

# European Political Parties as Campaign Organisations:

Toward a Greater Politicisation of  
the European Parliament Elections

Wojciech Gagatek





# European Political Parties as Campaign Organisations:

Toward a Greater Politicisation of  
the European Parliament Elections

Wojciech Gagatek

## **CREDITS**

Centre for European Studies  
Design: RARO S.L.  
Printed in Brussels by Drukkerij Jo Vandenbulcke  
Brussels  
Centre for European Studies  
Rue du Commerce 10  
Brussels, BE – 1000

The Centre for European Studies (CES) is the official think-tank of the European People's Party (EPP) dedicated to the promotion of Christian democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.  
For more information please visit:

[www.thinkingeurope.eu](http://www.thinkingeurope.eu)

This publication receives funding from the European Parliament.

© Centre for European Studies 2009

Photos used in this publication: Centre for European Studies 2009

The European Parliament and Centre for European Studies assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use. Sole responsibility lies on the author of this publication.

# Table of Contents

## Executive summary

**Introduction: political parties at the European level as campaign organisations . . . . .7**

**1 The origins and development of the European political parties . . . . .12**

Second-order elections . . . . .17

The lack of institutional incentives for classic party competition at the European level . . . . .20

The limits of internal integration within the Europarties . . . . .22

Conclusions . . . . .25

**2 The legal framework regulating Europarty electoral activities . . . . .26**

Legal recognition in the Treaty establishing the European Community . . . . .26

The introduction of the system of public subsidies for the Europarties . . . . .28

Code of conduct governing Europarty campaign involvement . . .29

Conclusions . . . . .31

**3 Campaign strategies for the European Parliament elections . . . . .32**

Previous campaign strategies in European Parliament elections . .33

Europarties as service providers . . . . .35

Campaign strategies for the 2009 European elections . . . . .37

The political competition between the EPP and the PES . . . . .48  
 The challenge of Libertas Europe . . . . .52  
 Conclusions . . . . .57

**4 The results and implications of the Europarties' campaign involvement . . . . .59**

The results of the 2009 European Parliament elections . . . . .60  
 Political-group formation . . . . .63  
 The role of the Europarties: allegro ma non troppo . . . . .65  
 The struggle over Barroso's nomination for the Commission Presidency . . . . .70  
 Conclusions . . . . .76

**5 Challenges and prospects for the future . . . . .79**

Breaking the vicious circle of low turnout . . . . .79  
 Combining the political and didactic message . . . . .84  
 Increasing the media presence of the Europarties . . . . .86  
 Conclusions . . . . .88

**Conclusions: towards a greater politicisation of European Parliament elections . . . . .90**

**Reference list . . . . .95**

**2009 European Party Manifestos . . . . .102**

EPP: Strong for the people. [http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/EN-ELECTION-DOC-FINAL\\_copy\\_2.pdf](http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/EN-ELECTION-DOC-FINAL_copy_2.pdf) . . . . .102  
 PES: People first: a new direction for Europe. [http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook\\_EN\\_Online.pdf](http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook_EN_Online.pdf) . . . .102  
 ELDR: European Liberals' top 15 for EP elections. . . . .102

## Executive summary

Although in recent years EU political parties have begun to exert a growing influence on the EU political agenda, so far they have played an extremely limited role in the electoral arena and have remained completely unknown to the voters. However, the 2009 European Parliament elections saw them trying to take their first steps towards becoming campaign organisations. The largest European political parties fought an unprecedented battle with their political opponents over political leadership in the main EU institutions. Yet because they did not run their own candidates, they still cannot be treated as politically independent campaign players. An analysis of these developments allows us to increase our understanding of the nature of the EU political system and the European Parliament elections as well as to offer explanations of and ideas for some of the main challenges facing European democracy.

This paper offers a thorough analysis of the 2009 European Parliament elections, mainly focusing on transnational party activities. The analysis of the major campaign activities is preceded by an accessible review of the academic literature on the topic as well as by an introduction to the legal provisions. The core of the paper is based on 22 interviews conducted by the author with politicians and political activists representing the major European parties. This makes it possible to set out a detailed understanding of the motivations and dilemmas faced by those developing the campaign strategies as well as to assess their effectiveness from the post-election perspective. This paper further focuses on an emerging government-opposition political dynamic involving the two largest political forces: the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES). Not only did this dynamic strongly influence the campaign activities, but it also had a crucial impact on the subsequent nomination of José Manuel Barroso for a second term as the European Commission President.

Overall, this paper notes some visible but still rather limited progress towards the politicisation of the European Parliament elections, presented here as one of the solutions to make European democracy more interesting and at the same more understandable to the citizens. For example, a concerted effort by both national and European political parties, aiming to combine political and didactic appeal, could contribute to redressing some negative tendencies, such as low turnout, that presently characterise European Parliament elections. Such politicisation does not require any further Treaty revisions, but rather a moderate shift of accent along the patterns of domestic party competition to include pan-European partisan elements in a much more prominent manner.

# Introduction: political parties at the European level as campaign organisations

Beginning a paper on the European Parliament elections in a catchy way is not a particularly difficult task. I can easily point out a number of paradoxes, odd phenomena and differences when compared to national elections, or I could observe the intriguing continuity and repetition of certain trends since the first direct elections of 1979, continuity which in itself constitutes a paradox. For example, although these are European elections, they in fact constitute a number of national electoral contests which produce a European result. However, explaining the electoral trends is becoming increasingly difficult, and there are many factors that may be important here. Some of them are quite obvious. In the last few years the number of EU Member States has almost doubled, which has forced researchers to explain a greater number of national political contexts and circumstances that may be affecting the overall trends observed all over Europe. However, there are some less obvious political changes, which in the long run may transform the commonplace ways of describing the EP elections, forcing authors to explain yet other paradoxes, strange phenomena or, perhaps, normalities. Will it become 'normal' for the European and national political parties representing a single political family to campaign on the same ticket and political programme all over Europe, or will it be 'normal' for the campaign to be based on national rather than European themes, as is now the case? Although the former was an ambition of the fathers of the first pan-European political parties created in the mid-1970s, it has never come into being. And although we still cannot expect such revolutionary changes in the near future (at least as far as the largest Europarties are concerned), we should not underestimate the way that their role, visibility and potential within the EU political system has been steadily growing in the last few years and that the 2009 European Parliament elections saw a few important developments in this regard.

The growing role and potentially greater presence of European political parties are due to a number of developments which will be explained in this paper, but their campaign involvement came about as a result of the recent EU regulation of 2007, which allows them to coordinate the campaign efforts of their member parties across Europe more actively than in the past, as well as to highlight their own presence. The most recent campaign provided an opportunity to observe how well these Europarties made use of the funds allocated to them from the European Union budget to promote the ‘European nature of the European elections.’ This does not mean that they ran their own candidates, either alone or together with their member parties, although there were some that tried to act like this (see the section on Libertas). Nevertheless, most of them focused on coordinating the transnational campaign efforts of their member parties, but were expected to do so to a much greater extent than previously.

This paper aims to review the developments sketched above and analyse their consequences. What does it mean when we discuss the notion of political parties at the European level as campaign organisations? To what extent and in which areas can the Europarties’ campaigns be similar to or different from national campaign styles? What resources do they have at their disposal to organise an effective campaign? How can the Europarties appear in the national electoral context and how can they adapt to the campaign efforts of their national member parties? These are the most important research questions that this paper develops over its five chapters.

The first chapter will introduce the characteristics of the European Parliament elections and the origins, aims and functioning of the political parties at the European level in more detail. To this end, the ‘second-order elections’ thesis, commonly used in the academic literature to summarise the elections to the European Parliament, will be used. The second chapter will briefly review the legal basis for the electoral activities of the Europarties, and present the code of conduct that all existing Europarties have agreed to abide by during these elections. Readers who are interested in a more

political account can move directly to the third chapter, which will contain an overview of the campaign activities and strategies of the major Europarties. Next, the fourth chapter will present the results and the role of the European political parties in these elections. Finally, the last chapter will discuss the opportunities and challenges that the national and European political parties face with a view to the next EP elections, followed by some concluding remarks.

The ideas that I present in this paper have been developed over a number of years of academic work on the role of the political parties at the European level and on the elections to the European Parliament. However, it does not aim to be a typical piece of academic work. It should be treated rather as a kind of opinion piece, which, although based on the scientific literature, tries to highlight new and recurring ideas and perspectives in an accessible manner. For this reason, it will forego the typical elements found in academic work, such as a detailed literature review, and explanations of methods and sources etc. For example, it will focus mainly on presenting the overall conclusion of the academic literature, rather than outlining the authors, schools of analysis etc. Academic referencing will also be kept to a minimum. In this way, the paper can be made more accessible to a non-academic audience, to which it is mainly targeted. It may therefore represent a useful synthesis of the state of the art in the field, as well as a straightforward explanation of the most current developments for journalists, politicians, party officials and ordinary party members, and also to those academics for whom the role of political parties at the European level is not a primary topic of interest. In order to gather the data for this paper, I interviewed 22 officials involved in the campaign of the four largest Europarties as well as the representatives of their national member parties. Part of this research was presented at a conference at the European University Institute in Florence on 4 December 2008 (co-organised by Peter Mair, Luciano Bardi and myself) and during the 7th International Conference on Political Communication, organised in Berlin on 21–22 June 2009 by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. All websites referred to in the footnotes and reference list were accessed between May 2009 and November 2009. I would like to express my

gratitude to Steven van Hecke, Karl Magnus Johansson and Luciano Bardi, who were kind enough to read and comment on the first draft of this paper. Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to the publisher, the Centre for European Studies, and especially its Head of Research, Roland Freudenstein, for their encouragement and useful comments on the manuscript. As always, however, any remaining errors are the author's.

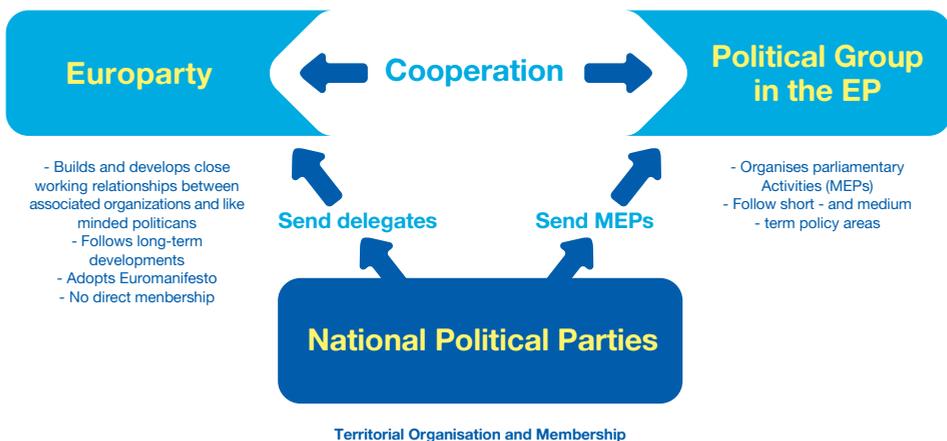
## 1 The Origins and Development of the European Political Parties

Various forms of cooperation between national political parties from the Member States of the European Union have existed in rudimentary form since the beginnings of the European integration project. However, the origins of what we today call political parties at the EU level, or Europarties, can in fact be found in the 1970s. Even before the first direct elections to the European Parliament, national political parties had recognised the need to cooperate more closely to achieve common goals within the then European Economic Community (EEC) and to coordinate their electoral activities across Europe. At the time, the three dominant political families of the EEC—the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the Liberal Democrats—established European federations or confederations of their national members.

The Christian Democrats from the outset described their organisation as a 'party', namely, the European People's Party (EPP), which was a sign of their federalist ambitions and of their staunch support for the European integration project, rather than a statement that they were a typical political party (van Hecke 2006). The other

political families, in a more modest way but also due to their less enthusiastic support for European integration, called themselves the Confederation of the Socialist Parties in the European Communities (CSPEC) and the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties in the European Community (ELD). Their main goal was to bridge the gap between European Parliament party groups and the electorate, which was already apparent before the first direct elections to the European Parliament (Hix and Lord 1997). The Europarties should therefore not be confused with the political groups in the European Parliament. Whereas the latter concentrate on parliamentary activities, the former focus on coordinating partisan activities within a much larger perspective, mainly but not exclusively between national political parties (see figure 1.1). Both organisations, the Europarties and the political groups in the EP, are however closely connected (also by the fact that the MEPs are usually quite active in the activities of their own Europarty), and sometimes the parliamentary groups and the Europarties have the same or similar names. In sum, the Europarties are composed of national member parties as corporate members, EP political groups and MEPs (where sometimes MEPs are individual members of a given Europarty). This relationship is shown in basic form in the figure below.

