

“Business as usual”: The Treaty of Lisbon and transnational party manifestos

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Abstract. The Treaty of Lisbon was a milestone in the enduring process of empowerment of the European Parliament and its connections to the European Commission. This latest reform of the Treaties, in force since December 2009, placed the only supranational institution whose members are directly elected by all citizens of the EU (since 1979) on an equal footing with the Council as a co-legislator in around thirty additional policy areas. The Treaty of Lisbon also strengthened the European Parliament in terms of the annual and multiannual budgetary decisions, and it granted it the right to elect the President of the European Commission according to the results of the European elections. This article examines various possible effects of this major boost of the European Parliament, along with links to the European Commission in the manifestos issued by five European parties: the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European Free Alliance (EFA), European Green Party (European Greens or EGP), European People’s Party (EPP), and Party of European Socialists (PES). It studies variations from 2004 onwards in the scope of the programmatic proposals regarding EU domains of power, the footprint in the manifestos of the transnational party organisations themselves, and eventually also of their candidates for the presidency of the European Commission. To do so, the twenty manifestos issued by the abovementioned parties for the 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 European elections were content analysed. The results point to the lasting distance between these transnational parties and the European elections, despite the reinforcement of the role of the European Parliament over time.

Keywords: European Parliament; European parties; ALDE; EFA; EGP; EPP; PES.

[en] *Business as usual*: el Tratado de Lisboa y los programas de los europartidos

Resumen. El Tratado de Lisboa supuso un auténtico hito en el proceso de fortalecimiento del Parlamento Europeo y de sus vínculos con la Comisión Europea. Esta última reforma de los Tratados, en vigor desde diciembre 2009, situó la única institución supranacional elegida directamente por todos los ciudadanos de la UE –desde 1979–, en pie de igualdad con el Consejo en tanto que colegisladora en alrededor de treinta nuevas áreas de políticas. El Tratado de Lisboa robusteció asimismo el Parlamento Europeo en las decisiones presupuestarias anuales y plurianuales, y le otorgó el derecho a elegir al presidente de la Comisión de acuerdo con los resultados de las elecciones europeas. El artículo examina algunos posibles efectos de este refuerzo del Parlamento Europeo y de su relación con la Comisión Europea en los programas de cinco partidos políticos a escala europea, que son la Alianza de los Liberales y Demócratas por Europa (ALDE), Alianza Libre Europea (ALE), Partido Verde Europeo (Verdes Europeos o PVE), Partido Popular Europeo (PPE) y Partido Socialista Europeo (PSE). Se estudió la variación a partir de 2004 en la extensión de las propuestas programáticas sobre los asuntos que son competencia de la UE, la eventual huella en sus programas de las propias organizaciones de partido a escala europea, así como de sus candidatos a presidir la Comisión Europea. Para ello, se llevó a cabo un análisis de contenido de los veinte programas presentados para las elecciones de 2004, 2009, 2014 y 2019 por parte de los partidos mencionados. Los resultados apuntan a la persistente distancia entre estos partidos transnacionales y las elecciones europeas, pese al impulso del papel del Parlamento Europeo a lo largo del tiempo.

Palabras clave: Parlamento Europeo; partidos políticos a escala europea; ALDE; ALE; PVE; PPE; PSE.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. The strengthening of the European Parliament and its connections to the European Commission. 3. Method. 4. Discussion. 5. Concluding remarks. 6. Bibliography.

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The doctrine of a separation of powers is no longer unchallenged. Those who have argued that it is not possible at a European level to choose between different policy options and to throw out an executive that is seen to have failed are now obliged to justify their position. One can now imagine a Commission that is not beyond democratic electoral reach and a European Parliament that can offer the possibility of policy change through executive

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renewal, a system where “rascals can be thrown out”. This transformation of the debate about representative government has been brought about by the Parliament in its role as the constant challenger of the principles of EU governance. The genie is out of the bottle and cannot be put back. (Shackleton, 2017: 203).

1. Introduction

“Democratic legitimacy is predicated on the government’s ability to govern responsibly and effectively while responding to the citizens’ political preferences, policy concerns, and social values, as expressed directly through the ballot box and/or indirectly via their access to policymaking” (Schmidt, 2015: 10). In the European Union (EU) that has emerged from the “polycrises” of the 2010s, the ability to govern effectively –or “output legitimacy”–, which is a performance criterion, might have ceased to be enough to guarantee democratic legitimacy. Additionally, the discussion about “input legitimacy”, which is “focused on the citizens” attitudes toward and engagement in a political community, along with the responsiveness of governments to the citizens’ political demands and concerns (Schmidt, 2015: 16), has become more analytical, informed by data on the functioning of the various channels that connect the citizens’ preferences on the EU policy portfolio to supranational policy-making processes and outputs.

Furthermore, the Treaty of Lisbon, in force since December 2009, brought about a massive reinforcement of the European Parliament, which included a strengthening of its link to the European Commission (Egeberg *et al.*, 2014; Hix and Hoyland, 2013; Ripoll, 2018; Wiesner, 2018).

