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Strengthening European Political Parties

Financial and Power Resources

EUROPA

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INTRODUCTION

European political parties (or Europarties for short) have a long history. The Liaison Bureau of the Socialist Parties of the European Community, the forerunner of today's Party of European Socialists (PES), was founded as early as 1957. In 1976, the European People's Party (EPP) was the first major organization to call itself a European »party«. With the 1993 Maastricht reform, »political parties at European level« found official recognition in the Treaty on European Union (Wieser 2018). In 2016, the last major overhaul of the EU party regulation (Regulation 1141/2014) led to the establishment of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF), which is responsible for the registration, control and sanctioning of Europarties. As of 2022, the Authority is officially recognizing ten Europarties.

This gradual formalization and institutionalization of the Europarties (cf. Switek/Weissenbach 2020) has been accompanied by their growing importance for the legitimacy of the EU. With the deepening of European integration and the gradual parliamentarization of the EU's political system, democratic legitimacy increasingly needs to be generated through the representation of transnational social and ideological cleavages rather than national interests. In this context, Europarties are the most suitable actors for structuring transnational political discourses and offering citizens political identification patterns that transcend national perspectives. **Strong Europarties are therefore crucial for the further development of the EU towards a supranational parliamentary democracy.**

In political practice, however, Europarties are not yet able to fulfil the typical functions of parties in a representative democracy. To this day, they primarily serve as »interlinking organizations« (Hix/Lord 1997:58, see also Bukow/Höhne 2013: 828–829) that promote exchange between their member parties, but can hardly set the political agenda and are barely visible in public.

Strengthening the Europarties and enabling them to perform the functions of »real« parties is therefore of central importance for a more democratic EU. **This policy paper outlines the most important institutional levers for this, namely the better endowment of Europarties with financial as well as power-political resources.** In both respects, progress has been made in recent years, but it has been slow and incomplete. Currently, two new European legislative processes – the reform of the European party regulation and of the European electoral law – are underway in the EU institutions and promise further improvements.

This policy paper first outlines the gap between the democratic opportunities and the unsatisfactory reality of Europarties. It then briefly presents the status quo regarding Europarties' financial and power resources, the ongoing legislative processes aimed at strengthening them, as well as further reform proposals that could provide Europarties with additional resources.

EUROPARTIES' ROLE FOR SUPRANATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The increasing importance of European political parties is closely related to the gradual transformation of the European political system from a paradigm of »member states' foreign policy« towards »European domestic policy« (Müller 2021a: 33–45). In the early years of European integration, the democratic legitimacy of the European Communities was based primarily on the member states' governments, which were legitimized through national elections and made common decisions by consensus. However, this intergovernmental model was only feasible as long as there were only a rather small number of member states and the EU focused on rather technical and/or uncontroversial policies. With the expansion of EU competencies to include more salient policy areas, the increasing politicization of European integration (Hooghe/Marks 2009), and the dismantling of national veto rights to ensure the EU's capability to act, the intergovernmental model has reached its limits. **Democratic legitimacy for the EU must therefore increasingly be generated directly at the supranational level** – in particular through meaningful elections to the European Parliament (Plottka/Müller 2020).

This shift of the EU's legitimacy basis towards the European Parliament (EP) also implies a change in the form of political representation of citizens. In an intergovernmental system, citizens are represented by their national governments defending »national interests« (whose definition is decided democratically at the national level). In a supranational parliamentary system, by contrast, citizens are represented by political parties, which are characterized by their programmatic line. The EP elections, in which citizens can vote for their preferred party, thus becomes the most important legitimizing act for democracy at EU level.

However, the seat share of any single national party in the EP is far too small to exert significant political influence on its own. As long as voters identify with their national parties only, they will not see EP elections as a meaningful way to impact the political course of the EU. **For EP elections to create democratic legitimacy for the EU, it is therefore a necessary condition that party identification is not limited to the national area.**

In this sense, Europarties are the »missing link between European politics and European citizens« (Donnelly/Jopp 2009: 23). As transnational partisan organisations, they are best suited to offer citizens a projection surface for political identities that are defined by supranational social and ideological cleavages rather than national differences. Moreover, by structuring cross-border opinion-forming processes along transnational programmatic lines, they can help to create a European public sphere in which complex European issues can be discussed in a way that is accessible to a broader public (zur Hausen 2008: 202–212). In this way, **strong Europarties should take a crucial function in bringing the EU closer to its citizens and generating legitimacy at the supranational level**.