**Figure 1.1 The basic relationship between national political parties, Europarties and EP political groups within a single party family**



The creation of the Europarties, together with the first directly held European Parliament elections in 1979, led many academics and politicians to proclaim the beginning of a new era of genuine party democracy at the European level, in which political parties, both national and European, would become the representatives of the societies of the Member States. It was in this time that political scientist David Marquand coined his slogan of a 'Europe des partis', as opposed to de Gaulle's 'Europe des patries', highlighting a change of accent in the discussion of the nature of the European project, from nation-state oriented integration to a more political, federalist one, symbolised by the growth of political parties (Marquand 1978). The first president of the EPP, Leo Tindemans, stated that the EPP was created as a genuine political party and that it had ambitions to work as a transmission belt between the citizens of Europe and their governments (Tindemans 1979).

The vision of the politicians involved in building these Europarties was clearly ahead of its time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the development of these fledgling Europarties stagnated during the 1980s, failing to build on the achievements made during the 1970s. Today, even the most pro-European optimists are not calling for a 'Europe des partis'. However, most contemporary scholars acknowledge a continuing evolution in the role of Europarties. An EU regulation adopted relatively recently on the rules governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding, which came into force in July 2004, provides a formal definition of a Europarty (EP 2003). Most importantly, it requires that a Europarty have representatives (such as Members of the European Parliament, or members of national or regional parliaments) in at least seven EU Member States. Furthermore, it must observe the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. Finally, it must participate in elections to the European Parliament, or have expressed the intention of doing so.

Following its entry into force in 2004, this regulation has already led to the creation of five new Europarties. There are currently ten Europarties, most of them based on the ideological commitments of certain party families in Europe and usually corresponding closely to their respective group in the European Parliament. Political scientists agree that the notion of ‘political party’ found in the names of the above-mentioned organisations differs to a considerable extent from that of national political parties, mostly because they do not run for legislative and executive office and do not have direct membership. Nevertheless, as federations of EU national political parties, they play a useful role as vehicles for coordination and the exchange of views and experiences along party lines, and are increasingly beginning to affect EU political developments.

Among the largest and most well known Europarties are the European People’s Party (EPP), uniting Christian democrat, centrist and like-minded parties; the Party of European Socialists (PES), gathering socialist, social democrat, labour and democratic progressive forces; the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) and the European Green Party (EGP). The table below offers an overview of the Europarties as of January 2010. This year’s newcomers are the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (with the British Conservatives, Polish Law and Justice and Czech ODS playing first fiddle), whose foundation was announced in late October 2009 (ECR 2009)<sup>1</sup>, and European Christian Political Movement (ECPM), the only Europarty not affiliated to one of the groups in the European Parliament. Even the nationalistic European Alliance of National Movements was planning to apply for funding. However, it failed to meet the deadline to lodge an application (Philips 2009b).

---

<sup>1</sup> This alliance was established in late October 2009 in Budapest by the French Front National, British National Party and other nationalist parties.

**Tab 1-1 Political Parties at the European Level and the Attribution of Grants from the European Parliament as of January 2010**

Political party at the European level (date of creation)	Abbreviated title	EP Political Group	Number of MEPs attached to the political party (May 2009)*	Grant awarded (in EUR)	Grant awarded (in EUR)
European People's Party (1976)	EPP	EPP	248	3.354.754	3.485.708
Party of European Socialists (1974)	PES	PES	215	3.027.647	3.100.000
European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (1976)	ELDR	ALDE	75	1.115.665	1.179.191
The European Green Party/ The European Greens (1984)	EGP	Greens/EFA	35	641.534	643.562
Party of the European Left (2004)	EL	GUE-NGL	30	536.685	562.405
European Democratic Party (2004)	EDP/PDE	ALDE	24	496.291	492.487
European Free Alliance (1994)	EFA	Greens/EFA	5	222.541	226.600
EUDemocrats (2005)	EUD	IND/DEM	6	226.700	245.274
Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (2009)	AECR	ECR	N.A.	-	-
European Christian Political Movement (2009)	ECPM	-	N.A.	-	-
<b>TOTAL (2009)</b>				<b>10.335.807</b>	<b>10.714.200</b>

\* This figure relates to the number of MEPs attached to a political party at the EU level, rather than to the total number of MEPs belonging to a given EP political group. It is sometimes the case that a political group is composed of MEPs who belong to different political parties at the EU level (as in the case of the Greens/EFA Group and ALDE Group) or that a significant number of MEPs within one political group do not belong to any Europarty (such as used to be the case with the European Democrats with regard to the EPP).

Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/grant\\_amounts\\_parties\\_2004\\_2008.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/grant_amounts_parties_2004_2008.pdf), Agence Europe 04/02/2009

## Second-order Elections

The first direct elections to the European Parliament did not have the results that many were hoping for. Soon thereafter, two German political scientists, Reif and Schmitt (1980), coined the term 'second-order elections' to describe this first pan-European election contest. This term continues to be widely used in the academic literature (although it has its critics as well), since the trends observed by Reif and Schmitt have proven to be true for each of the subsequent elections from 1979 to today. The second-order election model contains four major points: Compared to national elections, the turnout in the European Parliament elections is much lower (see the table below). The observation in the original article by Reif and Schmitt referred to the 1979 EP election, in which, across Europe, 63% of eligible voters cast their vote. Subsequent elections have only strengthened this trend, such that in the 2009 EP elections the turnout was only 43%.

EP elections lead to the emergence of new or to the strengthening of relatively unimportant parties. This was the case for example with the French Front National in 1984 and, more recently, with the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) in 2004.

Governing parties are usually punished by the voters. Especially if the EP election takes place in the middle of a national electoral cycle, the voters tend to use it as a kind of referendum in which they express their level of satisfaction with the current government.

Instead of being focused on purely European issues, the parties fight their campaigns on national issues. The academic literature commonly presents this factor as one of the major obstacles to the emergence of a genuine transnational political debate.

**Table 2.1 Turnout in the 2009 European Parliament elections and in the most recent parliamentary elections in the EU-27 (in percentages)**

Member State	The 2009 European Elections	The Most Recent National Parliamentary Election
Austria	46.0	78.8
Belgium*	90.39	91.2
Bulgaria	38.99	60.2
Cyprus	59.4	89.0
Czech Republic	28.2	64.5
Denmark	59.54	86.5
Estonia	43.9	61.0
Finland	40.3	67.9
France	40.63	60.2
Germany	43.3	70.8
Greece*	52.61	70.9
Hungary	36.31	64.4
Ireland	58.64	67.0
Italy	65.05	80.5
Latvia	53.7	60.2
Lithuania	20.98	48.6
Luxembourg*	90.75	85.2
Malta	78.79	93.3
Netherlands	36.78	80.4
Poland	24.53	53.9
Portugal	36.8	60.6
Romania	27.76	39.2
Slovakia	19.64	54.7
Slovenia	28.33	63.1
Spain	44.9	73.9
Sweden	45.53	82.0
UK	34.7	61.3
<b>Average</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>69.2</b>

\* Countries with compulsory voting.

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de>, <http://www.idea.int/vt/> and the official websites of national election commissions for the national elections data; for the European Parliament elections, see [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout\\_en.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/turnout_en.html).

Obviously, there are exceptions to this model, but it has nevertheless proven to be widely applicable in the majority of EU Member States. The development of subsequent studies devoted to European Parliament elections, often based on the second-order elections thesis, has had profound consequences for the overall discussion concerning legitimacy, representation and democracy in the European Union. Space does not permit an elaborate analysis but, as an example, it could be noted that for many years, especially since the mid-1980s, the low turnout and generally low profile characterising European elections were attributed to the weak position of the European Parliament in the EU institutional structure. The argument was based on the assumption that since the European Parliament played practically no role at that time, it was understandable that citizens were not interested in elections to it. However, despite the strengthening of the EP in the EU institutional architecture (through subsequent treaty changes, especially in Maastricht in 1992 and in Amsterdam in 1997), this did not remedy the long-standing problems related to the European elections, especially concerning the low voter turnout. They can still be appropriately characterised as second-order elections (Schmitt 2005). This is why various recent ideas focus on stimulating the emergence of a European political sphere—emphasising the need for citizen awareness of the importance of European integration to their daily lives—and on moving from the typical perception of the EU as a bureaucratic machine to showing that it is a place characterised by ideological and partisan conflicts, similar to those familiar from national politics. To this end, the political parties at the European level have been regularly noted as actors who may contribute to redressing the negative aspects of EP elections. However, the growth of their role is limited by various characteristics of the EU institutional system and by their own weaknesses. Let me move to this issue below.

## The Lack of Institutional Incentives for Classic Party Competition at the European Level

For many years, the Europarties played an extremely limited role in European Parliament elections. There are two major groups of reasons for this. One is related to the overall structure of the EU political system, which is generally speaking not conducive to the development of classic party competition, as known from national politics, whereas the second one has to do with the weak structure and internal coordination problems of the Europarties themselves.

The first group of issues concentrates on three major points. The first has already been mentioned above and is related to the fact that instead of genuinely European elections, every five years we observe a number of national elections within a European context (in 2009 we saw 27 such contests). This feature limits the areas of the Europarties' activities. This is related to the fact that there are no common European electoral rules that regulate the EP elections in all the Member States, and also that none of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected in a transnational constituency across Europe. The Europarties do not run their own candidates in the European Parliament election (this is undertaken by the national parties) but, instead, limit their role to acting as forums for coordination. For example, since 1979 every five years the major Europarties have adopted common manifestos for the European elections as a sign of unity and belonging to the same political family. Yet, given the nationally based character of these elections, the national political parties have rarely used these Euromanifestos, instead adopting their own national electoral documents for European campaigns. This problem will be treated in more depth below.

Second, in contrast to the situation in national politics, the results of the elections do not have a direct effect on the composition of the European Commission, which can in a certain sense be compared to a government. From its inception, however, this organ has been thought of as a non-partisan, primarily expert body that

was to stand above all political divisions, to be a guardian of EU law and represent the interests of the European Community as a whole. This does not mean that the President of the Commission and the Commissioners are not politicians, or at least do not enjoy political backing. Quite the contrary—their nomination depends entirely on the governments of the EU Member States and they are subsequently, as the College of Commissioners, approved by the European Parliament. However, once they enter the Commission, they are expected to leave their national, partisan and political connections behind. For the Europarties, such an approach creates problems for defining their own role. On the one hand, they all nowadays call themselves ‘parties’, but according to established definitions in political science they are not typical political parties, since they cannot run for power in the elections. To give an example relating to the European Commission, the largest European parties often claim to be represented by a certain number of Commissioners. In this way they try to build a link between the Commissioner nominated by a certain Member State and the party orientation of that country’s government. For example, if the British Labour government nominates a Commissioner, then it is assumed that this Commissioner also represents the PES, because the Labour Party belongs to the PES. However, the Commissioners usually do not highlight their political affiliation but instead focus on the expertise and qualifications that enable them to fulfil the role of Commissioner. The link between Commissioners and Europarties is in no sense comparable to that between national ministers and their parties, where ministers are expected to realise the programmes of the parties and depend on party support to keep their posts.

This point leads us to the main obstacle in the EU’s institutional structure that makes the development of partisan politics at the EU level so difficult. If the Commissioners are in fact apolitical and if they represent the breadth of the political spectrum, the development of a typical, adversarial, government–opposition approach is quite complicated. To stay in power, the Commission does not need the backing of the political groups in the European Parliament, and for this reason subsequent European Parliament

elections are not fought on the basis of the Commission's governing practices. In consequence, the Europarties do not shape their campaigns around their approval or criticism of the previous Commission (as would be the case nationally with governing and opposition parties), but instead focus on their ideas and solutions for the EU without much reference to the previous government's record. To some extent, however, this picture changed with the 2009 elections (see chapter 3).

### The Limits of Internal integration within the Europarties

Not only does the EU institutional structure limit the opportunities for the growth of the Europarties, but certain limitations are also apparent in their own construction and in their daily functioning. This subject can be explained by focussing on the problems of adopting a common manifesto for the European elections.

First of all, even though there are certain mechanisms in their statutes that provide for majority decision making, the Europarties still operate mainly on the basis of consensus. The extent of this consensual functioning differs from one Europarty to another but in general, in contrast to many national parties, the Europarties, due to their nature as conglomerates of different parties, must operate on the basis of consensus as they do not have any means to discipline their members. Therefore the obvious difficulties of coordinating the activities of a very large number of national political parties cannot be easily overcome. For example, the European People's Party, the largest political party at the EU level, unites 74 ordinary, associate and observer parties from 39 different countries, from the EU and beyond. Within such a large group of parties representing a wide array of opinions and ideologies, the art of compromise is the key to success, but also an important limitation on more ambitious political aims.

Second, the decisions adopted by the Europarties are not binding on their national counterparts. So even if one national political

party is outvoted within the Europarty that it belongs to, it can still opt out of this decision or simply ignore it. This was the case for many years with the British Labour Party, which often opted out of the decisions of the Party of European Socialists. There are many other internal challenges confronting the Europarties to which this paper will return later.