This article is focused on the following research question: did the reinforcement of the European Parliament through the Lisbon Treaty shape variations in the manifestos issued for the 2014 and 2019 European elections?

Even if there is no doubt that the empowerment of the European Parliament is a key dynamic of the EU, not just in recent times but all along the integration process, the European Commission and the European Council have also been big gainers of power over the past decade of formal and informal changes in the EU, responding to diverse functional and intergovernmental rationales (Bauer and Becker, 2014; Bickerton *et al.*, 2015; Nugent and Rhinard, 2019; van Middelaar, 2018).

Furthermore, the strengthening of the connections between the European Parliament and the European Commission through the Treaty of Lisbon did not imply a “parlamentarisation” of the EU (Dinan, 2016; Shackleton, 2017), among other reasons, because the Commission is not an institutional equivalent of a national government nor does it share the mission of one.³ The European Commission is in charge of protecting the general interests of the EU beyond any particular national interest, and the independence of its members must be beyond question. Although today the relative weight of the political groups in the European Parliament is taken into consideration when the Berlaymont portfolios are assigned, the candidates for Commissioners continue to be nominated by their national governments instead of being freely selected by the elected President of the Commission along their own political lines. This means that the ongoing logic of politicisation of the European Commission is at odds with the very *raison d’être* and composition of this supranational institution.

In a nutshell, what we can find nowadays on the supranational level is a more equitable balance of power between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament, the two supranational legislative chambers, without a substitution of the Council by the Parliament as the cornerstone. Moreover, a certain personalisation of the European elections has occurred as the result of the decision taken by the most relevant European parties to name candidates for president of the European Commission prior to the 2014 European election, along with the presidentialisation of the resulting Juncker Commission 2014-2019.

The so-called “*Spitzenkandidat(en)* system” is not mandatory and was not fully abided by in 2019, when Ursula von der Leyen was proposed by the European Council and elected by the European Parliament as President of the Commission for the period 2019-2024. She had not participated in the European campaign as the lead candidate of her party, the European People’s Party (EPP), which had instead appointed as its *Spitzenkandidat* Manfred Weber, the leader of the EPP political group in the European Parliament during the former institutional cycle 2014-2019.

At present, the EU’s executive branch continues to be ambiguous. Various institutions share executive duties: the Council of the EU (residually), the European Central Bank in its domains of competence, along with the European Commission and the European Council (both increasingly influential, responding to different types of pressures, solving transnational problems and equilibrating national interests, respectively).

³ According to the Treaties, “the Commission shall promote the general interest of the Union and take appropriate initiatives to that end. It shall ensure the application of the Treaties, and of measures adopted by the institutions pursuant to them. It shall oversee the application of Union law under the control of the Court of Justice of the European Union...” (Article 17.1 of the TEU). “The members of the Commission shall be chosen on the grounds of their general competence and European commitment from persons whose independence is beyond doubt” (Article 17.3 of the TEU). The expression “the Treaties” always refers to the Treaty on the EU (TEU) and the Treaty establishing the European Community, whose name since the Treaty of Lisbon is the “Treaty on the Functioning of the EU” (TFEU).

This fragmented executive, plus the enduring consensual style that characterises EU policy-making across the entire supranational setting, explain the lasting difficulties in identifying “the opposition” on the EU level and its alternatives with regard to the policy portfolio. In this sense, beyond the European Commission’s nature, at the start of the institutional cycle 2019-2024, we still observe that “the problem of the building of a EU party system is institutional” (Bardi *et al.*, 2010: 105).

The aim of this article is to make an empirical contribution to the literature on party competition focused on EU themes.⁴ It analyses the manifestos issued by five European parties for the 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 European elections.

“The term ‘Europarty’ refers to the transnational, extra-parliamentary federations of national political parties from several EU member states, united by political affinity. These organizations are not identical to the political groups in the European Parliament (EP), although they closely cooperate with each other” (Hertner, 2019: 488). While these latter develop activities at the supranational level, in the EP, Europarties play their role at the transnational level, within the framework of the EU Council (Van Hecke, 2010: 398). In the EU, the classic array of functions performed by the political parties in a representative democracy (mobilisation and socialization, recruitment of the political elite, policy design, legitimation of the political system, among others) are fulfilled mainly by the national parties as multilevel actors. However, this does not necessarily mean that transnational party organisations are irrelevant, and practices like the “*Spitzenkandidat(en)* system” could contribute to their reinforcement.

It is worth noting that the 2004 election is the first European election with official transnational parties, following the approval of the first Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties the year before. European political parties and European political foundations are presently governed by Regulation (EU, Euratom) No. 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 October 2014 on their statutes and funding (Current consolidated version: 27/03/2019).

The first EU legislation on European parties was made possible by changes introduced through the Treaty of Amsterdam, in force since May 1999. Article 224 of the TFEU contains the legal basis to regulate the European parties on the supranational level. Furthermore, Article 10.4 of the TEU states that “political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union”. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU also says that “political parties at Union level contribute to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union” (Article 12.2).