EUROPARTIES' PERSISTENT WEAKNESS IN POLITICAL PRACTICE

In political practice, however, Europarties only fulfil this legitimising function for the political system of the EU to a very limited extent (cf. Day/Shaw 2006: 105, Mittag 2010). Despite Europarties' gradual institutionalization and the consolidation of a European party system (Liedtke 2020), national parties remain the dominant actors in the party-political space. Europarties, by contrast, mainly serve as »umbrella organizations«, whose main activity is to bring together ideologically like-minded decision-makers from governments and parliaments at the national and European level and enable an informal exchange between them.

To be sure, this »interlinking« activity does allow Europarties to exert a certain influence on European policy making. This is most obvious in the EP (whose political groups, however, are not entirely congruent with their respective Europarties) and can also be observed in other EU institutions, for example through the »party summits« in the eve of European Council meetings (van Hecke 2010, see also Huhe et al. 2022). However, it falls far short of the role that political parties play within parliamentary democracies at the national level.

In particular, **Europarties' weakness may be summarized by a lack of political cohesion, activists' engagement, and public visibility:**

– **Political cohesion:** Compared with political parties at the national level, Europarties are politically rather heterogeneous. Although they do have common political programmes and electoral manifestos, they are usually less profound in scope. Moreover, despite the relatively high cohesion of EP groups – especially on matters with a high cross-party consensus (Bowler/McElroy 2015) –, the political costs a national party pays for deviating from Europarty positions are relatively low. Even in cases where political core values have been at stake (such as recent conflicts between the PES and their member parties from Romania, PSD, or Slovakia, Smer-SD, or between the EPP and their then Hungarian member Fidesz), Europarties struggled to impose their line.[1]

– **Activists' engagement:** Even as »interlinking organisations«, Europarties outreach is largely limited to politicians that are actively involved in EU politics. Many of the existing Europarties have established organisational structures for individual members (such as the ALDE Individual Members or the PES Activists), in some cases even with formalized rights in the Europarty's decision-making procedures (Hertner 2019). Still, most grassroots party members, and even elected national politicians with a focus different from EU affairs, are hardly involved in the activities of Europarties, and often enough not even aware of their very existence. Consequently, intra-party opinion formation processes are much stronger at the national than at the EU level.

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[1] In the case of PSD and Smer-SD, the situation changed only after they lost national elections in 2020; Fidesz ultimately left the EPP in 2021.

– **Public visibility:** Possibly most crucially, visibility of the Europarties in the media as well as the public sphere in general is much lower than that of national parties. This is partly due to the national fragmentation of the European media system, but more importantly to a lack of news value.

All three aspects mutually reinforce each other. For example, Europarties' difficulty to impose a coherent political line makes it less appealing for national politicians to engage in intra-party opinion formation processes. Vice versa, a lack of activists' engagement deprives Europarties' political positions of a deliberative legitimacy that could help keep national party leaders in line. In a similar way, the lack of cohesion and activists' engagement lowers Europarties' news value, while the lack of mediatic exposure disincentivizes engagement and reduces the political cost of deviating from the party line.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVERS TO STRENGTHEN EUROPARTIES

In order to better connect Europarties with society, several authors have recommended Europarties to foster transnational exchange at the grassroots level, to give individual party members a stronger role in intra-party decision making, and to generally increase engagement with civil society and on social media (e.g., Priestley 2011, Bütikofer 2016, Cantalou 2016, Van Hecke 2018: 46–47). While these efforts will certainly be useful at the margins, **the weakness of the Europarties has deeper institutional roots**. Any activities by the Europarties themselves will therefore be insufficient to fundamentally change their situation as long as the institutional context remains unaltered.

Among the structural reasons that impede Europarties from taking over a similar role as political parties at the national level do, two aspects stand out in particular: namely, their **relative lack of financial as well as power-political resources**.

– **Financial resources:** National parties can dispose of greater financial (and, consequently, human) resources than Europarties. This makes national parties generally more capable of action and, in particular, gives them a greater campaigning capacity. Moreover, due to a legal ban of Europarties spending money on political campaigns for national elections and referendums, these are carried out exclusively by the national parties.

