Previous studies have long suggested that candidate selection powers confer a central role in the functioning of the party to the actors in charge. At the EU level, one posited explanation of the stronghold of national parties on their MEPs is their power in the candidate selection process: it is relentlessly assumed that national parties - and certainly not political parties at European level - control ballot access for European elections. Yet, empirical researches on candidate selection processes for European Parliament elections have so far often been limited to case studies or unsystematic mappings of the processes. Based on a new dataset recording the candidate selection methods used in political parties in the 28 member states prior to the 2014 EP elections, this research examines the evidence for this above-mentioned assumption. In order to classify candidate selection methods, it relies on information about formal rules collected through the organisations’ internal documents (statutes, resolutions), supplemented by an experts’ questionnaire, and based on frameworks established by the literature. Information about the informal functioning of these rules is further gathered through candidates’ interviews. In light of a broader questioning about the influence of Europarties in the recruitment of elites - a defining function of political parties -, this paper thus questions their degree of involvement in the candidate selection processes thereof. By systematically comparing the candidate selection processes, it seeks to establish a typology based on the different roles Europarties may undertake in these processes.
Introduction

Political parties are pivotal to democracy. The “indispensability of parties” thesis (Lipset 2000) largely relies upon the idea that political parties constitute the main intermediate between society and government in modern representative democracies. In order to “link people to a government” (Sartori 1976:25), parties perform specific functions, mainly centred on the articulation and aggregation of social interests, among which prominently figure the recruitment function. Accordingly, it is somewhat unsurprising that explanations of democratic failures often revolve around issues of political representation and underline the role of parties therein. The debate surrounding the EU ‘democratic deficit’ - one of the most fruitful academic and political debates having emerged in the wake of the integration process -, indeed largely developed around the existing gap between the electoral and legislative arenas at EU level. A gap relentlessly attributed to the assumed absence of truly European elections and genuinely European political parties therein (see inter alia: Follesdal and Hix 2006; Hix and Lord 1997; Hix and Roland 2007).

Yet, the EU electoral arena - as most other electoral arenas - is almost invariably looked at through considerations related to inter-party electoral competition - i.e. the European election itself. By contrast, intra-party competition has drawn by far less scholarly interest. Processes of recruitment and candidate selection at the EU level remain largely unexplored. Previous research has however largely insisted on the consequences that various candidate selection processes might have for representative government (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008) in terms of participation, competition, responsiveness and representation (Hazan and Rahat 2010) at the national level. Therefore, in order to understand any political system one should not be deprived of a systematic study of methods for selecting candidates. This is precisely what this paper intends to do by asking how parties select their candidates for European elections.

Parties indeed constitute the main revolving doors between aspirants and candidates. Individual attempts to stand as candidates can be encouraged, discouraged or even prohibited by political parties. Authors concerned with candidate selection originally focused on examining and classifying the methods used by political parties. Criteria to that end have often included: the level of centralization, the selectorate, and eligibility or candidacy criteria (see in particular: Rahat and Hazan 2001). In the meantime, the characterisation of candidate selection as ‘secret garden of politics’ (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) still largely holds: little information is available on these processes, and often only covering the selection of candidates for national (legislative) elections. Local, regional and European elections largely constitute under-studied interfaces when it comes to the selection of candidates.
Thus, the ambition of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims at unveiling the processes of candidate selection taking place in the wake of the 2014 elections to the European Parliament (EP). Second, it seeks to re-evaluate the non-appearance of Europarties in these recruitment processes. To investigate these mechanisms and to establish findings, this paper proceeds as follows. First, it briefly surveys the literature on candidate selection processes and delineates major theoretical arguments underlining the need for studying candidate selection at European level beyond the seemingly unitary nature of these organisations, and highlighting the relevance of considering Europarties as a party implant. It further expounds on specificities of candidate selection at the EU level, in order to place this study in context. Then, it proceeds with a brief discussion of the methods and data used: an approach relying on a unique dataset of the candidate selection methods (CSM) used in the 28 member states for 2014. Finally, descriptive statistics are used to depict rules and interviews’ findings to establish the patterns of Europarties’ involvement. Main results are hence presented, before a few concluding remarks are drawn.

1. Political parties: the main revolving doors between aspirants and candidates.

1.1. Why candidate selection matters

The accession of an individual to political offices - whether the office is the European Parliament or any other - is two-fold: first, within parties aspirants are (or not) selected as candidates; second, candidates are (or not) elected to public office. In this context, two main factors delineate the chances of aspirants to become elected to legislative office, including EP positions: “electoral laws and (the) control of candidate selection” (Mitchell 2000: 340; see also: Faas 2003; Gallagher 1988: 258). Sometimes, the selection of candidates can even prove more decisive than the subsequent election itself. The outcome of an election is not necessarily a surprise and in cases where it is predictable - for instance in the case of the so-called ‘safe seats’ (because of historical anchors of a party, of a downturn of the main competitor) -, the party finds itself in a situation to choose directly who will eventually hold public office. By contrast, in case where the results are expected to be tight, parties can affect voters’ behaviour by putting forward a specific individual. Thus, electoral politics and more broadly democratic life is not limited to competition between parties in terms of elections and representatives, but also occur within the parties through the selection of candidates. As such, in order to understand any political system, one should not be deprived of a systematic study of methods for selecting candidates. It remains that literature on the inter-party arena of electoral competition is however generally acknowledged as less developed than the intra-party one, that of general elections (Alvarez and Sinclair 2012).
Candidate selection has become a core function of political parties and one of the prime mechanisms through which they organise (Epstein 1967: 10, 77; Henig 1970: 15; Key 1964: 370; Kirchheimer 1966: 189–90; Ranney 1981: 102–3; Schattschneider 1942: 64; Shomer, 2012). More precisely, candidate and leader selection have been thought to confer crucial powers within the party to the actor(s) in charge (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Marsh 1993; Massari 2004; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Over seventy years ago, Schattschneider analysed the nomination as the most crucial process of the party, affirming that “he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party” and therefore suggesting that “this is therefore one of the best points at which to observe the distribution of power within the party” (Schattschneider 1942: 101). Selection is accordingly considered the focus of power contests within parties (Seligman, 1961).