Moving now to the common Europarty manifestos: every five years each Europarty undertakes the task of adopting its own manifesto for the European elections. To simplify the matter somewhat, a commonplace method of doing this so far has been first to prepare a draft manifesto within a small working group comprising party representatives, then to send it to the member parties for amendment before adopting it in the amended form at the Europarty congress. In this exercise, as described above, the attempt is normally made to reach an outcome that suits all the national member parties. However, the inherent risk of such a method is that the final version of the manifesto tends to be based on the lowest common denominator. This is not to say that the majority in a given Europarty cannot decide, and indeed there have been many examples in the past of a national political party being outvoted on a certain issue. However, the Europarties have tried to limit this from happening as much as possible, as the outvoted party could simply opt out of all the transnational party activities. In most cases, then, the usual outcome has been highly abstract and general manifestos, lacking enough vigour to be used as the documents for national electoral campaigns (which are based on the national contexts), and hardly any national political party has used these Euromanifestos in their national campaigns. Thus even though the national parties participate in the common task of drafting and then adopting the common Euromanifestos, the vast majority of them later adopt their own national manifestos, which often bear hardly any reference to their own transnational party involvement, and campaign on national, rather than European issues.

In sum, both the institutional conditions of EU politics and the Europarties' mode of functioning and very nature make it difficult

for them to become effective. The general picture painted above can be usefully summarised in a table that contrasts the model of ‘responsible party government’, characterising the political systems of the Member States, with the EU political system (Hix and Lord 1997, 63–65; Judge and Earnshaw 2008, 108–110).

**Table 3.1 Responsible Party Government Model compared to the EU’s Political System**

Responsible Party Government	The EU Political System
<p>Each party presents a policy programme to the electorate in the form of a manifesto.</p>	<p>Neither the European parties nor the EP political groups conduct their own full-scale electoral campaigns; rather, this is undertaken by national political parties. The role of the European parties is limited to the general coordination and preparation of the election manifesto.</p>
<p>Voters make an informed choice between the competing parties on the basis of this programme.</p>	<p>National political parties do not normally use Euromanifestos as the basis of the campaign; they base their campaigns mainly on national rather than on European issues.</p>
<p>The successful party (or coalition) seeks to translate this programme into practice upon entering the government.</p>	<p>A representative European government as understood within the categories of the nation state does not exist; therefore, it is quite problematic to refer to government and opposition and, consequently, to governing parties and parties in opposition.</p>
<p>The governing party (or coalition) is then judged by the electorate at the next election on its success in implementing its promises.</p>	<p>It is difficult to claim that the electorate judges the governing party on its success (even if we assume that, for example, the President of the Commission comes from a specific party family), since the election campaign issues are centred on the situation in the Member State rather than in the EU.</p>

## Conclusions

To summarise the first chapter of this paper, the origins and developments of the Europarties and the most important characteristics of European Parliament elections have been presented. Although welcomed with great hope, neither direct elections to the European Parliament nor the development of the Europarties has fulfilled the ambitions of their proponents. The EP elections suffer from low turnout and national, rather than European, focus. The Europarties for their part have to deal with the unfriendly conditions of the EU institutional architecture, their own weaknesses and the lack of interest in supporting their development on the part of many of their own national member parties. However, since the early 1990s, a decade when European integration took on new forms of greater political integration, the Europarties and their advocates have made an effort for them to be recognised in EU law and for direct subsidies for their activities from the EU general budget to be introduced, along with permission and funding for their electoral involvement. The next brief chapter will be devoted to an account of these legal developments, followed by an explanation of the legal basis on which the Europarties campaign and an understanding of the rules by which political competition should take place. Although the analysis of legal rules may not be particularly absorbing, it is nevertheless important to realise that the entire idea of political parties at the EU level and calls for their institutional strengthening mirror the better-known debate over the future of the EU and the so-called EU democratic deficit. The strengthening of the Europarties used to be perceived by many of their opponents, usually from Eurosceptic circles, as a step towards a more politicised and more federal Europe. The next chapter will make these matters clearer.

# The Legal Framework regulating Europarty Electoral Activities

From the very beginning of their existence in the mid-1970s, the practical functioning of the first Europarties was based on the material, personal and financial contributions of both their political groups in the EP and their member parties. They had their headquarters inside the European Parliament, except for the EPP, which from the beginning had its seat outside the premises of the Parliament. Their staff, however, was composed equally of officials from their group in the EP delegated to work in the Europarty and substantial input from the Belgian member parties. This structure meant that they suffered from a notorious shortage of both staff and resources for political action. For example, for many years they employed only a handful of officials with a very small overall budget, while at the same time setting for themselves pan-European ambitions and goals. To make up for this problem, at the beginning of 1990s the three largest Europarties (the EPP, the PES and the ELDR) undertook a common initiative which in the long run led to the legal recognition of their role and direct funding of their activities from the EU budget.

## Legal recognition in the Treaty establishing the European Community

The first step towards the institutional strengthening of the Europarties was taken in Maastricht in 1992. The Intergovernmental Conference gathered in this Dutch town decided to formally recognise the role of the Europarties by inserting Art. 138a into the Treaty establishing the European Community:

Political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union<sup>2</sup>.

This was a great success for the Europarties, and especially for EPP President Wilfried Martens, who as Belgian Prime Minister at that time was instrumental in securing the introduction of this article. Still, the formulation quoted above was not a sufficient legal basis for the adoption of more concrete rules, for example providing for direct subsidies to the Europarties. Furthermore, observers noted that this formulation expressed only wishful thinking since, given the absolute lack of presence of the Europarties as recognisable political actors, they were not able to 'express the political will of the citizens of the Union.' Nonetheless, the Europarties and their advocates called for the adoption of more concrete rules regulating their activities, such as statutes of the European political parties, which in principle were to put their activities on a firm legal basis and provide for direct subsidies. However, for some traditionally Eurosceptic Member States (such as the UK) and for Eurosceptic political parties across Europe (usually from the extreme right or the extreme left), the strengthening of the Europarties meant, first, a step towards a more integrated and more political Europe, and second, the threat of their intervening in domestic politics. To find a compromise, during the Nice Intergovernmental Conference of 2000 the treaty article quoted above was amended, allowing for the adoption of further laws regulating Europarty activities. It was, however, subjected to declaration no. 11, adopted by the same conference, which stated, inter alia, that the funding for political parties at European level provided out of the budget of the European Communities could not be used to fund, either directly or indirectly, political parties at national level (Johansson and Raunio 2005).

---

<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of Lisbon has moved this clause to art. 10 (4) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union.

## The Introduction of the System of Public Subsidies for the Europarties

The amendment to the above-mentioned treaty article gave a boost to the start of the legislative procedures which were aimed at adopting more specific laws regulating Europarties and introducing a system of public subsidies. An extra incentive came from the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors (2000). This report considered the practice of financing the Europarties from the EP budget to be inadmissible, since funds allocated to political groups could not be used to finance any extra-parliamentary activities, such as those of the Europarties. Subsequent steps in the end led to the adoption of EU Regulation no. 2004/2003, which formulated a set of rules for the Europarties and established a system of public funding out of the EU budget. In order to be recognised, Europarties have to fulfil a number of conditions. The most important of these is that they be composed either of national political parties or national politicians (such as members of national, regional or the European Parliament) from at least seven Member States. This condition was intended to ensure their transnational, pan-European composition. The Europarties are funded by the EU up to 85% of their total budget, with the remaining 15% coming from the membership fees paid by the national political parties. Soon after the entry into force of the regulation, five new political parties at EU level emerged (see table 1.1 above).

However, there was one crucial aspect of the original regulation, which stated that the Europarties could not campaign in either national or European elections. After another round of revisions in 2007, the EU removed this limitation so that the Europarties can now campaign across Europe, and moreover be directly funded by the EU to fulfil this aim.

In sum, although it was a long process, the so-called top-down institutionalisation of the Europarties was successful. Rather than first developing their own structures and areas of activity, they attempted to provide for their legal recognition and greater

material and financial resources for their activities, and only then developed new areas of action. First, they ensured a proper, though symbolic, recognition in the Treaty establishing the European Community, and subsequently, together with their groups in the European Parliament, ensured that the EU adopted a more specific detailed regulation regarding their activities and funding. In this sense, it is worth noticing that, at least from the legal point of view, the status of the Europarties is very similar to that of national political parties. In most EU Member States, the role of political parties is recognised in the constitution, and concrete rules governing their activities are specified in more detailed laws of a lower status. The same applies at the EU level, or perhaps even more so, as the Europarties were granted funds for their campaigns already in February 2009, before the campaign had really started. Throughout the entire process described above, the Europarties presented a united front and jointly lobbied the EU governments to introduce the above law. During the run-up to the 2009 EP elections, they acted in the same way, proposing that the European Parliament adopt a set of rules governing their activities agreed on among themselves.

### Code of Conduct governing Europarty Campaign Involvement

The document entitled ‘Code of conduct governing the practice of campaigning for European political parties in European Parliament elections’ is noteworthy, not only because it was proposed by all 10 then-existing Europarties and as such shows the common understanding between them of the campaign rules that they should adhere to. The Europarties agreed on it with the perspective of presenting it to the European Parliament, and in October 2008 they formally asked the latter to acknowledge it. The Parliament (and more specifically its Bureau) is responsible for all matters relating to Europarty campaign involvement, from the decision to grant a certain Europarty funding for the campaign to the verification of the appropriate use of the funds afterwards. It also has competence to adopt rules, in particular as to the

eligibility of party expenses in connection with the campaign. The Bureau adopted the proposed code of conduct in its entirety, thus considering it binding on all the Europarties (EP 2008).

The Code of Conduct acknowledges that the European elections are in fact ‘national elections with a European result’ and that ‘cooperation with national parties, which are the vehicle to reach the European electorate, is fundamental in a campaign that presents European political parties to the voters.’ As such, the Europarties do not set themselves up, at least in campaign terms, as politically independent organisations. Their eventual success is dependent on cooperation with their national member parties rather than on any individual set of efforts. In a certain sense, to take such a position is quite logical, as most of the Europarties do not select the MEP candidates, which remains the sole prerogative of national political parties. Nevertheless, they aim at ‘raising awareness of European political issues in the context of the elections to the European Parliament, which otherwise—as has been the case so far—mainly focus on national issues.’

The document further includes a very important and ambitious goal. ‘European political parties have the goal of informing the electorate on what their respective political groups in the European Parliament will do.’ In other words, it implies a connection between the Euromanifesto adopted by a given Europarty and the subsequent parliamentary activities of its group. This goal is further explained by indicating that ‘European political parties shall campaign on ideas and programmes that the parties at European level will promote in the European Parliament ...’ The reality so far, however, has been that although the manifesto is in a certain sense a guideline as to what the given political groups promise to do, nevertheless candidates for the European Parliament have campaigned on a national ticket based on the programme of their national political party (i.e., the national party manifesto). Therefore, a connection between the Euromanifesto and the further activities of the respective parliamentary group has been possible only if there is congruence between the Euro- and the national manifestos within the same

party family. Nevertheless, much as it is a very ambitious goal to connect the Euromanifestos with the subsequent activities of the political groups in the EP, it is even more ambitious to inform the voters about such a link.

Regarding financial provisions, although the Europarties are not allowed to give financial support or support in kind to any of their member parties (in conformity with the EU regulation governing Europarty activities), at the same time they campaign to 'encourage citizens to vote for their member parties during European elections.' In order to fully understand this clause, let me return to EU Regulation 2004/2003 as amended in 2007, which regulates the activities of Europarties. This specifically indicates that the Europarties cannot 'support in any way the national political parties or any candidates.' A literal and strict reading of this clause would mean that the Europarties have a real problem in trying to position their campaign activities, since they cannot make any reference to the fact that these national parties are their members at the EU level. However, by making a common proposal to the European Parliament in the form of the Code of Conduct, and by inserting the rule that Europarties can 'encourage citizens to vote for their member parties during European elections', they succeeded in providing for an interpretation which excludes only financial support from the Europarties to their members.

## Conclusions

This chapter has provided the reader with a basic understanding of the legal rules that regulate Europarty campaign involvement. Their role is not only recognised symbolically in the basic constitutional document of the EU, but also in the secondary legislation which establishes the system of public subsidies for Europarties. For the first time in history, they were directly funded to finance their electoral activities before the 2009 European elections. The Code of Conduct, proposed by all the Europarties and adopted by the European Parliament, establishes the general framework within which the Europarties can campaign. According

to this document, their campaign must be carried out in at least a quarter of the EU Member States and in close cooperation with their own member parties. With regard to the relationship between the Europarties and the national political parties, although the former cannot support the latter financially, they can give them political backing. The aim of Europarty electoral involvement is to promote the European nature of these elections and to inform voters about the Europarties' commitments (mainly based on their Euromanifestos), which will be realised in the subsequent legislature by their political groups.