The requirements to be considered a European party are the following: having European or national parliamentarians in at least a quarter of the Member States, or having obtained a minimum of 3% of the votes cast in these countries in the latest European election; respecting the founding principles of the EU in their manifestos and activities; and having participated in or declared their will to participate in the European elections.

The five parties studied in this research are the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European Free Alliance (EFA), European Green Party (European Greens or EGP), European People’s Party (EPP), and Party of European Socialists (PES). These are the sole transnational parties created prior to the Maastricht Treaty, in force since November 1993. In fact, all of them had already been constituted in the 1970s and early 1980s for the first European election. The order of creation is as follows: PES (1973), EPP (1976), ALDE (1976), EGP (1979), and EFA (1981). Moreover, all of them have a consistent track record of manifestos. Not surprisingly, these five parties represent the most relevant pro-integration political families: Christian democratic (EPP), social liberal (ALDE), social democratic (PES), and ecological (EGP). The EFA, whose national members are regionalist/nationalist parties, is not an anti-integration transnational organization, but rather a longstanding partner of the EGP in the European Parliament, where they share a common and well-established Political Group.⁵

Although the modifications introduced by the last reform of the Treaties wouldn’t have been the only or even the main causes of variations in their manifestos, this exploration is thought-provoking, because the absence of substantial adjustments would indicate how hard it still is to link the transnational parties to the European elections, despite the noticeable reinforcement of the European Parliament since December 2009.

For the institutional reasons that were mentioned previously, the following four hypotheses about the relationships between the strengthening of the European Parliament and its connections to the European Commission through the Treaty of Lisbon, on the one hand, and the manifestos issued for the 2014 and 2019 European elections, on the other, are proposed:

⁴ We considered it crucial to limit the scope of this research to supranational issues because a certain misunderstanding continues to exist between “Europe” as a single issue and EU themes. Among other factors, this confusion might have been caused by the high profile of some Eurosceptic parties throughout the process of politicisation of ‘Europe’. As is commonly known, instead of providing alternatives within the EU portfolio, these parties have focused on demanding a more or less extended devolution of powers from the supranational to the national levels of decision-making (Belot *et al.*, 2013; Borriello and Brack, 2019; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares, 2013; Grande and Hutter, 2016).

⁵ The full list of registered European parties can be found on the website of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations: <http://appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties.html>.

- H1 – Variations in the extent of the policy offer on current EU domains of power were not shaped by Treaty of Lisbon.
- H2 – The footprint in the manifestos of the transnational party organisations was not influenced by the Treaty of Lisbon.
- H3 – Candidates for president of the European Commission –*Spitzenkandidat(en)*–remain absent from the party manifestos.
- H4 – The Treaty of Lisbon did not enhance co-writing or co-responsibility for the policy offer between national and European parties.

To verify them, twenty manifestos were content analysed, as described later on in Section three.

The article continues as follows: Section two offers a summary of the enhancing of the European Parliament and its links to the Commission through the Treaty of Lisbon. Section three describes the variables that were applied to code the manifestos. This is followed by the discussion. Finally, some concluding remarks are provided.

2. The strengthening of the European Parliament and its connections to the European Commission

As mentioned in the introduction, the empowerment of the European Parliament through the Treaty of Lisbon was remarkable. This section summarises some key institutional elements that justify the article's approach.

First, concerning the legislative branch, the Treaty of Lisbon contributed to a more equitable equilibrium between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. The boosting of the Parliament's say on the content of EU laws was so pronounced that the legislative procedure placing both chambers on an equal footing, which was extended to around thirty more policy areas, changed its name from co-decision to "ordinary legislative procedure".

Furthermore, "consultation" and "consent" were preserved as "special legislative procedures" for some sensitive issues, including topics related to citizens' rights and the EU budget, such as a uniform electoral procedure for the European elections, changes in the EU budget revenues (the so-called "own resources system"), mid-run budgetary planning (the "multiannual financial framework" or MFF), and social security and the social protection of workers.

National governments have maintained individual veto power by preserving unanimity as the decision-making rule within the Council regarding both variations in the own resources system and the approval of the MFF. However, the European Parliament was reinforced through the Treaty of Lisbon with regard to budgetary issues, as well. In it, the traditional distinction between compulsory (or spending derived from the Treaties) and non-compulsory expenditures was eliminated, broadening the scope of decision for the Parliament in the bargaining over the annual budget. In the past, the Council controlled the spending that was considered compulsory, such as the money intended for agriculture.

Additionally, the MFF was moved from the intergovernmental realm (prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, this was not only in practice, but also formally adopted by an agreement between the national leaders taken at the European Council) to the Community method, by converting it into a Regulation, the legislative procedure of which is not consultation, rather consent. This means that the Treaty of Lisbon granted the European Parliament a veto right over the MFF.