Legislative recruitment and selection processes - and in particular the questions of how and why selection occurs - have important consequences for parties, legislatures and representative government (Norris 1995; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). Indeed, by choosing who is going to stand on electoral lists and at which place, parties influence the future composition of legislative assemblies (and even of executives) and hence their policies. As such, studying candidate selection further allows assessing “what goes into politics”, which then can be mobilised when trying to explain legislative outcomes. An increased number of studies have linked recruitment and selection to subsequent parliamentary work, by examining the effects of these processes on the behaviour of legislators in various types of political systems (Alvarez and Sinclair 2012; Bowler et al. 1999; Crisp et al. 2004; De Luca et al. 2002; Faas 2003; Hazan 2000; Hazan and Rahat 2000; Hix 2002; 2004; Shomer 2009) and on the representativeness of the party’s list (Kernell 2008). Candidate selection can also notably prove a key-determinant of a party’s ability to act in a united manner during a legislative term (Gallagher 1988). Light has further been shed on the consequences of the different methods on the functioning of democracies. Most notably, these consequences concern the dimensions of participation, competition, responsiveness, and last but not least, representation (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Nevertheless, the relation between these four dimensions is not always linear or positive: one dimension may go at the expense of another, and in particular more participation does not necessarily entail a better representation (Katz 2001; Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008). A striking example can be found in the gender recruitment literature: enlarged selectorates do not necessarily benefit women (see inter alia: Wauters 2012).

There is in fact considerable variation between parties in the nature of the candidate selection processes used (Bille 2001; Lundell 2004). Delineating a more fine-grained model, Norris (1997: 1) has put forward four levels in the study of legislative recruitment: the political system (which encompasses legal regulations, the party system and the electoral system), the recruitment process (especially focusing on intra-party democracy and rules governing candidate selection), the candidates’ ‘supply’
(i.e. those willing to run for elections – the aspirants) and the demands of gatekeepers. She sees these different levels as encapsulated in a causality chain: the political system shapes recruitment processes which subsequently constrain the supply and demand (Norris 1997). Recruitment processes thus occupy a core position in these studies.

As such, in order to understand any party system or political system, there is a need for more systematic studies of the processes used for selecting candidates. These endeavours might however be complicated by the intra-party nature of these processes which has earned them the qualification of ‘secret garden of politics’ (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). Little information is available on these processes, and often only covering the selection of candidates for national (legislative) elections. By contrast, selection processes for local, regional and all the more European elections have not yet received the scholarly attention they might deserve.

1.2. Candidate selection for European elections: the exclusive preserve of national political parties

It has been clearly established though that national political parties control the selection of candidates for European elections. Previous studies have suggested that the stronghold of national parties on their MEPs during the legislature (in terms of voting behaviour) is due to their power in the candidate selection processes (Frech 2013; Hix 2002; 2004). The ‘second-order national elections’ hypothesis (Reif and Schmitt 1980) has often been interpreted in the sense that MEPs do not need to follow the preferences of their electorate because their actions, the policies they defend or oppose in the EP, the discipline to their group are all largely unrelated to their re-election. Conversely, they have all the reasons to follow their main selectorate - the national political parties - which decide on their placement on the lists and can accordingly reward or punish them (Hix and Lord 1997; Lord 2002). It is as such relentlessly assumed that ballot access for European elections is the exclusive preserve of national parties (Hix 2002; Faas 2003; Thiem 2009), and that other actors - including political parties at European level - are excluded from these processes.

Nor do the federations or groups have much control over appointments or policy, even where these are critical to their own continuity and coherence. The assignment of offices or other political opportunities in the European arena is either dominated by individual national parties or it is determined by an exchange relationship between them. National parties decide on the selection or re-selection of MEPs, and otherwise reward or sanction their careers. (Lord 2002)

In fact, despite their formal recognition by the Treaty of Maastricht, and current attempts to modify their statute, political parties at European level still largely challenge classical understandings of parties, in particular through the role of their members (i.e. the national parties) and the functions assumed. Political parties at European level simply do not fulfil any of the functions generally attributed to their national counter-parts, including recruitment. Generalising slightly, recruitment at
EU level has often meant that the European elite mainly and directly comes from national elites (Delwit et al. 2001), although the exact pattern underlying this mechanism remains unclear.