In sum, this legal framework provides a basis on which the Europarties can build political initiatives; and, as both chapters 1 and 2 have illustrated, by definition the meaning of the electoral campaign must be different from that of the national elections. The next chapter will move on to the question of what commonalities can be observed in this regard, and to what extent the campaigns of the Europarties used the strategy of national campaigning. In order to investigate this, the next chapter will examine the most recent developments. It will review the campaign preparations of the major Europarties, focusing first on their desired campaign style and then on their programmes as embodied in the Euromanifestos.

## Campaign Strategies for the European Parliament Elections

An early analysis of the campaign strategies of the major Europarties already suggested that for a number of reasons the 2009 EP election was expected to be more interesting than in the past. These reasons will be systematically described below by showing the progress made since previous campaigns and focusing on the differences in the vision of political conflict and electoral campaigns exhibited in EU party politics. This chapter

will be comprised of three parts. First, the main elements characterising Europarty involvement in the EP elections prior to the 2009 EP election campaign will be briefly described. Second, the analysis will move on to a discussion of Europarty campaign styles for this election. This will be followed by a presentation of their main policy proposals, their competitiveness and the short-lived presence of Libertas Europe.

### Previous Campaign Strategies in European Parliament Elections

Prior to the 2009 EP election campaign, the electoral engagement of the Europarties could be summed up by the central role attributed to their Euromanifestos and a number of extra events and services they wished to provide to their member parties.

The adoption of common manifestos was always the greatest challenge for all the Europarties. The most important goal was twofold: first, to adopt a relatively concrete manifesto that would be based not just on the lowest common denominator between the member parties, and subsequently, to convince their member parties to actually use it during their national campaign. The Socialists (CSPEC) in particular before 1984 had many problems even with their most basic documents. For example, before the 1979 elections, their internal divisions were so deep that instead of adopting a common manifesto they managed to adopt only a short appeal to the electorate, based on the lowest common denominator. The member parties campaigned on their own separate national programmes, although all but the British Labour Party to some extent used the CSPEC documents in the campaigns. The Dutch PvdA and German SPD, for example, incorporated some parts of it into their own national manifestos. The EPP did not have as many problems in drafting its manifesto compared to the CSPEC. Its 1979 EP election manifesto committed it inter alia to a federal Europe, more frequent majority voting in the Council and increased powers for the Commission and Parliament. However, one should not overlook the fact that in

the early period of its history the EPP was much more ideologically homogeneous than the CSPEC, uniting only traditional very pro-European Christian Democrats, whereas the CSPEC generally faced the very cold attitude to European integration held by its British and Danish member parties (Pridham and Pridham 1981, 146–163).

In subsequent elections, each of the Europarties repeated the procedure of adopting a common manifesto. Whether they had internal problems with adopting them was less important than the inherent inapplicability of these manifestos. As confirmed by many insiders, the main problem lies in the fact they are the result of the widest possible compromise, and in consequence do not suit any national party. Besides, by definition, the Euromanifestos present the proposals in a pan-European perspective, rather than being based on national issues. As such, they usually do not fit within the second-order election logic that is the logic of national elections within a European context. Finally, some national parties are afraid that the fact of their pan-European partisan involvement may be used by their national political opponents against them. For example, the British Labour Party used to be notorious for opting out of many of the policy documents prepared by the CSPEC. However, not only was this a result of policy differences, it was also due to their fear that the British Conservatives would accuse Labour of being dependent on the transnational party, and thus not able to fully represent British citizens. Similar cases were also apparent in other countries and within other Europarties.

A relative breakthrough in this scenario took place only in 2004, thanks to the European Green Party (EGP). Previously, the Greens had adopted a similar campaign strategy to the rest of the Europarties. However, before the 2004 EP campaign they adopted a common manifesto, on the basis of which 22 national political parties campaigned in their respective countries. Still, only three national Green parties (in Germany, Spain and Luxembourg) adopted the EGP manifesto as their only manifesto for the elections, whereas the rest of them used it in varying degrees, for example as a preamble to their own national manifesto.

Nonetheless, all of the national Green parties emphasised their transnational, pan-European party commitments, which, at least from this point of view, was an interesting change.

The idea of launching a pan-European campaign came from a combination of political and strategic convictions. As the internal sources within the European Green Party explained, they believed at that time that their very favourable approach towards European integration should also find its place in the style of their campaign, which should emphasise its European nature. Secondly, the Greens came to the conclusion, which was further confirmed by the research they commissioned, that their electorate would actually expect them to campaign all over Europe on the same ticket. And finally, a boost to organise such a pan-European campaign came from the entry into force of the EU law governing political parties (see the previous chapter), which meant that the Europarties entered into a new stage of their development, requiring new ways of functioning. Hence the common pan-European campaign.

This does not mean, however, that the Greens campaigned on a common platform in all EU Member States. For example, in some countries the European elections took place together with local ones; according to party insiders, it was difficult for the parties in these countries to fully engage in the pan-European EP campaign. Finally, as per the comment in the paragraph above, some parties were simply reluctant to follow such a united approach.

## Europarties as service providers

Apart from focusing on the promotion of the manifesto, the Europarties developed a number of accompanying activities, which can be labelled as service providing. Here, all the Europarties used quite similar methods. First of all, they tried to prepare a list of the achievements of their own political groups in the previous EP term, to be used electorally. Second, they produced a number of promotional gifts, leaflets, stickers and

other materials about themselves and their political groups in the EP. Third, most of them organised at least one electoral rally, with the presence of national party leaders. At such events they offered candidates photo opportunities (i.e., to have their picture taken with a well-known European political figure). For example, in May 1999 the EPP organised a meeting of the 'heads of list' in Strasbourg, that is, of the candidates belonging to the EPP member parties who were in the top spot on the electoral list. At this meeting they distributed some 200,000 leaflets (3,000 for each candidate) to be used by the candidates in the electoral campaign. They also planned a 'week of the EPP', taking place simultaneously in all Member States between 1 May and 9 May that year. The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity to present the electoral programme and the track record of the EPP Group in the European Parliament. In a similar way, the PES and the ELDR invited their member parties to put forward proposals for the organisation of major discussion rounds with top-level politicians and intellectuals. For their part, the Europarties offered to ensure the presence of well-known politicians during these meetings.

However, in reality few of the member parties were particularly eager to respond to the above offers. They had in mind the logic of the EP elections as national elections with a European result. If the proposals put forward by the Europarties had the aim of promoting the European nature of these elections (such as using the record of the MEPs electorally), then they stood in conflict with their national character. And many parties were simply not prepared for such an event, as the subsequent practice of their campaigns showed. This is one of the biggest challenges for the Europarties and will be explained in the following chapter. In sum, even when limiting themselves to acting as service providers, the Europarties could do this only if requested. Did the 2009 EP elections see any change in this respect?

## Campaign Strategies for the 2009 European Elections

In the 2009 European elections, the Europarties continued to act as service providers. This, indeed, was stressed in the EPP's approach and in those of other parties as well. They still adopted their own manifestos for the campaign and struggled with the same challenges concerning their applicability to the national campaigns. At the same time, before the start of the campaign all of them claimed that their efforts would be much more intense and concerted than before. Quite obviously, all of them intended to make use of online campaigning. The differences observed in comparison with the previous elections fit into four major categories.

First of all, in terms of campaign content, the economic crisis provided the major discussion themes for these elections, putting questions related to the future of European political integration into subordinate positions. Among other things, it meant that the major Europarties such as the EPP, PES, ELDR and the Greens, who share very pro-European attitudes, had a better opportunity to advertise their differences in relation to the economy, climate change and so on. Second, the major Europarties set themselves the goal of improving the process of manifesto-drafting, aiming to include the public much more prominently. Third, with regard to the EPP and PES as the two largest Europarties, they tried much more intensively than in the past to contrast their ideas and attack each other in their statements and political programmes, which in a certain symbolic sense may resemble a government-opposition conflict. Finally, Libertas Europe emerged as an attempt to establish a new European political party, which both with its programme and means of action was one of the most important novelties on the European political landscape. These changes will be explained by looking at the cases of the four largest and oldest Europarties and the case of Libertas Europe. Let me start chronologically with the European Liberal Democrats, who were the first to adopt their manifesto as early as October 2008.

## The ELDR

Each of the Europarties employed a different method of preparing their manifestos. Some parties continued to apply the well-known method of first collecting ideas from their member parties, then preparing the first draft in working groups, then asking the member parties for further amendments and finally adopting the document during their congress. This strategy was used by the Greens (see below) and the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR). The Liberals wanted to be the first Europarty to adopt a manifesto and they did so already during their Stockholm Congress in October 2008. They produced an extremely concise document, amounting to only 3 pages, which, when compared with the 27-page long document prepared for the 2004 EP elections, was a big change of strategy. ELDR president Annemie Neyts explained during a press conference at the Stockholm Congress that the idea behind proposing such a short document was to ensure that it had a better chance of being read by the citizens, and at the same time of being used by their member parties, than longer documents (for example, part of it could be inserted into national party manifestos). The ELDR had already started its preparation for the manifesto a year earlier. As with the methods of other Europarties, this resulted in a long process of amending and modifying the document, finally entitled 'European Liberals' top 15 for EP elections.' Versions in all EU national languages were made available on the ELDR election website (ELDR 2009a). The manifesto covered four main areas: civil liberties, the EU single market, environment and energy policy and, finally, enlargement, foreign, security and defence policy. The Liberals were proud to emphasise that they were the third largest group in the EP and 'make the difference in terms of law and policies.' The manifesto fully supported the swift adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, the strengthening of the Common and Foreign Security Policy and 'measured economic migration for the benefit of EU citizens.' The Liberals continued to emphasise the need for the liberalisation and further extension of the single market to energy, postal services, financial services, railways and health care. 'Only a truly competitive Europe, creating jobs and opportunities for all, will underpin the social dimension of the single market.' A

similar set of proposals had been present in the 2004 Liberal election manifesto, although, as mentioned above, in a much more extended format than in 2008.

Responding to the measures against the financial crisis, the ELDR pointed out that ‘a key guarantee for prosperity lies in the high-level personal responsibility of all market participants. A relapse into policies of nationalisation, over-regulation and protectionism would be a major mistake.’ In the entire document, as in 2004, there was not a single reference to their political opponents and, due to its concise form, one cannot avoid the impression that it was more an electoral platform than a full-blown manifesto, especially if we compare it to the documents of the other Europarties. To this criticism, sources in the ELDR reply that in contrast to their manifesto, both the EPP and PES manifestos were extremely dense documents, unlikely to be read by the citizens. Furthermore, they see no reason why their manifesto should give credit to their opponents by referring to their policy ideas. The Liberals were aware that the economic crisis, sometimes labelled by their opponents as a crisis of liberalism, could have negative electoral consequences for them, and according to President Neyts it could give a boost to extreme parties of both the Left and the Right. Nevertheless, they were hoping that it would not diminish the electoral chances of its member parties, and that their group in the European Parliament (called the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe) would retain the comparable number of seats they had had before and remain the third-largest group in the EP. Internal sources within the ELDR further pointed out that, unlike a few years ago, the Liberals are no longer just in opposition but have a significant presence in national governments and the EU Commission. They also believe that they have a much clearer and more coherent ideology than their competitors. In their opinion, this allowed Liberal parties to make their case during the campaign by showing their constituencies successful Liberal programmes from across the continent. The ELDR, as in previous years, organised an electoral rally in Brussels as well as seminars for campaign managers to exchange best campaign practices. It served its member parties as service provider by producing a brochure

focusing on the work of the Liberal group in the EP as well as providing various electoral leaflets, gifts, T-shirts and so on. Like other Europarties, they produced an electoral website featuring a gallery of the Liberal candidates across Europe (ELDR 2009b). ELDR insiders admit, however, that more active campaigning was constrained by the limited financial resources available to them.

## The PES

In this election, political competition was not only about ideas but also about the degree of openness of the Europarties and their ability to communicate with the public. A strategy focused on these concerns was adopted by the Party of European Socialists. According to internal sources within the PES, they came to the conclusion that the best way to promote their manifesto would be to change the traditional mode of adoption, which used to involve only the political parties, as was the case with the PES 2004 Manifesto. This time they set a path for a revised mode. Some 18 months before the elections the PES called on its member parties and also on members of the public, trade unions and foundations to express their ideas concerning the content and specific measures to be included in the manifesto. A similar strategy of opening the PES to the public has been underway for a few years already and most importantly is embodied in the growth of the initiative called PES activists, which since 2005 allows for the direct involvement of socialist militants from all over Europe in PES work. The PES claimed on its election website that more than 300,000 users had visited the consultation website, some 120 meetings across Europe had been organised and more than 500 written contributions had been received online, with more than 60 formal submissions from NGOs, trade unions, foundations and member parties<sup>3</sup>. Such an attempt to open this previously elitist Europarty is a move worth mentioning; besides, as some insiders confirm, it boosted interest in the manifesto among PES member parties. Still, the member parties were the

---

<sup>3</sup> To follow the process of PES manifesto preparation, see PES 2009a.

main players and had a final say over the manifesto's shape. The initial policy ideas were later collected, formed into a first draft manifesto and, after amendments from the member parties had been received, adopted by the 33 PES party leaders during the PES Council in Madrid in December 2008. It is entitled 'People first: A new direction for Europe' (PES 2008).