– **Power resources:** The political system also gives national parties more political power over the allocation of electoral and government offices. National parties often draw up the electoral lists for national parliamentary elections[2] and *de facto* nominate the ministers if they take part in the national government. Lists for EP elections, by contrast, are not drawn up by the Europarties, but by their national member parties. Similarly, the mem-

bers of the European Commission are nominated by the national governments, and thus indirectly by the national governing parties.

These differences in financial and power resources have strong indirect effects that enhance the position of national parties vis-à-vis Europarties.

Regarding party cohesion, the larger resources of national parties create a structural loyalty of elected politicians and party officials. Although members of parliament and government have, of course, a free mandate, their re-election chances depend heavily on the support of their national party. National parties have therefore more leverage than Europarties to push a coherent political line.

This kind of structural loyalty does not only matter in the context of »hard« political decisions like parliamentary votes. At least equally important are »soft« aspects such as the question of which intra-party networks activists cultivate, with whom they seek dialogue and in which internal debates they become involved. Also in this regard, the larger financial and power resources set an incentive to engage with the national rather than the European party: for an activist who wants to use the party to influence policy, it makes more sense to focus on the level that has the best chances of success. In this way, the greater resources of national parties also contribute to the national fragmentation of party-political discourses.

Finally, the greater financial and power resources of the national parties also lead to greater public visibility. Most obviously, election posters or websites financed by national parties will usually be designed to primarily promote the name and logo of the national rather than the Europarty.[3] Even more importantly, the greater power-political relevance also provides national parties with a higher news value in the mass media, increasing their presence in the public sphere. This in turn means that citizens are more likely to recognize and identify with national rather than European parties.

The best opportunities for the further development of Europarties therefore lie in strengthening them financially and in terms of power (cf. already Von Gehlen 2005, Bardi et al. 2010, Kreutz 2011: 325–329, Merten 2013:66, Leinen 2013, Van Hecke 2018: 44–45, Wolfs/Smulders 2018). Better funding and less spending restrictions for Europarties can give them more room for manoeuvre, make their work more professional and enable them to run campaigns. A stronger role in power politics means that politicians would need their Europarty's support in order to be elected to certain European offices. Both will increase Europarties' political cohesion, incentivize the engagement of politicians and party activists in Europarties' activities, and lead to greater media interest and thus public visibility.

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2 Depending on the national electoral system, this power may also lie with local or regional party chapters.

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3 The EU party regulation contains a legal requirement for national member parties to display their Europarty's logo on their websites. However, this obligation has so far been ignored by most national parties and is not being enforced by the authorities (cf. Drounau 2021a).

CURRENT REFORM DEBATES

Recent years have shown some promising yet incomplete progress towards more financial and power resources for the Europarties. On the one hand, several reforms have significantly expanded the funding of Europarties from the EU budget (Leinen/Pescher 2014). On the other hand, Europarties have gradually begun to exert influence on political nominations – most obviously in the form of the leading candidates *(Spitzenkandidaten)* procedure, through which the Europarties nominated candidates for the office of Commission President for the first time in 2014.

However, Europarties are still more limited than national parties both regarding the amount of funding and the legal framework for spending it, and their power-political advances remained informal and precarious. Further institutional reform therefore remains necessary in order to strengthen their position within the political system. Specifically, progress can be expected from two legislative proposals that are currently under discussion: the reform of the Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (European Parliament 2021, European Commission 2021), and the reform of the European electoral law (Ruiz Devesa 2021).

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

STATUS QUO

The public funding of Europarties was first introduced in 2004. Today, it is mainly based on the EU party regulation (Regulation 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, amended by Regulation 2018/673 and Regulation 2019/493; cf. Anglmayer 2021: 9–13).

According to current rules, any Europarty with at least one Member of the European Parliament (MEP) is eligible for funding from the EP budget. Since 2004, the total amount available has gradually increased (Wolfs 2018: 27) and reached around €42 million in 2020 (European Parliament 2020b). However, this is still considerably less than national public party funding in most major member states. For example, also in 2020, the public financing of national parties amounted to almost €200 million in Germany alone (Deutscher Bundestag 2021) and €66 million in France (French Government 2020).

Of the total amount available to Europarties, 10 % is paid out in form of a lump sum, whereas 90 % is distributed in proportion of their number of MEPs. For each Europarty, the public funding can cover up to 90 % of its overall budget. The remaining 10 % must be funded from other sources which can take the form of either contributions from party members or donations from non-members. Each of these revenue sources are subject to their own rules: donations are limited to €18,000 per donor and year; anonymous donations, donations from public authorities and donations from persons from third countries are prohibited. Contributions may not exceed 40 % of the total budget of a Europarty and must also proceed from within the EU.

