoral space into too many electoral districts does not provide parties and politicians with incentives for border crossing. Hence, one possible centripetal reform of the EU electoral system, given the high level of linguistic territorial concentration within the EU and the established use of PR in European Parliament elections, could consist in creating a single EU-wide electoral district (also often called a European constituency), analogous to the one proposed by the Pavia Group for Belgium, in which at least a portion of MEPs would be elected on trans-national lists. Such a proposal – which has been circulating in academic circles since the mid-1990s (Dewatripont *et al.*, 1995; Duff, 1996; Van Parijs, 1998; see also Verger, 2018)[13] – was put forward by MEP Andrew Duff in 2010 on behalf of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament (Duff, 2010). It was rediscovered by the Italian government in April 2017 and has been endorsed by, among others, the French president Emmanuel Macron and Martin Schultz, the former president of the European Parliament (Foster, 2017). The then president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Junker claimed that transnational lists would 'bring Europe democracy and clarity' (Verger, 2018, p. 9).

In the context of a post-Brexit scenario for the EU the idea would be to assign 'the 73 seats formerly allotted to the UK to a single European constituency, allowing the European political families to contend them on a trans-national basis' (Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee, 2017). Among the expected benefits of the proposal is the prospect that it would '*reinforce the role of European political parties* and set the scene for a closer knit European political discourse' (Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee, 2017, emphasis added; see also Gagatek, 2016, p. 158). In other words, the expected benefits are fully in line with our argument that centripetal institutions can provide incentives for the formation of multilingual parties.[14]

[12]E.g. see Art. 14 TEU; Articles 20, 22, 223 TEU; Act of 20 Sept. 1976 concerning the election of the representatives of the Assembly by direct universal suffrage and amendments to this Act of 25 June and 23 September 2002.

[13]For Dewatripont *et al.* (1995) every EU citizen should be given two votes in the elections to the European Parliament: one on a majority ballot to select their local representative and one on a pan-European proportional ballot. The declared purpose of the second vote is 'to encourage the formation of true cross-border political parties' (Dewatripont *et al.*, 1995, p. 17).

[14]In a non-binding decision on 7 February 2018 the European Parliament rejected the proposal for an EU-wide district by 368 votes against, 274 in favour and 34 abstentions. In our view the percentage of non-negative votes is sufficiently high (45.6 per cent) to allow us to think that the proposal was not a chimera and that it could be adopted in the foreseeable future.

It is important, however, to introduce a territorial distribution requirement in this proposal (for example, to receive a seat a party would need to win at least 5 per cent of votes in at least two-thirds of member states). In the absence of such a provision a PR system would most likely function according to the consociational (rather than centripetal) logic: if, say, France's *Rassemblement National* (formerly the *Front National*) needs only French votes to win seats, it does not have an incentive to form a common list (or even a common party) with similar parties from other member states.[15]

Presidentialism

The 2007 Lisbon Treaty introduced the institution of the President of the European Council as the highest EU representative (effective as of 1 December 2009). However, the president is not elected directly by the people. He or she is appointed by the European Council for a 2½ year term (renewable only once) by qualified majority (55 per cent of member states representing at least 65 per cent of the EU's population). While some might argue that the Presidency of the European Council could be considered a centripetal institution within the EU, in fact European party families play hardly any major role in electing the president who, we have seen, is chosen directly by leaders of the member states. Therefore the Presidency, in its current form, does not provide the necessary incentives for fostering a pan-European multilingual party system.

A direct election of the president – invoked, among others, by the former German president Johannes Rau (Kraus, 2008, p. 19) – would probably have more positive effects on multilingual transnational partisanship. To understand why consider, for example, recent developments in the European Parliament elections. On the eve of the 2014 elections five of the seven Europarties announced candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission. In other words they decided, for the first time, to organize their campaigns around a lead candidate (often called *Spitzenkandidat*). This development was possible thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, which stipulates that the European Council must nominate, by qualified majority, a candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission by '[t]aking into account the elections to the European Parliament' (Art. 17 Treaty on European Union [TEU]). The final say, by majority vote, goes to the European Parliament itself.