The manifesto itself was built around six priorities: relaunching the economy and preventing new financial crises; a New Social Europe—giving people a fairer deal; transforming Europe into the leading global force against climate change; championing gender equality in Europe; developing an effective European migration policy; and enhancing Europe's role as a partner for peace, security and development. The choice that European citizens had to make in June 2009 was, according to the PES, a 'choice between a progressive European Union where Member States work together in the interests of all the people of Europe, or a conservative European Union which leaves our future in the hands of the market.' The PES announced the end of conservative economic solutions based on the liberal economic policies of deregulation and liberalisation, and proclaimed the revival of the proven socialist recipes for economy and work. Their manifesto contained 71 measures. In contrast to previous PES manifestos and in contrast to other Europarties, what figured quite prominently was that the Socialists tried to respond to the usual accusations that Euromanifestos did not contain a single concrete measure to implement the policies they were advancing. This time the PES proposed a very large number of concrete measures, although using rather similar means. The Socialists proposed adopting a European pact to agree on common rules in certain policy areas, or developing or strengthening a certain EU policy or strategy. The PES proposed a European strategy for smart green growth and jobs, a European pact for the future of employment, a European social progress pact, a skills programme, a European statute for associations, mutual societies and foundations, and so on.

The success of Barack Obama in the 2008 US presidential elections and the style of his campaign also affected the PES. It

claimed in its manifesto that 'we are a force of change' and many of the party leaders speaking at the PES Council in Madrid in December 2008 finished their interventions with Obama's 'Yes, We Can!' Other parties also derived quite a lot from American experience. For example, the Party of the European Left entitled its manifesto 'Together for Change in Europe', and Libertas Europe copied the means of getting donations to their campaign funds from Obama's example (see below).

There are other reasons why the PES started preparations to adopt its manifesto so early. This was mainly to do with building the widest possible sense of ownership of the manifesto among PES member parties; in other words, to involve them from the beginning so that hopefully they would use it in their campaign. The PES website therefore contained such sections as 'your campaign', 'your manifesto' and so on, emphasising the common ownership of the entire PES campaign. Furthermore, the PES seems to have placed the manifesto at the centre of its entire campaign, and had the ambition to reach as many citizens as possible. For example, it organised a manifesto tour, which was a series of national and local meetings aimed at promoting the manifesto in EU Member States.

The PES still served as the service provider to the parties. It prepared various materials in its election kit, containing leaflets, postcards, boxes and also information on the record of the PES Group in the European Parliament. The PES stimulated significant involvement of bloggers and other internet activists in building up the content of its electoral website. Finally, a widely commented move in the last week of the campaign was to present a selection of 'terrible European election candidates of other European political parties', mostly of the EPP (PES 2009b). PES's motivation to resort to this type of negative campaigning rested on a belief that 'voters have a right to see not only the candidates they can vote for directly, but also their European allies'. On the list were, inter alia, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (who was running for an EP seat without any real intention of taking it up); French Minister for Social Affairs, Brice Hortefeux, with her claims that

immigrants were neither ‘honest’ nor ‘clean’; and Hungarian centre-right politician János Áder, who had compared ‘the handshake of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány and Finance Minister János Veres, following the adoption of the budget, to the infamous moment when the then East German President Honecker kissed the then Soviet President Brezhnev on the mouth.’ Apart from rather obvious examples, such as that of Holocaust denier Nick Griffin (UK), it is not however clear what the criteria were for inclusion on the list of ‘terrible candidates’.

## The EGP

Already in 2004, the European Greens had made an attempt to organise a pan-European campaign based on the same themes and ideas throughout Europe (see above). In 2009 they tried to build on their previous achievements and to improve in other areas, relating both to the programme content they presented to the voters as well as the style of their campaigning. Given the general focus on the financial and economic crisis, the largest challenge that the Greens faced in this campaign was to convince voters that not only did they have the competence to deal with typically Green issues (such as climate and the energy challenge), but also that they could successfully take up economic problems. According to the EGP co-spokesperson, Philippe Lamberts, their main goal in the campaign was to convince a significant part of the electorate that the best response to the economic and financial crisis was actually to respond to the other challenges relating to the climate and energy supply, as both these areas – economics and climate change – are strongly interconnected. This perspective clearly featured among the main themes of the EGP manifesto adopted in Brussels at the end of March, entitled ‘A Green new deal for Europe’. The process of manifesto writing took more than a year and involved three rounds of amendments tabled by EGP member parties. The manifesto explained that the Green new deal means ‘a Europe of solidarity that can guarantee its citizens a good quality of life based on economic, social and environmental sustainability; a truly democratic Europe that acts

for its citizens and not just narrow industry interests; a Europe that acts for a green future.’ What emerged then was a picture of a Europarty clearly on the left of the political spectrum (promising equality between men and women, the protection of society and workers and the assurance that it was not ‘in any industry’s pocket’), strongly in favour of EU integration and focused mostly on the environment, but also having a programme for other areas of EU integration.

The manifesto had three main headings: ‘A real alternative for Europe: securing our energy and environmental future’; ‘Social justice and globalisation: fighting for a fairer Europe’; ‘Democracy and human rights: a responsible EU that listens and is heard’. It started with a strong criticism of the ‘dominant neoliberal ideology in Europe,’ and correspondingly of ‘the neoliberal majority in the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission’, which was accused of establishing ‘a system where the interests of the few come before the general well-being of its citizens’. The Greens claimed to be ‘a real alternative for Europe [...] Shifting to a greener economy and combating climate change will boost employment and make us more self-sufficient, reducing our damaging reliance on energy imports.’ This shift was to be based on, among other things, putting renewables at the centre of European energy policy, discouraging the use of nuclear energy, supporting a sustainable transport system and ensuring that the EU was a genetically modified organism-free zone. The Greens wanted to put markets ‘on a leash’, strengthen workers’ rights and introduce minimum wages and a minimum income above the poverty line. Finally, they wanted to reform the EU ‘so that it can become a truly participatory democracy.’ For example, they hoped for the European Parliament to be granted the right to initiate legislation. Such an EU would foster democracy and human rights, while promoting a pluralistic civil society across the globe.

The European Greens strongly emphasised their programme unity. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the co-leader of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament, said during the EGP electoral congress at the end of March 2009 that,

contrary to other Europarties, ‘what our national parties say will be the same as what we will do in the EP.’ At the same time they wished to improve the European elements of the campaign. To this end, they nominated five Green ‘ambassadors’, leading Green politicians from different EU Member States, to travel across Europe and present Green solutions. The Greens developed a common electoral strategy, for example involving common posters and slogans, which were to be used by all Green parties in Europe. The main slogan for the campaign was ‘Think big—vote Green’. However, Philippe Lamberts identified the unsolvable difficulty of pan-European campaigning: ‘what can work very well in Denmark may not work in Belgium’. Finally, the EGP electoral website presented their policies, reported on the cross-border campaign tour and presented the Green candidates (<http://europeangreens.eu>).

## The EPP

From the very beginning the EPP announced that it would adopt its manifesto during the EPP Congress in Warsaw at the end of April. EPP officials claim that this strategy would prove to be the most practical in times of the growing economic crisis. They explained that if the manifesto had been adopted earlier, for example as early as the PES manifesto in December 2008 or the ELDR manifesto in October 2008, they would not have been able to refer therein to the current state of this crisis. On the other hand, their opponents argued that the EPP purposefully decided to postpone the adoption of its manifesto due to internal differences among its member parties.

Given the PES claims of openness and its inclusive mode of manifesto preparation, the EPP was to some extent called upon to respond, not only by producing a coherent manifesto, but also by competing in terms of how the drafting process was organised. It found a way of receiving public input to its manifesto, but in a different manner from that of the PES. First, they decided to draft the initial version of the manifesto with the

involvement of their member parties. Only then, at the end of January 2009, did the EPP open up a process of consultation. During a press conference announcing the adoption of the draft manifesto, EPP President Wilfried Martens explained that only in this way could they treat the public seriously, because they presented them with the full-blown document and looked forward to their comments rather than organising brain-storming but in the end letting only the member parties decide. The EPP launched a web channel, Dialogue TV, where citizens were able to express their opinions relating to the EPP draft manifesto (<http://dialoguetv.epp.eu/>).

The electoral document, entitled 'Strong for the people,' was adopted during the EPP Congress in Warsaw, attended by more than 3,000 representatives of EPP member parties and international guests. It contained five major sections: Creating prosperity for everyone; Making Europe a safer place; Combating climate change; Tackling the demographic challenge; and Uniting Europe on the world stage. The EPP solutions for the economic crisis were based on its long-standing belief in a Social Market Economy, or what they call a 'value driven' economy, combining solidarity and social responsibility with the need for free market solutions. These are similar to those of the ELDR: lowering taxes, easing the administrative burden and completing the single market giving priority to research and innovations. Regarding this last point, the EPP wished for overall spending on research and development to be increased to 3% of GDP in 2010 and 4% in 2015. Most of the solutions proposed to solve the crisis were formulated in the manifesto as recommendations, identifying challenges and areas for improvement rather than providing concrete measures to tackle these problems. The EPP stressed that its positions were fundamentally different both from those of the socialists in Europe, who 'see the financial and economic crisis as a chance to push their age-old agenda of nationalisation, protectionism and permanent deficit spending' and from the positions of 'market fundamentalists who believe that markets alone should rule the world.' The EPP aimed to inform citizens about the benefits of the Lisbon Treaty as a prerequisite for EU

efficiency. In 'Making Europe a safer place', particular emphasis was placed on the need to not equate terrorism and Islam and for the EU to promote democracy in the Arab world.

Like all the Europarties, the EPP made use of new technologies to communicate with citizens. However, in its recipe for reaching EU citizens, the EPP believed that it was an illusion that Europarties could reach all EU citizens. For this reason they focused on communicating with the opinion shapers and leading voices in Europe. To this end, they created a database containing 26,000 email addresses of businessmen, NGOs, activists, lobby groups and journalists to whom they wanted to spread their ideas. Dialogue TV, the interactive website launched by the EPP, was very strong on content, offering interviews with many EPP Prime Ministers and party leaders, reportages and so on. Furthermore, the Centre for European Studies, an official EPP foundation, provided citizens with an opportunity to express their concerns about the EU directly to President Barroso. This was possible through a simple web poll, in which the user was invited to write a short essay on how the EU could improve his or her life. More than 153,000 participants took the chance to communicate their ideas to the President of the European Commission. Ten participants were randomly selected to join Barroso in Brussels to discuss the results (CES 2009). Regarding its service to its member parties, EPP Secretary General Antonio López-Istúriz recognised the limits of its activities due to the lack of a common European constituency and a real transnational political debate. In an interview with the EU Observer, he acknowledged that 'we are producing a common programme, but in the end, it's about national campaigns. [All] we can do, is to be a service provider for national campaigns with European ideas' (Pop 2009).

The Europarties' manifestos set the basic boundaries of the political debate at the EU level. However, as often happens, the ideas and solutions in the manifestos are not the only area that should be looked at. Equally important is the style of political competition and the particular context characterising the current political circumstances within the EU. Let me move to this issue below.

## The Political Competition between the EPP and the PES

During its 2006 Porto Congress, the PES proclaimed that we are working hard to make of the PES a true European political party, capable of influencing European politics, a party that is more visible, more effective and that can relate to the people and to its members. (PES 2006)

This quote aptly illustrates the challenges that European political parties face today and gives some idea of how one of them defines the point at which it will become a ‘true European political party’. It is not only the PES, however, that wishes to continue to strengthen its traditional focus on cooperation and exchange among national member parties while also aiming to build a life of its own—to have its own political campaigns (that is, be more visible) and to directly communicate with the public. From a more general point of view, in making a true European political party of the PES, its leadership clearly wishes to emphasise that there is something at stake where European political parties are concerned, that the choices made at EU level are the same choices made at national level, that is, between the Left and the Right. In other words, the emergence of fiercer political confrontation at the EU level can be seen as desirable from an institutional point of view and, even more importantly, as an incentive for voters to become interested in the European Parliament elections and transnational party politics.