Furthermore, the latest reform of the Treaties allowed the European Parliament to "elect" the President of the Commission, even though the European Council continues to be in charge of nominating the candidate to be proposed to the Parliament, albeit taking into account the results of the European elections and without the requisite of unanimity. This "politicisation" of the election of the European Commission's President was not extended to the rest of the College. National governments are still in charge of nominating the candidates for Commissioner, who must also be accepted first by the Commission's elected President and then by the European Parliament. There, they are examined individually by the committee specialised in the portfolio to be assigned to each on the basis of their expertise, rather than political affinity. All this occurs before the Parliament's approval of the entire College of Commissioners in a single vote of consent. Likewise, since the very inception of the integration process, the Commission as a collegiate body has been responsible to the supranational parliamentarians, who could vote on a motion of censure. The right to approve the full European Commission and the right to "approve" (as opposed to "elect", as the Treaty says following the Lisbon reform) the Commission's President had been already granted to the European Parliament by the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, in the 1990s.

Moreover, since December 2009, the European Parliament has gained influence at some other stages of the EU policy-processes that go beyond decision-making. It acquired control over the European Commission's implementation duties (a terrain where plenty of political decisions are also taken), as well as the capacity to request the European Commission to submit a proposal to launch a new piece of legislation, according to the distribution of competences established in the Treaties. The Treaty of Lisbon also gave the Parliament greater capacity

to scrutinise the European Council and the Council of the EU on the Union's external actions, and to propose amendments to the Treaties, among other enhancements (Corbett, Jacobs and Neville, 2016; Mayoral, 2011).

This notwithstanding, and as has been pointed out earlier, it is significant that the EU Council continues to be the most powerful player in terms of major budgetary decisions (the own resources system and the MFF). Furthermore, with regard to the European Parliament's newly-granted legislative powers, it might be argued that, although the number of legislative acts adopted under co-decision, or the "ordinary legislative procedure", has continued to increase, the total number of legislative outputs on the supranational level has decreased since the early 1990s, and in particular from 2007 onwards (Arregui, 2019: 45, 50).

It is also worth noting that, in the political system of the EU, some policy objectives and instruments, which in comparative perspective are subject to change according to the shifting majorities that emerge from regular elections, are "constitutionalised" or blocked in the Treaties (Bickerton, 2018:11; Closa, 2014: 74-75). This occurs, for instance, in some areas of economic policy, from the single market to the budgetary rules applicable at the level of the Member States. Particularly on monetary issues, the peculiarity is even broader, because more power than usual is concentrated in the European Central Bank. This occurs not only at the implementation stage, but also throughout the entire policy process.

All in all, the role of the European Parliament from 2009 onwards is greater than ever. Nonetheless, a range of crucial policy decisions is not made by the directly elected representatives of EU citizens on the supranational level; the national governments guaranteed this by blocking some high-profile topics in the Treaties and maintaining other contentious issues under "special legislative procedures" and the unanimity rule within the Council.

3. Method

Our comparative data were obtained by content analysing the manifestos issued for the 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 European elections by five European parties: the ALDE, EFA, EGP, EPP, and PES. The full titles of these manifestos are given in the bibliography. The ALDE was called the "European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party" (ELDR) from 2004 to November 2012. Therefore, this former name appears in the list of references as the author of the ALDE's 2004 and 2009 programmatic texts.

For this coding, we have treated the manifesto's entire text as the unit of analysis. With regard to categories, we used the number of pages and the number of sections on EU themes as proxies for the extent of the policy offer. To identify the footprint of the transnational party organisations in their programmatic texts, we relied on three variables: the logo of the European party on the manifesto, text signed by the head of the party or other members of the party elite, and information on the party institution where the manifesto was approved.

The categories that deal with personalisation are the following: the name of the candidate(s) for president of the European Commission (*Spitzenkandidat(en)*), pictures of the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* on the front page, pictures of the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* on other pages of the programme, and text signed by the *Spitzenkandidat(en)*.

We also worked with a variable related to authorship, which captured an eventual share in responsibility between the European party, its composing national parties, and/or the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* concerning the issuing of the programmatic offer for the European election. Finally, we included a category that places the focus on the process of writing the party manifesto, looking for variation with regard to the declared involvement of some party members in the preparation of the manifesto, along with a possible call for contributions from the general public prior to or at the time of drafting the programmatic text.