There is hence a need to display how parties select candidates for EP elections. And there are at least two reasons for pursuing this research in terms of recruitment processes (focusing on rules governing candidate selection) and demand-side considerations (focusing on the attitude of gatekeepers) at the EU level. First, although more encompassing studies exist (see in particular: Norris and Franklin 1997), the rather sporadic attempts to look into the EU legislative recruitment processes have however tended to focus on either: the political resources of candidates (Frech 2013; Navarro 2012), providing ‘supply-side’ explanations, or the peculiarities of the multi-level political system, determining the ‘structure of opportunities’ for these recruitments. Regarding the latter, its relevance has been underlined given the absence of strict or encompassing legal regulations regarding candidate selection. In most countries, there is simply no law which establish guidelines or constrain parties in drawing-up their lists or ballots. Exceptions in Europe mainly concern Finland and Germany (Rahat 2007). Further, for EP elections there is no harmonized electoral rules. The overarching electoral system - i.e. the proportionality rule with pre-ordered lists of candidates - means that the party basically decides who will be candidate and at which rank and as such largely determine their (re)election chances. Closed-lists PR systems - which are in used in most member states - further contribute to this privilege of parties, as evidenced for example in the case of the Czech parties (Linek et Outly 2006). In fact, PR closed-lists systems are even deemed to encourage centralised recruitment (Navarro 2012).

Second and by contrast, the analysis of recruitment processes (intra-party democracy and party rules) and of the attitudes of gatekeepers, producing the ‘demand’-side of the causality chain, have often been overlooked or unsystematically studied. Isolated studies have however shown that where centralized methods are used in national parties to select MEPs, the latter tend to defect from their EP party group lines more frequently (Faas 2002; 2003). Conversely, more decentralized candidate selection methods for EP elections allow for MEPs to act more independently from their national party, and thus more in accordance with their EP party group lines. Such decentralized methods, Hix argues, would also permit that MEPs follow the preferences of the voters and not simply of the national party leadership (Hix, 2004). In sum, the centralisation and exclusiveness of the methods may impact the cohesion of the EP groups.

1.3. How Europarties might nevertheless matter

Political recruitment in general and candidate selection in particular have relentlessly served as illustrations of the underdevelopment of political parties at European level (the transnational party
federations). Authors have used it as a justification when arguing and agreeing that Europarties\(^1\) development is unimpressive and that national parties are the central actors within Europarties (Bardi 1994; Lord 2002). This alleged ‘inexistence’ of Europarties is crucial for candidate selection processes: it means that there is no corresponding level or party organ at the EU level; while local or regional selection processes may rely on corresponding regional or local party branches and structures, European selection processes may not. Furthermore, national parties are often assumed to be unitary actors which unilaterally control ballot access for European elections, although the actual processes remain empirically unexplored.

There are a number of reasons to believe that Europarties might influence the oft-assumed exclusive preserve of national parties on candidate selection. First and generally speaking, a number of authors have already discussed the consolidation of Europarties (see *inter alia*: Lightfoot 2006; Sozzi 2013). Attempts to grasp the basic organisational structure of Europarties have often depicted them as federations of national parties or party networks (Bardi 2002; Ladrech 2000; Raunio and Johannsson 2005). Not only their members are primarily national member parties and sectoral organisations, but the ‘struggle’ between the different ‘faces’ of the parties (Katz and Mair 1993) is largely unbalanced in favour of ‘party on the ground’ (Calossi 2012). Yet, it also means that PPELs’ developments are often considered as based on sovereignty transfers from national political parties (Niedermayer 1983). In particular these transfers can constitute an organisational response of national parties to the European integration process, resulting in a “restructuring of the main channels and forms of representation” (Bartolini 2005). The EU political system is hence considered as an independent variable in shaping national party structures in part through the EP and the Europarties (Ladrech 2009; Lord 2002; Poguntke et al. 2007). Yet, the literature often remains vague on what these organisational changes through sovereignty transfers consist in. Since this paper has largely expounded that candidate selection processes makes up a basic and core organisational aspect of political parties, these processes are likely to be affected. In addition, the claim that European policy positions of domestic parties constitute the connecting link between the Europarty and the domestic party (Külahci 2010: 1285) does not seem to sufficiently capture the complexity of the relation and concentrate on only one traditional function of parties.

Second and along the same line of thought, the question of whether Europarties or the transnational dimension of the political system may affect national parties has also been largely addressed theoretically and empirically in the literature (Bardi 1994; Hix and Lord 1997; Ladrech 2002;

\(^1\) In most of the literature, ‘Europarties’ usually refer to political parties at European level. In this paper, a more generic approach is chosen, with the ‘Europarty’ encompassing both European faces of the party: the political party at European level (PPEL) and the European parliamentary party group (EPPG).
Niedermayer 1984). This question might however deserve to be updated in views of both literary and empirical developments. Europarties might in particular affect the behaviour and attitudes of national parties by providing a forum for socialisation. In particular, Bulmer has delineated an intra-EU Europeanization process whereby the EU provides arenas for good practices exchanges between national actors (Bulmer 2005). The Open Method of Coordination is probably the most-often cited example, although it is mostly studied in terms of convergence rather than of the arenas themselves. Europarties might actually constitute such arenas too as well as resources for parties back home. Overall, they can constitute possible opportunity structures for national parties and party actors. This reasoning echoes previous attempts to analyse the (under)development of Europarties based on the idea that the vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking goals of national parties are only partially (but arguably increasingly) met in EU structures (Lord 2002).

The central goal of this project is thus to investigate whether political parties at European level are able to perform in the arena where they are most missing: the electoral one.