This approach was very visible in the PES’s campaign strategy during the 2009 European Parliament elections. It is important to notice the unprecedented level of direct criticism expressed by the PES towards its political opponent. In this sense, the PES manifesto clearly resembles the British style of election manifesto, filled with criticism of political opponents. This is an important change compared to previous PES manifestos. Whereas in the PES manifestos of 2004 and 1999 their political opponents—labelled as ‘right-wing parties’—were criticised only twice, in the 2009 manifesto there were at least 14 direct critical references to

their opponents and many more indirect ones. The PES manifesto claimed that the choice between the PES and the EPP was very important, because it was a choice ‘between political parties with very different ideas for the future of the European Union.’ European elections have frequently been criticised for not offering meaningful choices for the future of Europe, since no matter what the outcome of the election, the EPP and PES groups which have controlled the Parliament have ultimately led it in a very pro-European direction. By claiming that the two largest European parties were distinctly different, the PES was attempting to address this criticism. They used the term ‘conservatives’ to embrace both the EPP and its member parties, although some of them are clearly not Conservative but Christian Democrat or Liberal. Nonetheless, the PES’s characteristic criticism took the following form:

For the past five years, the conservatives have had a majority in Europe—in most EU Member States and in the EU institutions. What have they done with it? Did they tackle the global financial crisis? Did they address rising food and energy prices? Have they fought poverty and inequalities? Is society fairer than it was five years ago? Did they support our initiatives to deliver more and better jobs? They follow the market. We follow our convictions. (PES 2009c)

What is particularly noticeable is that sometimes both the PES and the EPP used the same concepts, such as Social Market Economy, but understood them differently. Another example, from the same source, illustrates this tendency:

Conservatives believe in a market society and letting the rich get richer, to the detriment of everyone else. We believe in a social market economy that enables everyone in society to make the most of the opportunities globalisation offers. We believe in solidarity between generations, not right-wing individualism.

The PES’s criticism of the EPP was found not only in its manifesto. PES President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen regularly issued

press releases that directly criticised the ‘conservatives’. On the very same day that the EPP presented its draft manifesto, in late January 2009, Rasmussen issued a press release criticising the EPP’s calls for tax cuts (PES 2009d). He said, ‘EPP tax cuts mean EPP spending cuts. Why don’t they just come out and tell us they want to axe public services? They don’t dare because public spending cuts are the last thing you need at a time of rising unemployment. It is the same old conservative rhetoric, the same old tired ideology.’ Rasmussen also highlighted five ‘cast-iron cases of EPP hypocrisy’, directly engaging with EPP proposals and solutions. For example, he refused to accept the EPP claim that the Socialists wanted to push nationalisation, stating instead that ‘nationalisation is a short-term necessity, not a Socialist goal.’ He also challenged the EPP for not being committed to fighting climate change, since in his opinion the EPP Group in the European Parliament spent ‘months trying to water down the climate package’. Quite often the PES has criticised the Commission and its President, José Manuel Barroso. Not only, however, does the PES critically engage with EPP policies and proposals, as noted above, but it also accuses the EPP of lacking openness, against which the PES places its inclusive and interactive mode of preparing its manifesto (see above). Therefore, Rasmussen observed, ‘our policies are more inclusive than the conservatives and we do our politics in a more inclusive way too.’ Other usual targets are the conservative EU governments and their leaders, such as Angela Merkel or Nicolas Sarkozy, or even the EU Presidency, in claims such as ‘Conservative Czech Presidency faces defeat on child care targets.’

The EPP countered the PES’s criticism, although EPP activity in this regard was not as intense as that of the PES. As illustrated above, the EPP manifesto itself was less competitive than that of the PES. Although it contained some criticism of the Socialists, it was not as visible and direct as was the PES’s criticism of the EPP. An example of this style of argumentation was an article by EPP President Wilfried Martens published in *European Voice* three days before the elections. While listing EPP priorities at

considerable length, the general point it made was that ‘socialist ideologies will not help the European Union achieve its goal of creating a better Europe’, but it also pointed out that the PES had failed to come up with a counter-candidate to José Manuel Barroso, who was supported by the EPP (Martens 2009). Martens also called the PES’s selection of ‘terrible European election candidates’, containing the names of a few EPP politicians, ‘cheap populism’ (Pop 2009). Antonio López-Istúriz, EPP Secretary General, claimed that ‘the left-oriented marketing and agit-prop is saying we are responsible for everything. But who were in European governments during the last 20 years? It was the Socialists who had the majority of governments in Europe’ (Pop 2009). López-Istúriz also hinted that the PES’s combative approach came from the lack of a real programme of their own; hence their campaign strategy could be based only on criticising EPP personalities and ideas (interview by the author on 29 April 2009). The EPP often used a standard formula in which it highlighted its numerical strength as its main advantage over competitors. On its website, it proudly claims that ‘with 74 member-parties from 39 countries, 19 Heads of Government (13 EU and 6 non-EU), 9 European Commissioners (including the President), and the largest Group in the European Parliament with 265 members, the EPP is the leading political force on the continent’ (<http://www.epp.eu>). The main election video introducing the EPP was based on the presentation of this numerical strength and of the main personalities of the EPP and its member parties. In its manifesto, however, it clearly distanced itself from its competitors:

Facing the new challenges of 2009, we are well aware of what others are proposing. Socialists see the financial and economic crisis as a chance to push their age-old agenda of nationalisation, protectionism and permanent deficit spending. We, on the other hand, are acting in order to preserve a competitive Social Market Economy and make it more sustainable. Nationalists are using the crisis to advocate their well-known plans against a strong Europe that would quickly leave us unable to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. We, however, are determined to push ahead with

the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and with modernising and strengthening the Union. In other words, this election is about a fundamental choice: between the dangerous recipes of Socialists and nationalists, and a secure future based on values, responsibility, competence and coordinated action. (EPP 2009)

The EPP also emphasised that the founders of Europe—Adenauer, Schuman, de Gasperi—were all Christian Democrats, and that the EPP ‘has influenced the historical development of Europe like no other political force.’ The EPP also identified the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, among its leading personalities. Quite often the EPP President issued statements in which he supported the Commission’s plans and policies in various areas, which at least on the symbolic level would mean supporting the government by the largest party at the EU level. The subsequent chapter will show how this competition looked on the occasion of the nomination of José Manuel Barroso for another five-year mandate as the Commission President. But to conclude this chapter, I will discuss the case of a new transnational political party at the EU level which emerged a few months before the elections: Libertas Europe.

## The Challenge of Libertas Europe

Libertas and its founder Declan Ganley made their name during the June 2008 Irish referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon. Ganley, an Irish multimillionaire, is commonly attributed with having played a major part in the rejection of this treaty by the Irish people. The arguments that he put forward against the treaty concerned the fact that it would put Ireland’s low corporate tax rates into question, deprive Ireland of its Commissioner and introduce unfair voting powers in the Council of the European Union. Libertas also used populist arguments, claiming, for example, that among the consequences of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty would be the conscription of Irish soldiers into an EU army or the legalisation of abortion in Ireland.

The activities of Libertas in Ireland sparked a number of controversies regarding its sources of funding. Its opponents both in Ireland and in the EU suspected, because of Ganley's excellent contacts with the US military, that the CIA stood behind his campaign. Ganley rejected all these accusations, claiming that Libertas was financed by donations from citizens and by the €200,000 loan that he himself had offered. However, for a long time Libertas delayed responding to requests for information about loans to the group and other financial matters. The question of Libertas funding even made it onto the agenda of the European Parliament, when the co-leader of the Greens/European Free Alliance Group, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, asked the Parliament to investigate the sources of Libertas funding. EP President Hans Gert Poettering backed this appeal, arguing that 'we require total transparency because the people who attack us always call upon us to show transparency. We cannot have double standards' (Smyth 2008).

Soon after the Irish 'No', in October 2008, Ganley revealed his initiative to extend Libertas's activities all over Europe by putting forward candidates for the European Parliament in all EU-27 Member States in order to fight the EP elections as a sort of plebiscite on the Treaty of Lisbon (Libertas May Run 2008). From then on, Libertas's leader started organising support all over Europe as well as in the European Parliament, mainly with some members of the Eurosceptic Independence and Democracy Group. A strong sympathiser with his views and activities was the Czech President, Vaclav Klaus. On 1 November 2008, Ganley set up a political party at the European level, based in Ireland as Libertas Party Ltd. Soon after, according to the rules governing political parties at the European level (see chapter 2), Libertas applied for funding from the European Parliament to promote 'the European nature of the European elections'. It fulfilled the most important condition for funding, the requirement that it be represented by either MEPs or members of national or regional parliaments in at least seven Member States, in fact managing to find support in exactly seven EU Member States. In those circumstances, on 2 February 2009 the European Parliament

decided to give a €202,823 grant to Libertas for 2009. The day after, an Estonian MP who had previously signed the Libertas membership application denied ever backing the formation, as did a Bulgarian MP. In this situation, Libertas's application was put on hold, but in the end the EP disbursed the funding.

Regarding Libertas's proposals for Europe, the mantra Declan Ganley repeated over and over was that, although they rejected the Treaty of Lisbon, they were pro-European. On the one hand, in their declarations there are some elements that many would call Eurosceptic or populist: the fight against an anti-democratic Europe, opposition to the Treaty of Lisbon (what Ganley called the Lisbon Constitution) and so on. In that sense, it was clearly an anti-establishment party. For example, Ganley blamed the political establishment for the economic crisis ('our so-called political leaders led us into that crisis') or accused them of lacking vision or of 'distancing of political elites from the people of Europe' (Ganley Press Conference 2009). On the other hand, under calls for democracy, accountability and transparency, Libertas argued for an elected Commission and President. So while Ganley rejected the Lisbon Treaty, at the same time he called for a new, short and understandable treaty, which would be read and then voted on by citizens. Nevertheless, his opponents accused him of opportunism and dishonesty as to his real, anti-European aims. For example, the former leader of the ALDE Group in the European Parliament, Graham Watson, called Libertas 'the lunatic fringe that wants to inflict fatal damage on the European Union as we know it' (speech at the ELDR electoral rally, 15 April 2009, Brussels).

The most important questions that emerged in relation to the political message of Libertas were whether the citizens wanted to hear more about the Treaty of Lisbon and the institutional intricacies of EU integration and, second, whether a recipe for a pan-European party could work well in the EP elections fought in each Member State on its national logic. The opinion polls conducted by Eurobarometer a few months ahead of the election clearly showed that the majority of EU citizens wished that

economic themes, such as economic growth, unemployment and inflation, would stand at the centre of the 2009 campaign. The topics typically associated with European integration, such as the powers and competences of the EU institutions, figured much less prominently among the issues that the citizens wanted to hear about (Eurobarometer 2008). From this point of view, focusing on the Treaty of Lisbon could mean addressing a non-issue. However, Anita Kelly, Libertas's spokesperson, informed me in February 2009 that Libertas would present a very comprehensive programme both for the economy and for other issues that interest the citizens (personal interview, 19 February 2009). This was to take place during the planned launch of their campaign on 25 March in Rome. However this event had to be postponed, since, as the media reported, by that time Libertas could not find enough candidates for its lists nor agree on a common programme. When the Libertas convention finally took place in Rome on 1 May, they did not adopt a common programme either, coming up with only a few general ideas rather than a comprehensive policy programme. These proposals concerned holding 'Brussels' to account, disclosing MEPs voting records and EU summit discussions to the public, insisting that every country must hold a referendum on 'any EU constitution' and cutting by half the number of 'Brussels meetings' (Libertas 2009). One has to remember, however, that MEPs' voting records are available to the public, whereas demanding that every EU country hold a referendum is in opposition to some countries' constitutional rules (such as those of Germany). In sum, rather than focusing on economic issues, Libertas chose to move to the well-known terrain of contrasting its anti-establishment approach with what it called 'Brussels'.

Second, unlike the mainstream Europarties, Libertas was composed not of national member parties as corporate members but of individuals. Consequently it claimed for a long time that all of its candidates would run under the same banner all over Europe. This indeed would be an unheard-of novelty in European Parliament elections and this is why Libertas claimed to be the first truly pan-European party. Its opponents pointed out, on the

other hand, that the declaration of building a truly European party did not come as a result of their real intentions, but out of necessity. For example, as much as Libertas was proud to announce that it had recruited a number of candidates from its email list, for its opponents this was a sign of weakness and the lack of any real programme base. As it appeared in most countries, Libertas's presence in this campaign was marginal, and the opinion polls did not show that Ganley's party had a chance of becoming a real game changer. It managed to register candidates in only 12 EU Member States (Agnew 2009). Furthermore, despite its reassurance of its pro-European commitment, in some countries Libertas's presence created a platform not only against the Treaty of Lisbon, but also generally against the European integration project. This was most visible in Poland, where Libertas united almost all the traditional Eurosceptics from the various parties of the far right, such as the League of Polish Families.

One of the most important questions that Libertas faced concerned its funding. Most EU Member States have different rules on the funding of political and electoral campaigns, and in some it is forbidden to finance political parties from abroad. To find an alternative way of funding, Libertas hired specialists to design online donation systems and focused on gathering a large number of small web donations from citizens. In terms of campaign style, apart from some common elements such as the same programme, and some coordinated production of gifts, leaflets and T-shirts, Libertas's campaign was decentralised and in each EU Member State the local Libertas leadership decided on the most efficient campaign style (Ganley Press Conference 2009). The only common events were a few conventions, including the above-mentioned Rome Convention, which gathered Libertas sympathisers from all over Europe, although not in impressive numbers. The leaders of the national branches of Libertas signed a petition demanding that every EU Member State hold a referendum on any new European treaty. The special guest at this convention was former Polish President Lech Wałęsa, currently a member of the EU's group of 'wise men'. He said 'I

see a place for you. There is a place in Europe for different ideas. Not enough people attend the elections, the programmes are bad, too much bureaucracy. So in your diagnosis I agree.’ However, Wałęsa later admitted that Ganley actually paid him €100,000 to address the convention. The media effect of Walesa’s presence during Libertas convention was slightly diminished when he was booed by some Polish members of Libertas, who insinuated that he used to be an informer of the Communist secret police. The Polish leaders of Libertas made no secret of their extremely critical opinion of Wałęsa, but were grateful that he agreed to address this convention as Ganley’s ‘gimmick’ (Wierzejski 2009). Wałęsa appeared at another convention of Libertas in Madrid, but at the end of the campaign he completely distanced himself from Libertas, arguing that while he is always open to speak to opponents of EU integration, such as Libertas, they wanted to use his presence to their political advantage.