According to Hobolt (2014, p. 1529) 'the hope was that the introduction of *Spitzenkandidaten* would strengthen the European element in the campaigns, personalize the distant Brussels bureaucracy, and thereby increase interest and participation in European democracy'. Indeed, for the first time TV debates with lead candidates, conducted in English, French and German, took place. After the election, the European Council, in spite of the scepticism of many European leaders (such as Merkel and Cameron), eventually agreed to nominate one of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, Jean-Claude Juncker, to the Presidency of the Commission. While it is too early to assess the impact of this innovation on a pan-European party system,[16] it is expected to have 'important implications' for 'the future of European democracy' (Hobolt, 2014, p. 1528), and it could give 'a greater boost to

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[15]Indeed, the French government has proposed a formula requiring that a transnational list must propose candidates who are registered on the electoral roll in at least one-third of EU member states. A maximum of 25 per cent of candidates can be from the same country. In addition, the seven top candidates must come from different countries (Verger, 2018, p. 8).
[16]Indeed, in July 2019 the Council nominated Ursula von der Leyen to the Presidency of the Commission, even though she was not a *Spitzenkandidatin*. She was then elected by the Parliament, albeit with a very narrow margin.

the Europarties to strengthen their organization' (Gagatek, 2016, p. 159), thus fostering multilingual partisanship across the EU.

Direct Democracy

In the late 1990s the idea that Europe-wide referendums could foster the Union's democratization was gaining ground (see, for example, Grande, 2000; Zürn, 2000). The Lisbon Treaty introduced the European Citizens' initiative (ECI; effective since 2012), a form of direct democracy allowing one million citizens to propose policy changes at the EU level. Initially, there was a hope that the ECI would contribute to 'the formation of a common identity' (Papadopoulos and Magnette, 2010, p. 725). However, its 'key aim' was 'to promote transnational discussion and deliberation' (Greenwood and Tuokko, 2017, p. 166). This aim is evident in the requirement that the necessary signatures must come from at least one-quarter of EU member states, according to the pre-established minimal thresholds for every member state. Therefore, many reasonably expected that the ECI would support multilingual transnational partisanship (for example, Bardi *et al.,* 2010, p. 100). The experience of Switzerland clearly points in this direction.

The problem with the ECI is that it is far too weak an instrument of direct democracy. In contrast, for example, with Swiss referendums, in its current form the ECI provides insufficient incentives for multilingual transnational partisanship. The main inadequacies of the instrument are: (1) the ECI is too restrictive and burdensome for its organizers and signatories; (2) the European Parliament and the Commission are free to adopt or to refuse its proposals; and (3) EU citizens cannot vote on the proposals. It is not surprising, therefore, that many ECIs have failed to gather the necessary number of signatures.[17]

The European Commission itself recognizes the weakness of the current instrument (European Commission, 2017) and has initiated a reform process by publishing a roadmap on 22 May 2017. The aim is to 'increase democratic legitimacy in the EU' (European Commission, 2017, p. 1). In June 2018 the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament approved the proposal for the reform of the ECI. However, none of the proposals for reform tackle problems (2) and (3) mentioned above. They focus mostly on solving the first problem, by making it easier to launch an ECI and to gather the necessary signatures. By also focusing on the second and third problems, however, a duly reformed ECI could provide a significant incentive for the formation of a truly multilingual, transnational, pan-European party system.

Conclusion

The EU has long been suffering a legitimacy crisis. In this article we have argued that multilingual Europarties could contribute to addressing this problem by providing an effective linkage between EU citizens and EU institutions. Moreover, by drawing inspiration from the analysis of Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, we have argued that centripetal institutions such as an EU-wide electoral district, presidentialism, and direct democracy could provide favourable institutional conditions for the development of such multilingual Europarties. We would like to conclude by considering two objections that could be raised against our argument.

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[17]Of almost 50 ECIs, only four have so far been accompanied by the required number of signatures.

Firstly, one might point out that our argument is somehow paradoxical as in order to enable multilingual Europarties to provide a more effective *bottom-up* linkage between EU citizens and EU institutions, we invoke *top-down* institutional reforms. Or, to put it in different terms, one might point out that our argument is politically implausible because existing national and transnational partisans (especially those in leadership positions), who profit electorally under the status quo, are unlikely to support the reforms we propose. Such reforms, in other words, are too idealistic.

In response to this objection, we should stress that the distinction between real and ideal is often presented, in democratic theory and beyond, as a binary one, that is, 'things as they are' versus 'things as they should be'. However, as Alessandro Ferrara (2008) has cogently shown, there is also a third option: 'things that are as they should be', for example, exemplary social and political institutions that already embody, in the real world, normatively desirable features. When it comes to our argument, Ferrara's insight implies that we should look for existing contexts and situations in which the desirable institutional reforms that we invoke (or similar ones) have already been implemented.