2. Political parties as gatekeepers: toward an analytical framework to the study of candidate selection for European elections

The empirical work in this paper supports and builds on typologies of candidate selection elaborated elsewhere. The entry point is clearly the lack of systematic studies of these processes at European level in the wake of the 2014 elections despite their political relevance for both national and EU politics. In fact, candidate selection for European Parliament elections has not been the object of extensive research so far. Researches on candidate selection methods for European Parliament elections have often been limited to case studies (Buskjær Christensen 2009; Linek and Outly 2006). Although more encompassing mappings of the processes have also been conducted (Lehmann 2009), they would deserve updating in light of the 2014 elections as well as a more systematic comparative analysis (one limited attempt to do so is Bardi et al. 2010). In sum, at the EU level, candidate selection processes and the attitude of gatekeepers therein have been sporadically researched, not least because of the often deplored difficult access to empirical material (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Notwithstanding that literature on the intra-party arena of electoral competition is often acknowledged as less developed than on the inter-party one, that of general elections (Alvarez and Sinclair 2012). This places the processes of recruitment at the EU level in a largely under-studied interface.

Parties are often considered as gatekeepers to elected office (Bochel and Denver 1983; Norris and Lovenduski 1995) and we have seen that EP positions are no exception to that claim. There is hence a
need to assess how candidate selection processes exactly work within parties for these contests. Gatekeepers select candidates both through formal rules and informal practices (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Ramney 1981). Analyses of candidate selection procedures usually concentrate on two dimensions of these processes: the level of intra-party decision-making (the centralisation-decentralisation dimension) and the selectorate used (the exclusion-inclusion dimension). It should be mentioned however that Rahat and Hazan have introduced a more encompassing framework, distinguishing four dimensions of CSM democratisation: candidates’ eligibility criteria, the selectorate, decentralisation, and voting v. appointment systems (Rahat and Hazan 2001). Along this framework, studies have suggested that the outcome of candidate selection (who is selected) is largely determined by the degree of centralization of the selection process, discrimination by selectors and the use of affirmative action.

First, regarding eligibility criteria, the literature has already sketched some of the specificities of the profiles of candidates for European elections, although this is often done based on the MEPs than on the whole pool of candidates. Senior politicians are more likely to be offered an eligible place (Verzichelli and Edinger 2005), political parties tend to select incumbents rather than new aspirants (Ghergina and Chiru 2010) and women (Chiva 2014; Freedman 2002). This reflects the second-order hypothesis: scholars have asserted that European elections are less attractive for high profile candidates and that there is less at stake for parties (Chiva 2014; Vallance and Davies 1986; see also: Lord 2002). Despite a mixed picture, the literature thus generally acknowledges the lower profile of EP candidates.

The second dimension of the analytical framework retained relates to the intraparty body in charge of the selection of candidates, i.e. the selectorate. In fact, research on recruitment has more often than not concentrated on the level of inclusiveness of the selectorate (Le Duc 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Rahat and Hazan 2001). This appears in line with the idea that candidate and leader selection confer crucial powers within the party to the actor(s) in charge (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Marsh 1993; Massari 2004; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Numerous studies have thus concentrated on who controls selection within political parties and how this power has evolved overtime. In that respect, the most widely used typology is that developed by Hazan and Rahat (2001; 2010): it distinguishes selectorates on basis of their degree of inclusiveness. In this typology, selectorates are ranged from the most inclusive - i.e. when all voters are eligible to take part to the selection of candidates (e.g. US primaries) - to the most exclusive - i.e. when one single person (generally the party leader) selects candidates. Between these two extremes, decisions on selection within parties may be in the hands of party members, delegates at party conferences, selected agencies or the parliamentary group, or even party executives.
The third dimension of the analytical framework relates to decentralisation which can be functional or territorial (Lundell 2004; Rahat and Hazan 2001). The territorial decentralisation dimension distinguishes between selection processes entirely controlled by the national party organs and processes where the procedures are in the hands of decentralized branches of the party organisations. Under the ‘decentralisation label’ however, rules might involve multiple levels of power. It is however schematically possible to distinguish regional organs to more local ones, usually situated at the level of the national constituencies or municipalities. Regarding candidate selection for national elections, in most Western parties, cross-country comparisons have suggested that decentralized bodies dominate the processes (Bille 2001) with national party organs having often only a consultative role. Nevertheless, in the most recent period several authors have identified a trend towards an increased influence of the central party organs. It appears in particular that larger parties as well as political parties in Southern Europe are more likely to centralize candidate selection procedures (Lundell 2004; Rahat 2007). More precisely, based on the assumption that small parties rely more on local and district organs, Lundell expounds a relation between these parties and decentralised selection procedures. He contrasts it to the complex structure of large parties - which he finds may lead them to adopt more centralized selection procedures (Lundell 2004).
To complicate the picture further, selectorates and levels are often mixed - i.e. with several bodies and several levels intervening - , while processes can also be multi-stages - i.e. with selection being made through several consecutive steps. It has in fact long been suggested that the selection of candidates within a political system should be treated as a process rather than a punctual decision (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Blomgren 2003: 128). For analytical purposes, these processes can be divided in different stages: from the nomination to the final decision (Rahat and Hazan 2001), and through eventual inputs. Taking into account (multiple) levels, selectorates and stages (for formal rules), as well as adding what are often more diffuse candidacy criteria (for informal practices), thus allows to account for the complexity of the candidate selection processes.

Two hypotheses are tested which are essentially the two faces of the same coin: candidate selection at European level are dominated by the national parties (with a need to precise ‘who’ in the party and ‘at which level’ the decision is taken) and Europarties nevertheless play a role in these processes. This papers thus aims at specifying the influence that Europarties may have on CSM, focusing on Europarties’ ability to push issues in the processes.