All variables included in the classification scheme are given in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Classification scheme

A. Identification variables	
Variable 1:	Party name
Variable 2:	Party acronym
Variable 3:	Programme title
Variable 4:	Election year
B. Extent of the policy offer	
Variable 5:	Number of pages (total number in the official file provided by the party)
Variable 6:	Number of sections on EU supranational domains of power. Introductory messages unrelated to policy preferences are not counted, nor are the names of the chapters or equivalent divisions in the text
C. Footprint of the transnational party organisations	
Variable 7:	Logo of the European party (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

Variable 8: Text signed by the head of the European party or other members of the party elite (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

Variable 9: Information on the European party organ where the manifesto was approved (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

D. Personalisation (since 2014)

Variable 10: Name of the candidate(s) for president of the European Commission (*Spitzenkandidat(en)*)

0 No (although the party did appoint them for the election)

1 Yes

3 Programme of a party without any *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

Variable 11: Pictures of the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* on the front page (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

Variable 12: Pictures of the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* on other pages (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

Variable 13: Text signed by the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* (No: 0/ Yes: 1)

E. Miscellaneous

Variable 14: Author

This is the author given in the text, usually on the front page. It is made explicit by the complete name of the European party, and/or its composing national parties, and/or *Spitzenkandidat(en)*; or, following this order: their respective logos, or pictures. The second digit (0, 1, 2, 3) of the response options for this variable whose first digit is 1, 2 or 3 indicates references that do not imply collaboration in the preparation of the manifesto or co-responsibility for the policy offer, but that merely mention an electoral actor different from the author who is responsible for the content of the manifesto

10 European party only

11 European party with some references to its member national parties

12 European party with some references to its *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

13 European party with some references to both national parties and the *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

20 *Spitzenkandidat(en)* only

21 *Spitzenkandidat(en)* with some references to the national parties that support them

22 *Spitzenkandidat(en)* with some references to the European party that has appointed them

23 *Spitzenkandidat(en)* with both references to the national parties and the European party

30 National parties only

31 National parties with some references to the European party

32 National parties with some references to the *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

33 National parties with both references to the European party and the *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

40 European party and *Spitzenkandidat(en)*

50 European party, *Spitzenkandidat(en)* and national parties

60 European party and national parties

70 *Spitzenkandidat(en)* and national parties

Variable 15: Information on who contributed to the development of the programme

0 No

1 List of participants

2 Information on a call for contributions that had been previously announced

3 Invitation to submit contributions

Source: authors' own work.

4. Discussion

Below are the most relevant results obtained and an explanation of how these are related to our expectations regarding the links between the empowerment of the European Parliament through the Treaty of Lisbon and the manifestos of the five transnational parties examined.

As was pointed out earlier, the following four hypotheses are to be tested: variations in the extent of the policy offer on current EU domains of power were not shaped by the Treaty of Lisbon (H1), the footprint in the manifestos of the transnational party organisations was not influenced by the Treaty of Lisbon (H2), candidates for president of the European Commission (*Spitzenkandidat(en)*) remain absent from the party manifestos (H3), and the Treaty of Lisbon did not enhance co-writing or co-responsibility for the policy offer between national and European parties (H4).

Firstly, regarding the extent of the policy offer, the absence of meaningful changes would imply that the empowerment of the European Parliament has not fostered programmatic competition among these European parties. Secondly, stability in the prominence of the transnational party organisations in their programmatic texts may mean that the strengthening of the European Parliament has not boosted these political actors, which have remained subordinated to their composing national parties.

Thirdly, as the reinforcement of the European Parliament and its links to the European Commission have been accompanied by the nomination of lead candidates prior to the 2014 and 2019 European elections for the purpose of introducing these personalities in the campaigns, in the hopes that their visibility might help to maintain and even increase electoral participation, testing whether this so-called “*Spitzenkandidat(en)* system” has reached the electoral manifestos merits some attention. As was already reported in the methodological section, Variable 14 is intended to capture not simply whether the *Spitzenkandidat(en)* is mentioned in the programmatic texts, but rather whether they, and/or some national parties, had collaborated with the European party in the preparation of the policy offer or assumed any responsibility for the preferences contained in the European manifesto.

4.1. Extent of the policy offer

According to our data, none of the parties studied shows a consistent trend towards broadening its policy offer for European elections. See Table 1. In terms of the number of pages, the longest manifesto issued by each of these parties occurred in the following years: ALDE (or ELDR in 2004 and 2009) (2004), EFA (2014), EGP (2014), EPP (2009), PES (2009).

Table 1. Extent of the policy offer (2004-2019)