## Conclusions

How can we briefly summarise the campaign strategies of the major Europarties? First of all, this chapter has noted some continuity in their election styles. All of them based their campaign on a manifesto, which they hoped would spread their views across Europe and which would be used at least in a symbolic way by their member parties. Furthermore, they acted as service providers, offering their member parties various electoral materials, gifts, T-shirts and so on. However, each of the Europarties introduced some new elements into the campaign. The European Green Party tried to lead the most integrated campaign among all the mainstream Europarties, characterised by their ambition for their transnational programme to be used by the Greens all over Europe. The Liberals decided to set the agenda by issuing their manifesto eight months ahead of the elections. The PES introduced a novel way of drafting their manifesto, inviting members of the public, NGOs, trade unions and others to express their ideas as to what their manifesto should contain. Furthermore, it was very active in presenting the

ideas of this manifesto all over Europe, launching a manifesto tour and organising its five days of action. The EPP also decided to consult the public on its draft manifesto, and offered a very rich web channel, Dialogue TV.

The manifestos, especially that of the PES, were more partisan than they had been in the past. The PES directly attacked its main competitor with the aim of regaining the majority in the European Parliament. It found an opportunity to capitalise on the financial crisis in Europe, which it expected would affect the centre-right parties who control the governments in most of the EU Member States.

Finally, the emergence of the new transnational political party, Libertas Europe, could have been a prime opportunity to raise interest in transnational party politics and in the European elections and, hopefully, increase the turnout. Libertas had a very ambitious goal: to be at the centre of power in the newly elected European Parliament. Given that their support in most EU countries was minimal, this ambition needed to be treated with caution from the very beginning. In its political appeal, Libertas combined anti-establishment, populist sentiments and the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty with calls for a more democratic, transparent and accountable Europe, possibly even more integrated than today. Furthermore, Libertas had the opportunity to be the first genuinely transnational European political party, relying on the participation of individuals in all EU Member States rather than of national political parties. This does not mean, however, that this recipe for electoral success could work well within the national logic of the EP elections, as the results of these elections have shown. I will turn to these issues in the next chapter.

## 4 The Results and Implications of the Europarties' Campaign Involvement

The results of any election are never limited solely to the question of who won and who lost. However, with regard to the European Parliament elections, even this question may be difficult to answer. Although it is relatively easy to identify the winners and losers in each of the 27 EU Member States, some winners found themselves in the third (e.g., the Estonian Reform Party) or even in the fifth-largest group in the house (such as the British Conservatives). On the other hand, some parties defeated in the national elections (e.g., the Czech Christian Democrats and the Danish Conservatives) became members of the largest group, thus mitigating their actual defeat. Nonetheless, the 2009 elections have been rightly described as a victory for the centre-right parties united at the European level within the European People's Party. The centre-right won the elections in 16 EU Member States, providing them with 246 MEPs (out of the total number of 265 EPP MEPs). The day after the elections, the EPP announced on its website that it had 'won the European elections'. As much as, symbolically, this could be argued to be valid, the real question remains to what extent the Europarties actually made a difference. However, and perhaps most importantly, the subsequent candidacy of EPP candidate José Manuel Barroso was possible only because his own political family won these elections. This chapter will deal with these issues in turn, starting however with a very brief account of the election results, focusing mainly on issues related to the European political parties rather than to the national electoral contexts<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> For an elaborate comparative and case study analysis of the European Parliamentary elections in the EU-27, see Gagatsek (forthcoming).

## The Results of the 2009 European Parliament Elections

As predicted by most analysts, the centre-right parties won these elections with overwhelming support. However, the scale of this victory was quite surprising. In April, the predictions made by the website Predict09 assumed that the EPP would remain the largest group with around 240 MEPs (excluding the British Conservatives), about 40 MEPs more than the PES Group, with the Liberals in third place (around 90 MEPs) (Hix, Marsh and Vivyan 2009)<sup>5</sup>. The final results showed that this gap between the EPP and the PES was even larger. The EPP Group returned 265 MEPs, followed by the PES Group with 162 MEPs and the Liberal group (ALDE) had 84 seats.

The EPP's success can be attributed chiefly to a large increase in in Poland (+13 MEPs), France and Italy (+11 each). Correspondingly, PES member parties did very badly, especially in France, where the socialists lost half of their seats (down from 28.9% of the vote in 2004 to 16.8% in 2009) and in the Netherlands (down from 23.6% in 2004 to 13.9% in 2009). In Germany, the SPD had its worst election result since 1945, losing seats to a more radically oriented Left Party (Die Linke). The British Labour Party lost five seats (leaving them with 14). In all these cases, PES member parties lost their seats not only to the advantage of EPP members, but also to some radical or extreme parties. However, PES member parties won the elections in Sweden, Greece, Romania, Malta, and Slovakia.

With regard to the other political families, the Liberals almost doubled their score in Germany (from 6.1% in 2004 to 11% in 2009). The Greens did very well in France, where they were almost on par with the Socialists (16.2% and 16.8% of the vote respectively), and Germany, where they became the third political force and pushed the Liberals into fourth position. Extreme left parties did well in France and Germany, and the Dutch Socialists

---

<sup>5</sup> Predict09 was commissioned by Burson-Marsteller.the EU-27, see Gagatsek (forthcoming).

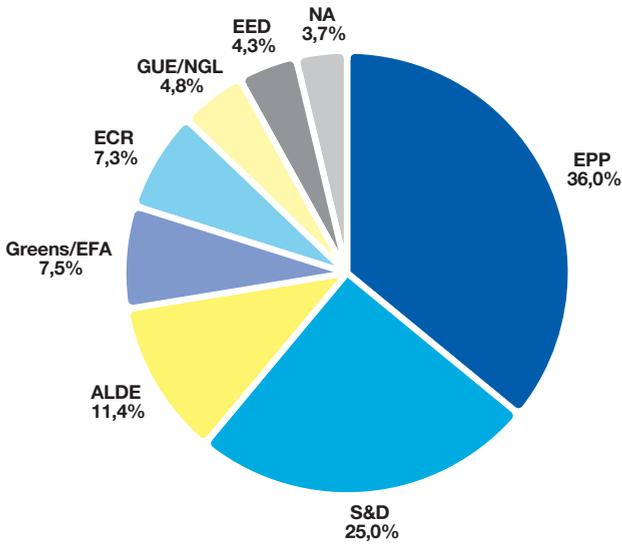
(PvdA) lost their seats to the advantage of Geert Wilders' anti-immigrant PVV. Extremists were also successful in Hungary (Jobbik) and in the UK, where the British National Party won their first-ever two seats.

Libertas failed completely to realise its electoral ambitions, as it managed to win only one seat (for Philippe de Villiers in France). The reasons for this failure can be found in a number of factors. First, a plausible explanation, which also explains the EPP's success, builds on the assumption that in times of crisis citizens are reluctant to vote for populists or in other words to experiment in the European elections. Second, from its very beginning, the membership base of Libertas in various countries included either completely unknown personalities or parties and individuals well known for their extreme views. Third, as often happens, what could very well work in one country on one occasion did not work in other EU countries, let alone on a pan-European scale. Some commentators also point out that Declan Ganley was too inexperienced to run such a pan-European campaign, and in fact he did not even manage to win a seat in Ireland. Finally, the political message of Libertas was very unclear. While claiming to be pro-European, it presented many Eurosceptic or populist arguments, and also recruited parties with clear anti-European sentiments. If, then, people rightly perceived it as a Eurosceptic movement, it seemed to be very odd that such a movement was steered centrally from Brussels. We still need to wait however for a more elaborate analysis of the voting behaviour in these elections. Nonetheless, the lesson from Libertas's campaign can be very useful for the established Europarties too.

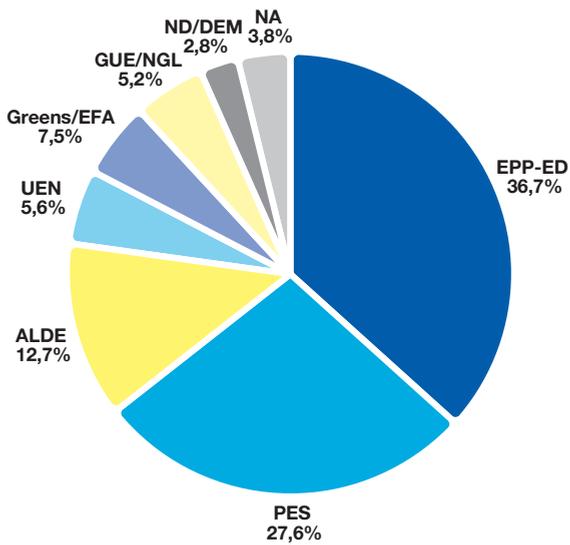
The results translated into a new legislature that overall is quite similar to the previous one. The two charts below compare the political composition of the newly elected Parliament (as of July 2009) with the 2004–2009 legislature (as of May 2009). These two charts are shown separately since the size of the Parliament was reduced from 785 (May 2009) to 736 (as of July 2009) MEPs. A useful comparison in these circumstances is the percentage of seats controlled by each political group.

Chart 4.1 EP Composition as of July 2009 (the constituent legislature) and as of May 2009 (the outgoing legislature)

EP Composition July 2009



EP Composition May 2009



Legend:

*EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (formerly EPP-ED)*

*S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (formerly PES Group)*

*ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe*

*GREENS/EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance*

*ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group (including Polish Law and Justice, the largest party of the former Union for a Europe of Nations Group, UEN)*

*GUE/NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left*

*EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group (based on Independence/Democracy Group, IND/DEM)*

*NA: Non-attached*

## Political group formation

Despite overall continuity in terms of political composition, a number of changes are likely to affect the way politics proceed in the new EP. First of all, already before the elections the British Conservatives had decided to split from the EPP-ED and create their own political group. This move, which had been announced with increasing intensity since 2007, can be explained by the more Eurosceptic direction set since 2005 by the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron. However, previous Conservative leaders were also challenged to face this question, which had its roots in the internal divisions in the Conservative Party (see Gagatsek 2004). The arguments advanced by more Eurosceptically oriented Tories held that while sitting in the pro-integrationist EPP Group Conservative MEPs were not able to fully express their party's reservations about further political integration. On the other hand, the more pro-European members of the Conservative Party pointed out that they would never be able to exert as much influence on the Parliament's business as they were able to from within the EPP-ED ranks. While enjoying the benefits of membership of the largest political group, the British Conservatives enjoyed many privileges, including the right to vote differently on institutional and constitutional matters. Their special status was even enshrined in the name of EPP-ED Group, the latter acronym a reference to the name of the Conservatives Group from 1979 to 1992. However, David Cameron made a promise to withdraw from the EPP-ED Group in his election

programme for the Conservative Party leadership. When rumour had it that he was actually going to fulfil this promise, in EPP President Wilfred Martens demanded January 2009 that Cameron announce his decision in this regard before the EPP Warsaw Congress taking place at the end of April 2009, which Cameron in fact did, thus ending the history of the common group which dated back to 1992. It was clear that this step would be emulated by the Czech ODS, until then sitting in the ED wing of the EPP Group, and programmatically close to the Conservatives on EU matters. The intention of establishing a new group was officially announced in May 2009 in Warsaw by the leaders of the Conservative Party, ODS and the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) (Słojewska 2009). The new group was then formally established after the elections as the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); apart from the three above-mentioned parties, it included single MEPs from five other countries. The direct consequence of this step was the dissolution of the Group for the Union of Nations (UEN), in which PiS was the largest national delegation in the outgoing legislature.

Second, the extent of the PES defeat was slightly mitigated by the creation of a new political group together with 21 MEPs from the Italian Democratic Party. The new name of the resulting group was the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D). The Italian Democratic Party (DP) was created in 2007 in an attempt to unite Italian parties of the centre and centre-left. Its core was formed both from parties belonging to the PES and to the Liberal ALDE Group. These origins of the DP led to internal frictions over its European party affiliation and an initial inability to decide which European political family this new Italian party wanted to be associated with. Therefore, in the previous legislature 14 of its MEPS sat within the PES Group and eight in the ALDE Group. However, after the 2009 elections, in an internally contested vote, they decided to form a new parliamentary group with the PES, and in the end the name Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) was coined (Rosso 2009). The Democratic Party was intended to have special status in this

alliance, retaining full autonomy from the rest of the group, although it was not revealed to the public exactly what this means.