3. Data and methods

This paper thus looks at how EP candidates are selected within political parties which it considers as a necessary pre requisite to studies of party politics in the EU. To do so, it builds on different data sources that are used in a complementary manner. It should be noted that the often non-transparent nature of these intra-party processes, which has earned them the qualification of ‘secret garden of politics’ (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) largely constrained data collection. For 2009, data has been recoded based on the information provided by the Lehmann’s report (Lehmann 2009), but the unsystematic gathering of the data greatly limited its use. For 2014, a similar report was drafted by the Centre d’étude de la vie politique (CEVIPOF) on behalf of the AFCO Policy department of the EP’s Directorate general for internal policies. It essentially consisted in two steps. First, information on formal rules to select candidates displayed by political parties’ statutes or other documents in the 28 member states was gathered, in part through an expert questionnaire. Second, to obtain direct insights into the selection processes, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with MEPs were conducted, recorded and transcribed. They aimed at investigating the informal practices in candidate selection processes, and at assessing how informal practices differ from formal rules from the point of view of those who went through the processes themselves. Not all national delegations were covered by the interviews: sampling was based on the size of national delegations, complemented by other cases selected to achieve a geographical balance, although it was highly constrained by the response rate. As a
consequence the sample included MEPs who have successfully run for reselection for the 2014 European election (being put on eligible places), current 2009-2014 MEPs unsuccessful in that regard, and MEPs who did not seek reselection. It is thus acknowledged that these individual circumstances may influence the perceptions of the MEPs on their party’s candidate selection process. Overall, a total of 364 MEPs were contacted for interview, but only 43 responded positively. They represented 37 different national political parties, 30 of which are directly mobilised in this paper.

4. Findings

4.1. How are EP candidates selected?

The analytical framework retained for formal rules is based on two main dimensions for analysing candidate selection processes: the selectorate and decentralisation, for which findings will now be put forward.

Most recent literature analysing parties from an organisational perspective underlines that the most used instrument for implementing this ‘democratisation’ process is the enhancement of the inclusiveness of the methods for candidate selection. In that regard, results are displayed in Table 1 and main findings illustrated in Graphs 1 to 4. They are based on the average of the several selectorates eventually intervening for each stage - e.g. if in the initial stage the leader and the PPG intervene, it has been coded 2 (to be understood as average between 1 and 3, and not strictly as NEC or nominating committee). They show, both in the step-by-step break-down and the overall repartition (mean), that a higher number of parties use rather exclusive CSM. Furthermore, aggregating all the parties scores for each step, the mean values are of respectively 3.10 (initiative), 2.67 (input) and 2.95 (final approval). This seems to indicate that party are slightly more exclusive in the input stage while relatively more opened in the final approval and above all in the initiative stage (the overall mean being of 2.90). This can be attributed in particular to a number of parties holding votes of members as a mean of ratification of the processes or just before the actual ratification.

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2 Interviews were held between January and April 2014.
Table 1. The exclusiveness of candidate selection methods for the 2014 EP elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selectorate</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Overall (N)</th>
<th>Mean (%)</th>
<th>Initiative (N)</th>
<th>Initiati ve (%)</th>
<th>Input (N)</th>
<th>Input (%)</th>
<th>Final approval (N)</th>
<th>Final approv al (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Single leader’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Party elite’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.54</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.78</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘PPG’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34.65</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Delegates’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.05</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.89</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Members at conference’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.86</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘All party members’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Non-member party supporters’</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.84</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A direct involvement of Europarties in candidate selection could be displayed through the role of parliamentary party groups in the processes. Findings however largely confirm the long-standing hypothesis according to which Europarties do not play any major role in the selection of candidates. Looking at how many parties mention a formal role of Europarties as selectorates in their party statutes or in their specific rules for the selection of candidates for European elections, results from the data analysis are clear and straightforward: experts did not mention in their answers to the questionnaire any case of provisions attributing a formal role to PPELs or EPPGs in the selection of candidates. That is, rules enacted by parties never mention Europarties directly when it come to the provisions on candidate selection: there is no systematic mechanism for Europarties intervention in any party. However, the ‘PPG’ category of the questionnaire encompasses the eventual presence of both national MPs/parliamentary groups and MEPs/national delegations in the EP (without allowing for a distinction). A few party rules refer to these actors: 13 for the initiative stage (9.77% of the cases), 8 for the input stage (6.02%) and 10 for the final approval (7.52%). These figures are however high compared to the corresponding scale (3) in Table 1, suggesting that PPG often do not intervene alone (the table presenting the average of the several selectorates eventually intervening for each stage rather than involvement of the PPG per se).
This calls for further exploring which parties use more exclusive or inclusive selection processes. Previous studies have often looked at single countries in isolation or compared parties as independent units of analyses. They never consider the possibility of having a link between the methods used to select candidates across different countries. Partly inductively and partly relying on previous works on policy diffusion – which is sometimes based on geographical proximity (Bouche and Volden 2011) or cultural ties (Simons and Elkins 2004) - and to have a better outlook of this distribution, I propose to look at possible patterns of candidate selection methods within subgroups of Member States, as well...
as within European party families\(^3\) (Graphs 5 and 6). Further analysis of these patterns however falls out of the scope of this paper.