For example, in two Canadian provinces, British Columbia (2004) and Ontario (2006), randomly selected 'citizens' assemblies' were convened to discuss and elaborate propositions for electoral reform (Rose, 2007; Warren and Gastil, 2015). In each case, the final proposal was eventually put to a referendum, that is, all enfranchised citizens were given the opportunity to have a say in the process. Even though the process itself was initiated by political parties (in the form of an electoral promise to be implemented after gaining power), and had to receive clearance from the provincial legislatures, the proposals themselves were the outcome of a bottom-up process involving randomly selected ordinary citizens, and they were finally assessed by ordinary citizens in a popular vote.

Could something similar work at the European level? Fishkin *et al*. (2014), who in 2009 conducted an exploratory experiment called Europolis, argue that it could, and that a citizens' assembly at the European level is a 'viable democratic tool' (Fishkin *et al*., 2014, p. 348). Moreover – and in contrast to Canada, where deliberations were held in English only – in Europolis the group of 348 citizens from the 27 EU member states used their native languages to discuss two timely political topics (immigration and climate change). The language barrier was overcome via simultaneous translation and did not pose an obstacle to deliberation. On the contrary, 'the event evaluations [by participants] offer strong indications of successful communication and mutual respect' (Fishkin *et al*., 2014, p. 336). A similar experiment – called a European Citizens' panel and convened by the European Commission – was held in May 2018.[18]

A second objection to our argument is that bottom-up multilingual partisanship presupposes not only certain favourable institutional conditions but also a key element of party politics, that is, party members. Yet Europarties lack (and might not be willing to provide resources to build up) real grassroots structures, thus posing a key obstacle to the kind of bottom-up multilingual partisanship that we endorse. In other words, there cannot be any bottom-up partisanship if there is no 'bottom' within parties, that is, if there is not a critical mass of grassroots members whose inclusion into the parties' decision-making structures and processes could contribute to the linkage role of multilingual Europarties.

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[18]https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/european-citizens-panel-future-europe

It is true that Europarties present very low levels (as well as diverse forms) of party membership. Membership of the European People's Party, for example, is almost entirely limited to its MEPs (Shemer-Kunz, 2017, p. 54). At the other end of the spectrum we find the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, which does have formal membership open to all EU citizens,[19] though only around 2,000 EU citizens have taken it up so far. Somewhere half way between these two cases, we find the Party of European Socialists (PES), which considers all members of its member parties to be automatically PES members, but also allows any of them who would like to participate more actively in EU-wide activities to be 'PES activists'.[20] Similar to the PES is the European Green Party, which, while not offering individual membership, has an individual supporters network in which members of European Green Party member parties can participate if they are particularly interested in EU-wide issues.[21] Why have these individual membership schemes not been successful so far?

In one of the very few scholarly analyses of membership in Europarties, Yoav Shemer-Kunz (2017) has provided empirical evidence to support the conclusion that two main factors have hindered the success of the European Green Party individual supporters network (and, similarly, of membership schemes in other Europarties). The first is the tension between Europarties and national parties, with the latter having little interest in allowing their EU counterparts to appeal to (and, potentially, monopolize the attention and resources of) their individual members (Shemer-Kunz, 2017, p. 69; see also Bardi, 2002). The second is the lack of actual demand for EU party membership among EU citizens, who are mainly interested in domestic politics (Shemer-Kunz, 2017, p. 70). Crucially,

> '[a]s long as the national parties do not actively diffuse information on the Europarty they are affiliated with among their members, supporters and voters, these individuals have little chances to be informed on the political dynamics at the EU-level and to get interested in contributing to the Europarty organization' (Shemer-Kunz, 2017, p. 70).

This latter issue is particularly important. In our view, at the moment Europarties are not incentivized to promote grassroots structures precisely *because* they are not incentivized to run and compete at the EU level due to the lack of favourable centripetal institutional conditions that we have highlighted throughout this article. However, should Europarties have to start to compete for votes across linguistic and national boundaries in the EU they would also have an interest in investing in real grassroots structures. After all, that is what all parties have done *within* nation-states following the processes of democratization that started in the second half of the nineteenth century (Caramani, 2009). Europarty membership, therefore, should not be seen as a precondition for the kind of institutional reforms that we have defended in this article but rather as something that also depends on those reforms. Only if parties have an incentive to compete at the EU level will they have an interest in creating real grassroots structures and keep their grassroots members informed, and only under these conditions will those members take a genuine interest in EU politics, and take up more often the membership opportunities offered by Europarties.

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[19]https://www.aldeparty.eu/become-individual-member-alde-party
[20]https://www.pes.eu/es/pes-activists/
[21]https://europeangreens.eu/individual-supporters-network

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