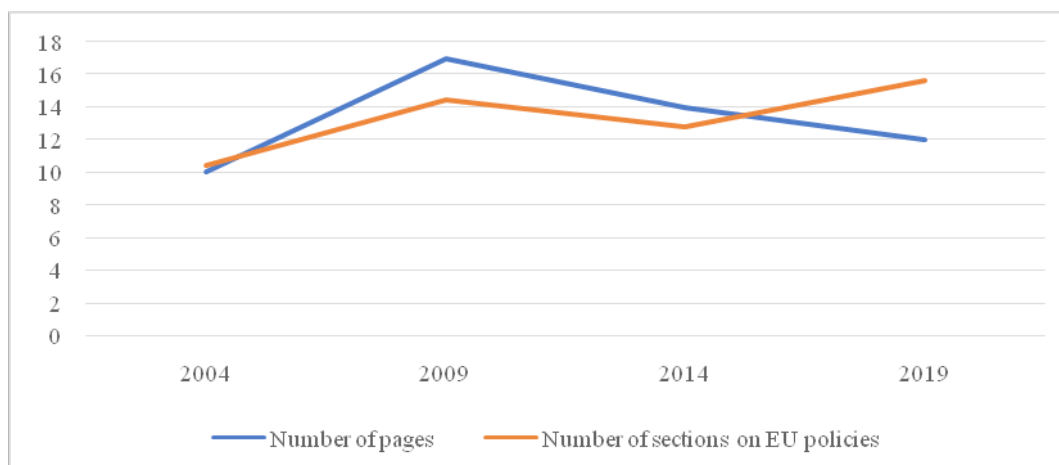
Party name/acronym	Election year	Number of pages	Number of sections
ELDR*	2004	27	32
EFA	2004	7	5
EGP	2004	6	5
EPP	2004	3	5
PES	2004	7	5
ELDR	2009	3	4
EFA	2009	10	13
EGP	2009	8	3
EPP	2009	35	40
PES	2009	31	12
ALDE	2014	8	5
EFA	2014	15	7
EGP	2014	40	30
EPP	2014	5	12
PES	2014	4	10
ALDE	2019	12	9
EFA	2019	12	10
EGP	2019	16	31
EPP	2019	16	21
PES	2019	4	7

Source: authors' own work. *ELDR is the former acronym of ALDE.

In addition, the 2009 European election was a moment of change. This becomes evident when we observe the mean of the two indicators for the extent of the policy offer (variables 5 and 6 of the classification scheme). That year, the number of pages of the European manifestos increased by 70%, and the number of sections on EU themes by 38%.

However, 2009 failed to become a turning point. It is significant that the number of pages in the manifestos of the principal parties according to the number of seats in the European Parliament, i.e., EPP and PES, decreased in the next European election held in 2014 from 35 to 5 pages, and 31 to 4 pages, respectively.

Graph 1. Change in the extent of the policy offer (2004-2019)



Source: authors' own work. The graph represents the means of the ALDE, EFA, EGP, EPP and PES.

This evidence may suggest that the first Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties that had been approved in 2003 might have had a greater impact on programmatic competition between the European parties, which were officialised at that point, receiving funding from the EU budget since 2004, than the major empowerment of the European Parliament by means of the Lisbon Treaty.

It is also true that the content of the Treaty of Lisbon was well-known by the European parties since at least December 2007 when this Treaty was signed. Hence, a likely trend towards more extensive European manifestos might have been prevented between 2009 and 2014 by the Great Recession (2008-2014).

Independently of the causes, it must be stressed that the European manifestos of 2019 are not the richest in terms of proposals on EU policies in comparison with previous programmatic texts issued by each of these five European parties for the elections of Members of the European Parliament.⁶

4.2. The footprint of the transnational party organisations

The footprint of the transnational party organisations was reflected in Variables 7 to 9 of the classification scheme [logo of the European party (V7), text signed by the head of the European party or other members of the party elite (V8), information on the European party organ where the manifesto was approved (V9)]. By aggregating these three variables, we calculated an index called “party_index”, the results of which are presented in the last column of Table 2 (in a theoretical range between 0 and 3).

Table 2. The footprint of transnational party organisations (2004-2019)

Party name/acronym	Election year	Party logo	Party elite	Party organ	Party index
ELDR*	2004	1	0	0	1
EFA	2004	0	0	0	0
EGP	2004	1	0	1	2
EPP	2004	0	0	1	1
PES	2004	1	0	1	2
ELDR	2009	1	0	1	2
EFA	2009	0	0	0	0
EGP	2009	1	0	0	1
EPP	2009	1	0	1	2
PES	2009	1	1	0	2
ALDE	2014	1	0	0	1

⁶ Beyond our coding, to illustrate the lack of progress in programmatic competition on EU themes among these five European parties, it is worth disclosing that the ALDE's 2019 manifesto, on page 1, contains a paragraph as non-specific as the following: “We, Europeans, have achieved peace and prosperity on our Continent. That is a tremendous achievement that should not be taken for granted. The European Union is a positive ideal for many others in the world; an example to follow”. Another illuminating piece of information is that it was the PES's manifesto for the 2004 European election, rather than a more recent manifesto, which included this paragraph on page 7: “In addition, we have a wealth of detailed policy documents (...) These reports, along with national manifestos of PES parties, are available on the PES website – www.pes.org. Additional documents are available on the website of the PES Parliamentary Group: www.socialistgroup.org”.