**Graph 5. Inclusiveness of the selectorate per geographical region**

![Graph 5](image)

**Graph 6. Inclusiveness of the selectorate per European parliamentary party group**

![Graph 6](image)

Arguing that the other main dimension, the decentralisation of CSM, might be particularly affected by the various electoral systems for EP elections (with some countries having multiple constituencies and thus a more ‘regional’ dimension), the analysis further investigates this path. The results are straight-

\(^3\) Operationalised through European parliamentary group affiliation in the EP legislature preceding the (s)election.
forward: within the parties, the national level (i.e. central party organs) overwhelmingly dominates each stage of the selection processes (see: Table 2 and Graph 7). It should be further noted that the initial coding also included other categories. First, regarding functional decentralization, affiliated organisations are found to be involved in the initial selections stage of five parties. Second and more central to this paper, regarding territorial decentralization, the analysis of party rules regarding candidate selection did not reveal the presence of the European party (it is not an extra-level in selection for any party).

Table 2. The territorial decentralisation of candidate selection methods for the 2014 EP elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decentralization levels</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Overall (N)</th>
<th>Mean (%)</th>
<th>Initiative (N)</th>
<th>Initiative (%)</th>
<th>Input (N)</th>
<th>Input (%)</th>
<th>Final approval (N)</th>
<th>Final approval (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘National’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>80,47</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>82,76</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>85,83</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>88,89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8,59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,86</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Regional’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,69</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7,76</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5,00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5,47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5,17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4,76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Constituency/Local’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,78</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 7. Candidate selection processes for EP elections: territorial decentralisation

Overall, these findings highlight relatively exclusive and very centralised CSM, which appear quite in sharp contrast with Bille’s findings (2001) which underlined that in most Western political parties, the traditional pattern is that decentralised bodies dominate candidate selection processes (based on CSM for national elections), with the national party organs only having a consultative role. However, they
seem to largely confirm that the adaptation of parties to Europe is marked by a strengthening of the power of national executive elites (here: parties’ executives) concomitant to an eventual loss of influence and control of the party on the ground (Poguntke et al. 2007).

4.2. Missing without a trace? Europarties as ‘politics-seeking’ actors in candidate selection processes

Europarties are sometimes considered as a “missing link” (Priestley 2010) and their performance regarding the traditional functions of parties are also considered at best “unimpressive” (Lord 2002). As such, their qualification as ‘parties’ has sometimes been interpreted as mostly performative (Magnette 2001). However, in the European political arena and the European Parliament, national parties are confronted with supra-national political organizations and groups (Blomgren 2003). Of course, because the literature has so far superbly ignored the possibility of any Europarty intervention, it is not entirely clear what form such an interaction might take in recruitment processes.

At first sight, the interviews conducted seem to point in the same direction as the party rules regarding the involvement of Europarties. Interviewees very seldom came to mention Europarties by themselves and at first hardly ever considered Europarties as being relevant at all. Among the MEPs the view is thus that candidate selection is a national party affair only: when being asked on the involvement of PPELs or EPPGs, most of the MEPs first inclination is an affirmation that there is none. Nevertheless, a number of nuances can be brought. This paper accordingly hypothesized that Europarties may nevertheless retain a (more informal) influence on the selection of candidates. A starting point is of course the question of what the intervention of Europarties would look like. Analytical frameworks have established as main dimensions the selectorate (who selects?), the level of centralisation and candidacy/eligibility criteria (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Conversely to the previous section which dealt with formal party rules, this section reconsiders these dimensions based on the informal practices revealed in the interviews.

- Europarties as part of a selectorate or as an additional level in selection processes

There is certainly no expectation of any Europarty as being a veto player or constituting a level of its own in a given CSM. Individual figures within the Europarties might however play a role as part of selectorates. The 2009 data (Lehmann 2009) revealed at least two national parties where such is the case: the PvdA in the Netherlands and the PSD in Romania. In the latter case, all candidatures were reviewed by a selection committee which included representatives of the PES. In 2009, the Hungarian MSZP further acknowledged having consulted the Party of European Socialists during its selection processes, although it is not clear whether this had a clear impact on the selection outcome.
Sometimes, however, the involvement of individual politicians can be linked to both their national and European parties. This of course raises the issue of the definition and boundaries of Europarties: as their membership is still dominated by national parties (they are still after all federations of national parties), individual politicians only indirectly belong to Europarties. It is thus sometimes difficult to establish at which level an individual is situated when acting in candidate selection: this is notably the case of Guy Verhofstadt in the Belgian Open VLD (interview #15), or regarding the role played by the Danish PES President in the 2009 selection process of his national party (see: Lehmann 2009). Indeed, EPPGs and PPELs’ leaders seem to play a role essentially in the selection processes of their own national party. This is notably the case for instance for Joseph Daul, which opinion has been taken into account as EPP Chairman in the corresponding French UMP selection process (interview #9), or Guy Verhofstadt in the process within the Belgian OpenVLD (interview #15). The fact that Europarties’ key-figures (EPPGs chairs or personalities, PPELs presidents or general secretaries) might intervene, as suggested by several interviewees, also means that even when the Europarty intervenes, it does so in a rather exclusive manner – i.e. through its leaders.

Besides leaders, MEPs themselves can be taking part in candidate selection as part of a party’s selection body. We have seen in section 4.1 that parliamentary groups are sometimes involved in CS processes for European elections. MEPs are often part of other party organs too (e.g. NEC), some of which might take part in the selection processes as selectorate. MEPs might also take part in ad hoc selection committees (as it is the case in the Belgian Open VLD – interview #15) or more generally in the party’s working group on Europe/International matters which opinion might be taken into account during candidate selection processes.

Moreover, there seems to be share practices across ‘sister parties’; Europarties appear as a possible arena for the diffusion of practices between national parties. There are quite clearly transnationalised candidate selection processes, such as that of the German Greens, with the participation of parties from Dutch provinces in the processes (interview #26). Such horizontal cooperation across close parties is particularly visible across specific regions: in addition to the Dutch/German example, socialists in the three Baltic States have acknowledged privileged links and communication around the issue of candidate selection.