In addition, Europarties are subject to strict rules regarding the expenses they can incur (Anglmayer 2021: 13–14). While they are allowed to spend money in campaigns for EP elections, no direct or indirect financing of national parties is permitted. Thus, **Europarties are still prevented from intervening in national electoral or referendum campaigns as well as from providing financial support to weaker member parties**. This is in stark contrast, for example, to the federal party system in Germany, where § 22 of the Political Parties Act explicitly obliges the national parties to ensure »adequate financial compensation« for their regional branches.

CURRENT LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

Already in its 2020 Report on stocktaking of European elections, the EP identified a need to reform the funding rules for Europarties (European Parliament 2020a, no. 29). In November 2021, it passed a report by Rainer Wieland and Charles Goerens on the application of the Regulation 1141/2014 with specific reform demands (European Parliament 2021).

Shortly afterwards, the Commission took up the EP's key demands in a formal legislative proposal for a recast of the Regulation (European Commission 2021). On the one hand, this proposal aims to facilitate the financing of the European parties. In particular, it would:

– **introduce an additional category of revenue sources** beyond contributions and donations. These new »own resources« shall be linked to party activities (e.g., sales of publications or participation fees for conferences) and limited to a maximum of 5 % of a Europarty's total budget.

– **increase the maximum share of public funding** from 90 % to 95 %, and even 100 % in EP election years. This would make it easier for smaller parties with limited access to other revenue sources to receive funding from the EU.

– **allow contributions from member parties from third countries** belonging to the Council of Europe, up to a maximum of 10 % of the total budget. This would overcome the current situation in which, for example, the PES has member parties in Norway and the United Kingdom, but is not allowed to receive any contributions from them.

On the other hand, the proposal also aims at relaxing the spending limitations of Europarties by allowing them to finance national referendum campaigns on European issues. **However, Europarties would still not be permitted to fund national parties, national electoral campaigns, or referendum campaigns on purely national issues.**

In addition, public funding is also an issue of European electoral reform, which is currently being discussed in the EP. According to the draft report by Domènec Ruiz Devesa, this reform includes the introduction of transnational lists in an EU-wide constituency (see below). The election campaign for these

transnational lists would be financed entirely from the EU budget, with a fixed amount for each vote obtained by the list.

FURTHER REFORM PROPOSALS

The reforms proposed in the Wieland-Goerens report and by the European Commission would significantly increase the Europarties' financial capacity to act. However, even with the implementation of these measures, the financial resources of the Europarties would lag behind those of national parties – not only because of the comparatively smaller overall amount of party funding, but also because of the design of the funding and spending rules.

Regarding the funding system, the Commission proposal keeps the number of MEPs as the most important criterion for the distribution of public funding among the Europarties. Alternatively, it would be conceivable, for example, to **partially link the amount of public financing to the number of individual members or to the amount raised in contributions and donations** (Drounau 2021b). This would create incentives for a stronger outreach of Europarties towards grassroots party members and donors and therefore contribute to better anchoring them in society.

Even more important, however, is the question for which activities Europarties are allowed to spend money. According to the Commission proposal, Europarties would obtain the right to fund national referendum campaigns on EU issues. Beyond that, however, numerous spending limitations would remain, in particular the ban on funding national parties and national electoral campaigns. In order to strengthen Europarties, these **spending limitations should be lifted in order to give Europarties the opportunity to be active at all political levels of the EU** – European, national, or regional. First, this would increase the relevance of the Europarties for national politicians, creating an incentive to engage with them as potential partners for national electoral campaigns. Moreover, it would facilitate citizens' identification with Europarties, as they could become part of the national political life rather than appearing only in the context of European campaigns. Finally, it would better enable Europarties to strategically foster member parties in member states in which they are only weakly represented, thus strengthening the cohesion of the European party system as a whole.

POWER RESOURCES

STATUS QUO

Europarties' power resources – i.e., their ability to nominate candidates for political offices – are currently even weaker than their financial resources, but they are not entirely inexistent. Without any formal institutional role, Europarties' main leverage on the appointment of executive offices is through the political groups of the EP. The election of both the Commission President and the Commissioners' college requires a vote of approval by the EP, which enables the majority groups to exert some influence over personnel selection.