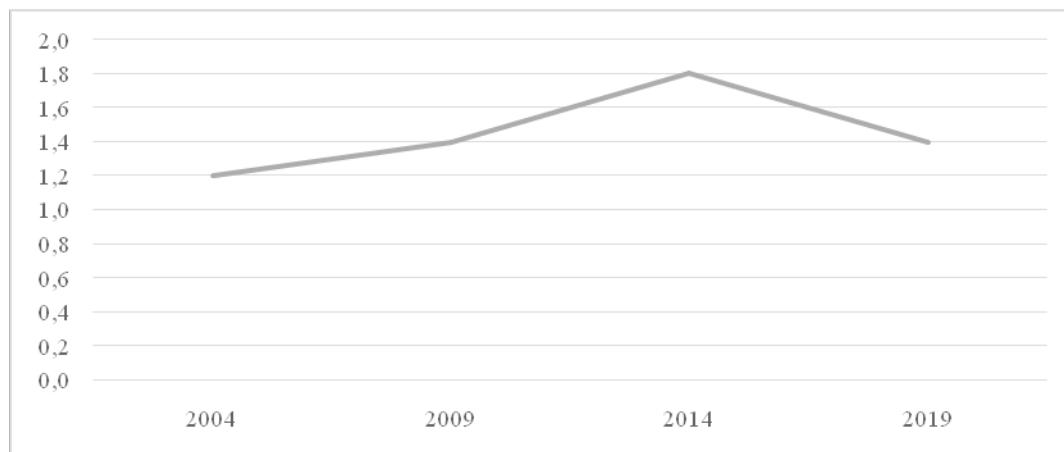
Party name/acronym	Election year	Party logo	Party elite	Party organ	Party index
EFA	2014	1	1	0	2
EGP	2014	1	0	1	2
EPP	2014	1	0	1	2
PES	2014	1	0	1	2
ALDE	2019	1	0	1	2
EFA	2019	0	1	0	1
EGP	2019	1	0	1	2
EPP	2019	1	0	0	1
PES	2019	1	0	0	1

Source: Authors' own work. This table presents data for Variables 7, 8 and 9 (See Chart 1), plus the "party_index", calculated by summing up these three categories (in a theoretical range between 0 and 3). *ELDR is the former acronym of ALDE.

There is a positive relationship between the "party_index" and Variables 5 and 6 analysed in the previous section (4.1) devoted to the length of the policy offer. In particular, the only two manifestos that contain a text signed by the president of the party, plus its logo are the longest manifestos issued by the PES (31 pages in 2009) and EFA (15 pages in 2014), respectively. These two manifestos could be considered the best cases in the sample in terms of the visibility of the European party in the programmatic text. Also consistent with the results presented in Section 4.1, none of these manifestos was issued for the 2019 European election.

Graph 2 illustrates change over time in the "party_index", showing the means of the five parties studied.

Graph 2. Change over time in the "party_index"



Source: authors' own work. "Party_index": V7+V8+V9 (in a theoretical range between 0 and 3). The graph represents the means of the ALDE, EFA, EGP, EPP and PES.

4.3. Personalisation and authorship of the European manifestos

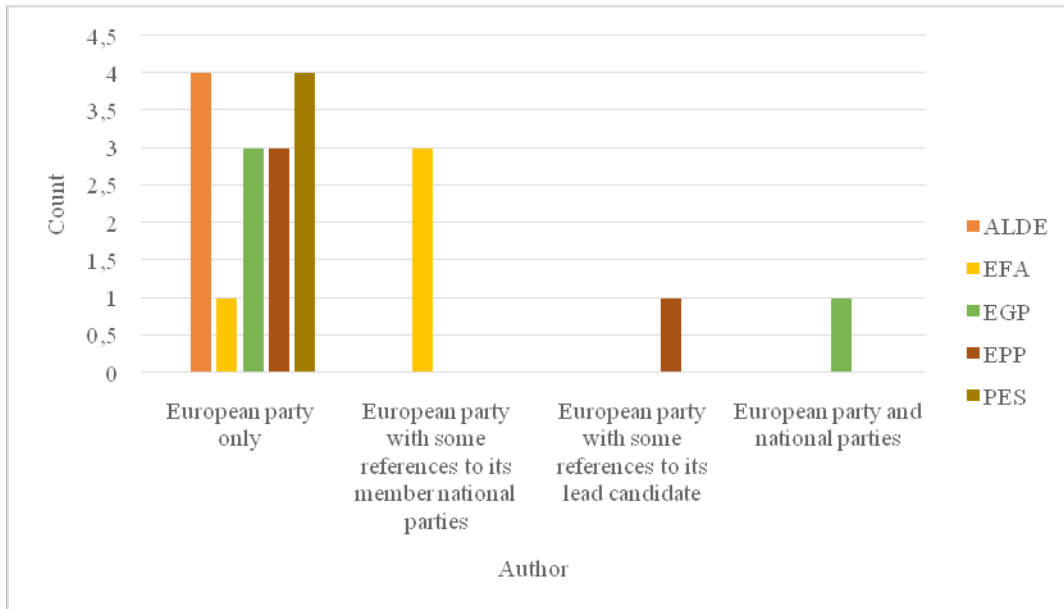
Moreover, the results are crystal clear regarding both personalisation and authorship. The "*Spitzenkandidat(en)* system" has not entailed any personalisation of the programmatic offer, as far as the parties ALDE, EFA, EGP, EPP and PES are concerned. Across the twenty manifestos, there is just one mention of a lead candidate, Manfred Weber, at the very end of the EPP's 2019 manifesto, where it is said, on page 16: "Manfred Weber stands for our forward-looking political approach. He is a true bridge builder, who not only unites Europe but also brings Europe back to people. He fights for a strong, secure, and ambitious Europe. He will open a new chapter for Europe; Manfred Weber has to become the next President of the European Commission". Unambiguously, this reference does not imply any kind of collaboration between the lead candidate and the European party in the preparation of the programmatic text.