Finally, the process of designation of candidates for the Commission Presidency for 2014 has marked a major change in the role of PPELs. This is most blatantly the case for parties or lists which have taken up the name of a Europarty candidate as in Italy: the ‘Tsipras list’ and the list ‘Scelta Europea with Guy Verhofstadt’. Less clear is however the influence of the Spitzenkandidaten as Europarty leaders on their national parties and other parties, and again whether such influence can be traced back to their
EU-level candidacy. At the time of his selection as head of the SPD list in 2014, M. Schulz was expected to become top-candidate, while being the outgoing EP President, but also member of the SPD Praesidium. This creates confusion as to which level really mattered in reselection. From the 2014 interviews and political developments, I find some indication that candidate selection processes for the European Commission Presidency by PPELs played a role in the national parties to which these candidates belong. For instance, the European Green Party candidate José Bové did not secure the most members votes in his constituency but was nevertheless placed as head of the list in the last stage of its party selection process. By contrast, the German Greens did not select Franziska Keller as their head of list but she nevertheless secured a safe third place, which constituted a clear upgrading. Sometimes indeed, the international recognition of the candidates seems to be more important than their actual nomination as Europarties top-candidates, and can hence account for their (re)selection: in the case of M. Schulz, the interview with a German SPD MEP suggests that he is the first European politician to be known in Germany and his reselection as SPD list leader owes to that recognition, independently from his role in the PES (interview #24).

• Europarties and their influence on eligibility criteria

Second, the literature has established that in selecting candidates, national parties are expected to balance certain eligibility and candidacy criteria (gender, geographical representation, members and non-members, ethnic groups, political factions, etc.), but formal party rules remain often vague on that matter (except of course when legal provisions on parity apply). This sub-section thus asks what Europarties might informally push as criteria and how so.

One possible assumption would be that Europarties would support outgoing MEPs seeking reselection (in particular if they are satisfied with the work done in the previous legislature). Indeed, interview findings suggest that PPELs and EPPGs clearest interventions concern outgoing MEPs: in a number of parties, MEPs recognize that there is an informal role for PPELs and EPPGs in pushing for the reselection of incumbent MEPs. The opinion of the EPPG is sometimes asked on the work done by incumbent MEPs (that is the case in the Slovak SMK – see: Lehmann 2009), with some national parties having explicitly asked for reports or opinions on the work of parliamentarians reseeking nomination. The 2009 report further highlighted that the role set aside for outgoing MEPs and those who can claim a certain experience in EU affairs is becoming greater in French political parties, which have witnessed a gradual emergence of a group of European professionals. In 2014, the two UMP MEPs having held committee
Chair positions have secured eligible positions following intense party discussions\(^4\). This is particularly interesting with regard to the literature which tends to assume that re-election (and hence re-selection) is not about the work done in the EP or the policies supported by the MEPs, which is at the basis of the ‘second-order national elections’ hypothesis. This is also to be nuanced in light of the degree of incumbent protection which is present in some parties (e.g. the UK Conservative and Labour parties).

An even more indirect influence concerns eventual exchange of views between national parties and their European counterparts on policy or value-positioning issues which are related to the eligibility criteria. Regarding gender issues, in a number of cases PPELs have gained an influence which can prove particularly relevant during selection processes. The MSZP in Hungary has in particular taken up the PES standards, while a number of parties introduced party formal or informal quotas following their adhesion to PPELs. A further but marginal practice which suggests some influence of Europarties on the criteria concerns the commitment of candidates to join a specific group in the EP which is imposed in some parties (Conservative People’s Party in Denmark). Somewhat more vaguely, candidates for the Romanian UDMR are committed to assume obligation toward European partners once elected in the EP (Lehmann 2009), although these practices might be designed to insure cohesion and control of the national party rather than giving the selection processes a European dimension. More generally, being part of PPELs can also allow for a claim of Europeanness on the part of these parties (a claim of legitimacy used by ND and PASOK in Greece). By contrast, some parties simply tend to hide any supranational affiliation (one would of course think of UK parties).

An influence of Europarties can occur in the overall political debate more than the selection per se (this was acknowledged by die Linke in Germany - interview #25). Most parties, without recognizing a direct impact on candidate selection, depict a lot of contacts and cooperation taking place between national parties and their European counterparts (e.g. Fine Gael in Ireland), interactions and dialogues which are especially developed at the time of drafting the common manifesto (Irish Green Party). They can notably play a role in electoral campaigns, impact upon programmes or electoral platforms (respectively stated by B90/Die Grünen in Germany, the Estonian Greens, and the BE in Portugal). The involvement of a number of personalities of the national party in the Europarty serves as a primary relay and contact point to that end (as acknowledged by the Belgian sp.a MEP - interview #16 -, and also as admitted by the Danish social-democrats in 2009). Reversely, visits of high profile PPEL

members are deemed to help the national party in terms of image boosting or party family belonging (in 2014, top-candidates have attended meetings in most national member parties).