Indeed, there is a long-standing informal consensus that not only national and gender-based but also party-political criteria are taken into account for the appointment of the most important executive offices (Commission President, Council President, High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and more recently also the Executive Vice-Presidents of the Commission). Since the entry in force of the Lisbon Treaty, these posts have always been filled by members of the major Europarties whose political groups are needed for a majority in the European Parliament: EPP, PES (S&D) and, since 2019, ALDE (RE). However, the negotiation on filling these top jobs mainly takes place in the European Council. Although heads of state and government of the same Europarty usually coordinate in order to find a common approach to nominations, Europarties' formal bodies hardly appear as actors in this process.

The only clear exception to this is the Commission Presidency. Since the 2014 EP elections, Europarties have been nominating »leading candidates« *(Spitzenkandidaten)* for this job. Usually, these nominations were made by delegates at Europarty congresses; a more inclusive approach implying grassroots-level party members or citizens in general was considered in some cases, but only realized once by the European Greens in 2014 (Wolfs/Put/Van Hecke 2021). In principle, the new procedure has provided the Europarties with a new power resource: **as leading candidates, politicians for the first time have to get the explicit support of their Europarty in order to hold a public office**. However, the procedure has so far been purely informal. It has never been fully accepted by the European Council and already failed at its second edition in 2019 due to the lack of unity within the European Parliament (Müller Gómez/Thieme 2020). This informality and lack of reliability has so far limited the impact of the leading candidates on Europarties' public visibility during the campaign.

Beyond the leading candidates, there have only been very sporadic attempts by Europarties or EP groups to exert influence over the nomination of other Commission members. In theory, Europarties could use the EP's right of veto over the election of the Commission to shape the nomination of ordinary Commissioners in a similar way as they did with the Commission Presidency. However, although the EP has regularly used its power to reject individual Commissioner candidates since 2004, the nomination of replacement candidates was usually left to national governments. In 2014, EPP and S&D jointly suggested an own replacement candidate after rejecting a Slovenian nominee, but when the Slovenian government and the Council rebuffed this move, the two groups ultimately refrained from taking it any further (Müller 2014).

Lastly, **Europarties do not play any role at all in nominating candidates for EP elections**. EP elections take place in separate national (or, in some member states, regional) constituencies, for which lists are drawn up by the national parties (or their regional chapters). In itself, this is not unusual for federal party systems even at the national level – in German Bundestag elections, for example, there are no federal lists either, but only regional lists and local individual candidates, who are nominated by the regional and local party chapters

respectively. However, due to the otherwise strong power resources of the national party leadership (for example, regarding the nomination of government members), the parties are still perceived as unified nationwide actors in the national public sphere.[4] At the EU level, by contrast, the general weakness of Europarties as well as the national fragmentation of the media system makes a comparable »party integration through public perception« much more unlikely, reinforcing the need for institutionalised power resources.

CURRENT LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES

The idea of **giving Europarties additional power resources by introducing an EU-wide constituency with European party lists for EP elections is therefore one of the most prominent proposals in the debate on European democracy** (cf. Verger 2018, Diaz Crego 2021 with further references, and recently Müller 2021b, Nguyen 2021). The proposal has been discussed since the 1990s but has never been put into practice so far. However, the political debate on this idea has gained momentum again in recent years. At the Conference on the Future of Europe, for example, EU-wide lists drawn up by Europarties are among the ideas that have received most endorsements on the digital platform (Kantar Public 2021: 62). They have also been recommended by the European Citizens' Panel on »European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security« (Conference on the Future of Europe 2021: 7–8).

EU-wide lists are also a central proposal of the draft report on electoral reform presented by Domènec Ruiz Devesa to the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) in July 2021. This draft report provides for a new EU-wide constituency through which an additional 46 EP seats would be allocated. As the existing national seat quotas would remain unchanged, the total size of the EP would increase from 705 to 751 seats.

For these 46 new seats, lists would be drawn up by Europarties or other newly established »European electoral entities« (which would either have to collect a certain number of support signatures or be composed of national parties from at least a quarter of the member states, but would not have to be registered as a European party). To address the concerns of smaller member states, the report also provides for a system of national quotas to ensure that seats on transnational lists are filled with candidates from member states of different sizes (Müller 2021c). Amendments were tabled in the AFCO Committee in November 2021 and were still being negotiated at the time of writing of this policy paper.