Furthermore, there is only one case of declared participation by national parties in the writing of the European manifesto. On page five of the EGP's manifesto for the 2014 election, it is reported that: "In a common process, representatives of the EGP's member parties within the European Union worked on drafting the EGP's common manifesto for the European elections. At the EGP's Electoral Convention in Brussels on 22 February 2014, the present delegates from the EGP member parties adopted this 2014 Manifesto unanimously".

The other references to national parties present in the manifestos do not indicate co-writing or co-responsibility for the policy offer. The EFA's manifestos of 2004, 2009 and 2014 merely contain an informative list of the national members of the European party.

Taking into consideration all the evidence on authorship, it must be highlighted that the author of the European manifestos is solely the transnational party organisation in all cases, except for the one above-mentioned contribution by the EGP's national member parties. See Graph 3.

Graph 3. Authorship of European manifestos



Source: authors' own work.

In summary, at the beginning of the 2019-2024 institutional cycle, the main European parties have not extended their proposals on EU issues or increased their visibility as transnational organisations in their programmatic texts issued for the European elections. Furthermore, there are no systematic traces of increased collaboration between national and transnational parties and/or their candidates for president of the European Commission in the writing of the European manifestos.

5. Concluding remarks

This article has analysed the manifestos issued for the 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 European elections by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European Free Alliance (EFA), European Green Party (European Greens or EGP), European People's Party (EPP), and Party of European Socialists (PES). It has examined the extent of the policy offers on supranational domains of power, the possible footprints of the transnational organisations in their programmatic texts, and since 2014, the visibility of their *Spitzenkandidaten*. It has also searched for variety in the authorship of the manifestos, in terms of collaboration between transnational and national parties as well as their candidates for president of the European Commission.

It is worth noting that the officialisation of the European parties immediately prior to the 2004 election constituted a hopeful moment for electoral competition on EU themes on the supranational level. The 2004 and 2009 European elections were promising. The 2009 election was the most prolific as far as the extent of the European parties' programmatic proposals is concerned. For instance, on that occasion, both the EPP and the PES issued manifestos longer than 30 pages. Furthermore, regarding the footprint of the transnational organisations, the 2009 PES manifesto was signed by its president, as was the EFA's 2014 manifesto; this latter document was also the most extensive programmatic text authored by the EFA during the period studied.

Furthermore, our data confirm the four hypotheses formulated in the introduction: variations in the extent of the policy offer regarding current EU domains of power were not shaped by the Treaty of Lisbon (H1), the footprint in the manifestos of the transnational party organisations was not influenced by the Treaty of Lisbon (H2), candidates for president of the European Commission (*Spitzenkandidat(en)*) remain absent from the party manifestos (H3), and the Treaty of Lisbon did not enhance co-writing or co-responsibility for the policy offer between national and European parties (H4).

A trend towards broadening the European parties' policy proposals and greater prominence of the transnational organisations in their manifestos has not developed from 2009 onwards. Likewise, no trace of per-

sonalisation or further collaboration between the transnational and the national parties in the writing of the European manifestos has emerged in the 2014 and 2019 European elections. In particular, the 2019 election was discouraging, probably because of the outstanding and enduring political effects of the Great Recession (2008-2014) and the other relevant crises of the 2010s, especially the 2015 refugee crisis and the 2016 Brexit referendum. The “polycrises” of the 2010s, and the increasing emphasis on EU issues in the national political debates, might have brought more room for national parties to adapt their policy offers to domestic political rivals and circumstances instead of new incentives to widen the European manifesto by enhancing the role of the transnational organizations in its shaping and/or the collaboration between the European parties and their composing national organisations.

For future research, while the analysis of the anti-integration Identity and Democracy Party, which was created in 2019, would be pointless due to its lack of institutionalisation, the examination of some other less pro-integration and anti-integration European parties (mainly, due to their parliamentary and electoral trajectories on the supranational level, the Party of the European Left, and the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECPR)) would be of interest. Contrary to what occurred in the pro-integration terrain, have the European Left and the ECPR increased their contribution to the definition of policy preferences from December 2009 onwards?

To conclude, electoral competition about EU policies among the most important European parties is not being enhanced, nor does it contribute to boosting input legitimacy, which is still in need of development (Chopin, 2015: 133; Schmidt, 2019: 8-11). Despite the ongoing process of politicisation of Europe (Ares and Bouza, 2019:10; Schmidt, 2018: 1548), the most relevant pro-integration transnational organisations, whose institutionalisation remains attached to the intergovernmental works within the framework of the EU Council, continue to be unlinked from the great empowerment of the European Parliament without any prospect of change.

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