This appears as particularly relevant in the newer member states, where Europarties are often deemed to have provided impetus and direction for party developments. On the one hand, adhesion to political parties at European level has sometimes constituted a real goal for parties in CEECs. Party foundations in older member states (in France, the UK, and perhaps more clearly in Germany) have assisted these processes. Cooperation and membership have thus first been decisive for the legitimacy of the newer parties at the national level and in the European or even international context. Some parties mention the expected improvement of the parties’ image abroad (LS-HSDZ in Slovakia). Participation in a European parliamentary group became a campaign issue for the Cypriot EDEK party in 2009, while the DISI party insists on its intention to have candidates who wish to represent the party successfully within EPP group. On the other hand, Europarties have provided ideational support in organising the party and campaigning (this is cited by the PSCP in Latvia, but also for the LFP/LW in the 2009 report). They have helped in the preparation of elections (LSDWP in Latvia), for instance by organising trainings (PP in Latvia). Such preparation has also taken place in parties not yet represented in the EP (the ALDE has mentioned its wish to develop this practice in CEECs – interview #15). More generally, PPELs are often seen by individual parties as “something bigger” (SPP in Denmark) or bringing a “modernization capacity” (Greece). PPELs are sometimes seen as a resource in elections (by New Era in Latvia, while to the same extent, the People’s Party in Latvia also values its European ties and explicitly stated that the EPP is seen as a valuable resource that can be used during the election campaign). The question which remains unanswered is thus the extent to which they have really used this ‘Europarty’ resource when designing and in the operation of candidate selection processes for EP elections. So far, the lack of clear policy-, vote- or office-seeking goals related to the EP candidate selection processes means that the Europarties’ participation is limited to rather vague EU-politics considerations.
Conclusion

The selection of candidates can sometimes prove more decisive than the subsequent election itself and has important implications for representative democracy. Understanding methods for selecting candidates is therefore a necessary prerequisite for scholars who study parties, elections or political systems. Based on an analytical framework considering party rules regarding the ‘selectorate’ and ‘decentralization’ dimensions of these processes, complemented by insights on informal practices also underlining some of the ‘eligibility criteria’, this preliminary research has established the need to look beyond the often assumed unitary nature of political parties. National parties may be keeping the gates, but there is a need to explain how so and whether this meant the total exclusion of Europarties as often assumed. Indeed, in order to pursue further theoretically oriented empirical research into the causes and consequences of candidate selection at EU level, it appears important to know whether some of the main assumptions related to these processes hold. This paper has found that candidate selection processes put in place within parties running for European elections are rather exclusive, but above all that they are extremely centralised. It has further put forward a number of instances where Europarties have indeed intervened while trying to underline the logics behind these interventions.

It remains that this exclusiveness and centralisation of candidate selection methods suggests that the national executive or central organs of the parties retain considerable control in choosing and ranking candidates, which is to be considered in contrast with the general trend often identified in the literature of a ‘democratisation’ of CSM and of intra-party processes more generally. Yet, these results are based on a static analysis and no trend can be identified for these selection processes given the scarcity of data available for previous (s)elections.

This research might thus have important implications for our understanding of the nature of EU politics. Over the past twenty to thirty years, authors have analysed the second-order nature of European elections (see inter alia: Hix and Marsh 2007; Reif and Schmitt 1980), looking in particular at whether these elections mean anything for national politics. This paper has asked whether these elections mean anything for EU politics. Future possible research paths could indeed consider the still largely unresolved question of whether candidate selection for EP elections is itself of a ‘second-order’ nature. Despite the long-standing hypothesis that European election constitute ‘second-order national elections’ (Reif and Schmitt 1980), the extent to which recruitment processes are themselves about EU issues, EU personalities or Europarties would deserve specific scholarly consideration. But most crucially, this paper could be usefully complemented by understanding why specific candidate selection processes are used, why these processes include Europarties…and why they do not.
List of interviews

- All interviews were conducted between January and April 2014 –

Interview #1: MEP from the Socialistische Partij (SP) - NL
Interview #2: MEP from the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) - NL
Interview #3: MEP from the Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) - NL
Interview #4: MEP from the Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA) - NL
Interview #5: MEP from the Platforma Obywatelska (PO) - PL
Interview #6: MEP from the Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD) - PL
Interview #7: MEP from the Partidul Democrat Liberal (PDL) - RO
Interview #8: MEP from the Uniunea Democrat Maghiara din Romania (UDMR) - RO
Interview #9: MEP from the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) – FR
Interview #10: MEP from Europe Ecologie - Les Verts (EELV) - FR
Interview #11: MEP from the Mouvement démocrate (MoDem) - FR
Interview #12: MEP from the Union des démocrates et indépendants (UDI) - FR
Interview #13: MEP from the Parti Socialiste (PS) - FR
Interview #14: MEP Assistant from Nouvelle Donne (ND) - FR
Interview #15: MEP from the Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open Vld) - BE
Interview #16: MEP from the Socialistische Partij Anders (sp.a) - BE
Interview #17: MEP from the Vlaams Belang (VB) - BE
Interview #18: MEP from the Écologistes Confédérés pour l’organisation de luttes originales (ECOLO)-BE
Interview #19: MEP from the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) - SP
Interview #20: MEP from the Partido Popular (PP) - SP
Interview #21: MEP from the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) - SP
Interview #22: MEP from the Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC) - SP
Interview #23: MEP from the Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU) -DE
Interview #24: MEP from the Sozialdemokratische Partie Deutschlands (SPD) - DE
Interview #25: MEP from Die Linke - DE
Interview #26: MEP from Bündnis 90/Die Grünen - DE
Interview #27: MEP from the Nuovo Centrodestra (NCD) - IT
Interview #28: MEP from the Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP) - HU
Interview #29: MEP from the Piratpartiet - SE
Interview #30: MEP from the Green Party of England and Wales - UK

References