If the Ruiz-Devesa report were to be implemented, Europarties would for the first time directly nominate a significant number of candidates. This increase in power resources would have a positive effect on the structural loyalty of the politicians running on the EU-wide list, who would have to appeal to an EU-wide party base rather than just their national party. Moreover, it can increase public visibility, as the European party congresses that would decide on the lists would become relevant political events with a high news value. Finally, EU-wide lists can also support the leading-candidates procedure, since the candidates would now actually be on the ballot papers throughout Europe. All in all, the proposal of EU-wide lists thus presents itself as one of the most important levers currently under discussion for strengthening the Europarties.

FURTHER REFORM PROPOSALS

Independently of EU-wide lists, another approach that is discussed for increasing the role of Europarties in the European electoral system is the introduction of a transnational electoral threshold (Decker 2015). Currently, electoral thresholds for EP elections exist only in some member states and only in relation to the national vote. This leads to a situation in which a party that is relatively weak at the national level can be excluded from the national seat allocation, even though its Europarty is actually represented in the EP. Conversely, a party that is strong only in a single member state can enter the EP even if it does not belong to a Europarty and ultimately does not become a member of any political group.

With a transnational threshold, only parties whose Europarty had achieved a certain minimum share of the vote (e.g., 3 per cent) across Europe would be considered in the allocation of national seats. Membership in a Europarty would thus become a *de facto* prerequisite for entering the EP. Such a regulation would not only reduce the number of non-attached MEPs and thus increase the cohesion and decision-making capacity of the EP, but also provide the Europarties with a very strong power resource. In particular, a transnational threshold would strengthen the Europarties in possible conflicts with their national member parties (such as those between the EPP and Fidesz in the past), as it would make expulsion from the Europarty a harsh sanction that member parties would urgently try to avoid. This, again, would incentivize national parties to seriously engage with their Europarties and shape a coherent political line rather than just glossing over political differences with other member parties.

Finally, **the strongest leverage for strengthening the Europarties' power resources in the long term is the parliamentarisation of the European Commission** (Müller 2020: 4). This would include, on the one hand, the introduction of a constructive no-confidence vote, through which the EP could replace the Commission President with an absolute majority.[5] On the other hand, Commissioners should be ap-

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[4] For a pointed example, the nomination of far-right CDU candidate Hans-Georg Maaßen as a local constituency candidate became a topic of nationwide debate before the 2021 Bundestag election, and any attempts by the national CDU leadership to dismiss the nomination as a purely local matter remained largely unsuccessful.

[5] Currently, a vote of no-confidence requires a two-thirds majority and only serves to remove the incumbent Commission. The replacement candidate for the Commission Presidency is then nominated by the European Council and elected by the EP with the same procedure that also takes place after an EP election.

pointed by the Commission President alone, without involvement of national governments. Together, these two reforms would make the appointment of the EU executive an essentially party-political issue, similar to the procedures known from national parliamentary democracies, and put Europarties into the very centre of democratic politics at EU level.

CONCLUSION

With the politicisation of the EU as well as the abolition of national veto rights, there is a growing need to generate democratic legitimacy for the EU directly at the supranational level. In this context, Europarties are the actors that are best suited for shaping discourses according to a logic of transnational ideological cleavages rather than national differences. By this, they can offer citizens a transnational political identity, and enable a supranational representative democracy.

In political practice, however, Europarties suffer from a threefold weakness that prevents them from fulfilling this legitimising function: they lack political cohesion, activists' engagement, and public visibility. Attempts by the Europarties to overcome these weaknesses on their own (for example, through better networking with civil society or an improved outreach to party members at the grassroots level) can lead to marginal improvements. However, given that the weaknesses have a largely structural character, fundamental progress can only be expected through an improvement of the institutional framework of the Europarties. Two factors in particular play a decisive role here, namely the strengthening of Europarties' financial and power-political resources.

In both respects, there has been some progress in recent years, but it has remained incomplete and precarious. Currently, the reform of the European electoral law as well as the revision of the EU party regulation offer new opportunities for improvement.

With regard to financial resources, the focus of the reform should not only be on improving the public and private funding of the Europarties, but above all on easing the legal spending restrictions that prevent Europarties from playing an active role at the national and regional level. With regard to power resources, an EU-wide constituency with transnational lists for EP elections is a promising approach. In addition, a transnational electoral threshold and, in the long term, the parliamentarisation of the European Commission should contribute to strengthening the Europarties.

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