The newly formed Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) can be regarded as a direct continuation of previous Eurosceptic groups in the Parliament, such as Independence and Democracy, which had been present in the 2004–2009 legislature. Its core consists of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Italian Lega Nord (which previously was a member of the UEN Group). The formation of the other political groups remains as in the previous parliament.

However, concerning the Europarties, it is also important to consider two additional issues. First, we need to look at the effects of their campaign involvement. In this context, the election result is one thing, but it is equally important to analyse the impact that they made on the national electoral contexts. Secondly, we need to return to the question of the nomination for the Commission Presidency, since the victory of the EPP made it possible to propose the candidacy of José Manuel Barroso for a second term.

## The Role of the Europarties: *allegro ma non troppo*

The role of the Europarties can be analysed by looking at a number of indicators. As explained in chapter 1, they have not had an easy ground on which to appear as real electoral players. The main limitations of their greater campaign involvement have to do with the structural characteristics of the EU political system, which generally speaking is not conducive to the emergence of real party competition modelled on national patterns. Second, the dynamics of EP elections rest on the fact that these are in fact national elections with a European result, and from this point of view for some national parties the greater involvement of the Europarties may be simply redundant. Finally, the Europarties suffer from their own internal weakness and the lack of agreement among the

national member parties to strengthen their transnational campaign efforts. However, as shown in chapter 3, the most recent campaign was marked by a few important novelties, which overall made some limited progress towards showing the relevance of Europarties as campaign players. In this section, I will focus on analysing the extent to which the national member parties highlighted their transnational involvement by looking at the use of common programme documents and visual imagery.

Traditionally, since the main area of Europarty activities used to be focused on adopting a common electoral manifesto, most researchers have tried to assess whether national member parties in fact made use of these common transnational manifestos. Their usual conclusion up to the 2009 elections was that in most cases the use of these manifestos was very limited if not inexistent. However, as shown in chapter 1, given that the Euromanifestos were based on the lowest common denominator, lacking sufficient vigour to serve as documents for electoral campaigns, it is not surprising that most national parties were reluctant to use them. In fact, why would the national parties want to use these general documents, often unrelated to the specific national contests, in an electoral campaign based on national rather than European themes? Therefore, from this point of view, before we measure the adoption of the Europarty manifesto by a national party as its own election document, we should first identify the reasons why the national parties would want to use the Europarty manifesto in the first place, or, more generally, why they would want to mention their transnational links.

For many parties, membership in a transnational party family increases their stature in national politics. This is often the case with newly established parties, or those originating from new Member States such as Romania and Bulgaria. From this point of view, making reference to or even fully adopting the Europarty manifesto is a function of this larger trend. On the other hand, the matter is not so obvious, since political opponents may put the argument that being a member of a Europarty or party group in the EP in fact limits room for independence, as it subjects national

parties to a common Europarty line. This was the case in Poland, for example, when the main opposition party, Law and Justice, accused the governing Civic Platform, an EPP member, of being under German influence, given the leading role played by the CDU/CSU in the EPP (for more details see Gagateg, Grzybowska and Rozbicka forthcoming). Moreover, an internal source within the Dutch Christian Democrat Party (CDA), another EPP member, has reported that their opponents tried to compromise them by highlighting their links to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose party is also a member of the EPP. Already after the elections, the British Labour Party (and the British media likewise) accused the Conservatives that by creating a joint political group with Polish Law and Justice they were allying themselves with a racist and homophobic party. The PES and the ELDR have had fewer problems of this kind, but nonetheless it can be concluded that whether a national party ever mentions its transnational links is not only a question of its own internal considerations or the efforts made by the Europarty, but also one of the dynamics of domestic party competition. Thus it is common in Cyprus for parties' national campaigns to be linked to their respective Europarties. On the other hand, this is hardly possible in the UK, where none of the parties used a Europarty manifesto in their campaign. This matter is therefore very complex, and simply measuring the number of uses of a transnational party manifesto by national parties may not always work as a good indicator of campaign involvement.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that given the domestic nature of these elections, national parties very rarely use the Europarties' manifestos. Despite this, all the major Europarty officials I interviewed argued that even if most national parties do not use the Euromanifesto, they take it as a point of departure in developing their own national manifestos for the European elections. In other words, national parties looked at their Europarty's common programme and then tried to implement or adapt these solutions to the national context. This point was made by both EPP and ELDR officials, and PES insiders claimed that nearly all their member parties felt obliged to declare that

their national programmes were strongly based on the European programme (even though, as they admit, this was not always the case in fact). On the other hand, the Greens argued that whether their national member parties use their Euromanifesto was less important than in the case of the other Europarties, because they believe that they are more coherent programmatically than their political opponents. For example, the co-spokesperson of the EGP, Philippe Lamberts, saw no problem in a situation where some national Green parties adopted their own manifestos (as the most successful Green parties in France and Germany did) rather than basing their campaign on the EGP manifesto, since they were not contradictory and the EGP manifesto was 'equally valid'. Nevertheless, other officials noted a certain backward trend compared to the 2004 European Greens campaign.

In line with the previous explanations, a second strong indicator of Europarty campaign involvement is the use of common visual imagery. In this context, the EPP was in a much worse position than the other major parties in the recent election. First, it did not have the same colour all over Europe, whereas the Socialists (red), Greens (green, obviously, but also a yellow sunflower) and even Liberals (blue) benefited from consistency of colour in many EU Member States. Second, the EPP has a problem with its name (European People's Party), which does not seem to be particularly catchy, and above all may refer to a large number of political strands and tendencies. As for its value as a marketing term, EPP insiders admit that in most countries it constantly faces a problem of low 'brand awareness'. The ELDR is in rather a similar situation regarding its name (European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party), but instead of using it, it simply refers to itself as the 'European Liberals'. With regard to the PES, its name is translated according to national traditions and contexts; for example in Italy it is translated as the Party of European Socialism and in Germany as the European Social Democratic Party. The Greens, however, are in a more comfortable position, since both their visual identity and the names of the different national parties (referring either to 'green' or 'ecology') leave no doubt about their identity.

In this regard, the member parties of the EPP and the ELDR rarely make the link to the logo of their Europarties. However, during the recent election the EPP took an important step, since the Greek, Cypriot and in particular the French member parties clearly included the EPP logo on their election materials. ELDR insiders admit that their logo was used more often on the websites of the candidates than of the parties. The story was different in the case of the PES and Green national member parties, who for the most part referred to their common visual identity (for example many Socialist parties, such as the French, Spanish and British ones, still have a red rose in their logo, which has come about spontaneously). So, while PES insiders admit that it was relatively easier for them to run a more European campaign, they say that what counts is that they did in fact do so.

In sum, progress since the previous elections was visible, but still very limited. In fact, this was commonly pointed out by the Europarty officials themselves. They are not real campaign players but only provide tools, with the real campaigning undertaken by the national political parties. The reasons why some national member parties have started to show their transnational party links are always country-dependent.

What did change in these elections was the arrival of extensive online campaigning. Nonetheless, this was not really a pan-European campaign, since the election websites of the four largest parties were available in at most two languages (English and French). EPP officials explained this by their still-limited financial resources. In short, each Europarty achieved successes in different areas. According to EPP officials, apart from reconfirming their position as the largest group in the EP, their greatest success was perhaps the fact that they managed to unite behind Barroso's candidacy for the Commission Presidency, and did so as early as their April congress in Warsaw. Socialist insiders pointed to the big effort they had made to offer their member parties as many campaign tools as possible, making the PES a part of the campaign. ELDR officials argued that despite the expectation that liberal ideology and the market economy

would be blamed as the root of the financial crisis, this did not really translate into the results, as they managed to maintain the number of MEPs they had had before the elections. Finally, the Greens believed that they were able to campaign with a common political message (the Green New Deal), maintain a clear pro-European profile and a common slogan all over Europe; also, they agreed to strongly oppose Barroso's candidacy. This leads us smoothly to the final part of this chapter regarding the nomination of José Manuel Barroso for the Commission Presidency and the role of the Europarties in this process.

## The Struggle Over Barroso's Nomination for the Commission Presidency

The overall intensification of the PES's criticism of the EPP and its member parties explained on the previous pages should be seen in a particular political and legal context, which underlines the importance of the 2009 elections. The battle was not only about the majority in the EP but also about the Commission Presidency. From this election onwards, thanks to the combination of legal and political circumstances, the nomination of the President of the European Commission depends much more on which political family—that is, which political party at the European level—wins these elections by securing a majority in the European Parliament. In order to fully understand how the Europarties can influence the nomination of the President of the European Commission we need to go back to the year 2004.

Some time before the 2004 European Elections, Hans Gert Poettering, the then chairman of the EPP-ED Group, announced that, in the spirit of the Constitutional Treaty (which at that time was still in the process of ratification), he would not accept any candidate for the job from a party that had lost the European elections. He knew that it was most likely that the EPP would win these elections, but he suspected that European leaders would not take this into account and would propose a candidate from another European party. In fact, French President Jacques Chirac

and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder did later agree between themselves to ignore other heads of governments and propose the candidacy of the Belgian Liberal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Due to the opposition of the EPP Heads of Governments (though not unanimous), this candidacy failed. In turn, the EPP summit mandated its President Wilfried Martens to personally consult EPP party leaders on who would be their best candidate. In the end, the EPP came up with the candidacy of British Conservative Chris Patten, who at that time was Commissioner for External Relations and whom Martens himself put forward as a pro-European Christian Democrat. His candidacy was however coldly received in France and Germany. In these circumstances, the compromise candidate became the Portuguese Prime Minister José Manuel Barroso, leader of an EPP member party, who was later accepted by the European Council and the European Parliament (Martens 2006, 355–361).

Although it was a very important symbolic recognition of the role of the EPP, and potentially of other Europarties, the public hardly noticed. The question that appeared many times in internal discussion within the Europarties was whether they would decide to propose their own candidates for the post of Commission President. The PES discussed this issue during its Congress in Porto in December 2006. Within other parties there was also support for this initiative (for example, from the then chairman of the ALDE Group in the EP, Graham Watson). In late 2008, political scientist Simon Hix presented a detailed hypothetical scenario of just such a possible competition among candidates for the Commission Presidency (2008, ch. 9). According to this colourful scenario, each Europarty would agree on their top candidate for European elections, either because it would want to do so or because it would be forced to react to other Europarties doing so. Such a move would require a pan-European campaign, with public debates and media coverage in which the candidate would visit most countries. The candidates would then present their programme for the upcoming Commission term. Hix believes that voters would recognise for the first time the ‘European’ elements in this electoral campaign based on competition for the Commission

Presidency. Moreover, after the elections the candidates for the Commission Presidency would build cross-party coalitions in order to obtain a majority in the Parliament and in the European Council. In sum, this would lead to a complete change in the way in which the Commission President was nominated, but equally important is the probability that for the first time a significant number of EU citizens would follow the campaign. Similar ideas were also presented in a call published in March 2009 'Give European Citizens a Voice', endorsed by some prominent politicians including former Commission President Jacques Delors and former Prime Ministers of EU Member States such as Jerzy Buzek, Jean-Luc Dehaene, Wim Kok and Guy Verhofstadt.

At present we can conclude that these hopes were not fulfilled. On the other hand, one cannot dismiss the view that the case of Barroso in 2009 was another step forward in the politicisation of the process of the nomination for the Commission Presidency. As mentioned above, already during the 2009 campaign, EPP President Wilfried Martens made it clear that no matter which political family won the European Parliament elections, the winner should have the right to propose its candidate for the Commission Presidency (press conference attended by the author, Brussels, 30 January 2009). A few months before the elections, José Manuel Barroso made it clear that he wished to remain in office as Commission President. During his Presidency, although formally independent, Barroso did not deny his political connection with the European People's Party, often participating in its activities and enjoying its support in return. Most importantly, the EPP summit of 16 March 2009 formally supported a Barroso candidacy for the next term as Commission President, and so did the EPP Congress gathered in Warsaw at the end of April. This, on the other hand, was seen by EPP opponents as a partisan proposal against which they should offer their own candidate. The idea that the PES should propose its own candidate had already been in the air for a few years, but PES member parties were divided over whether this was the proper strategy to win that office in the end. The post of the Commission President is defined by implication in the Treaties as a non-

partisan function, therefore adding any clear partisan accents could be counterproductive. This is why, as shown above, the PES focused on criticising Barroso's policies, and waited until the election results for a possible counter-candidacy. In these circumstances the lead was taken by the European Greens. Just before their electoral congress, which took place at the end of March, its political group in the European Parliament issued a straightforward resolution entitled 'Stop Barroso.' The Greens believed that the Commission President should not be reappointed without taking stock of his performance. In their opinion, the fact that the EPP family and some other heads of government (among them Socialists) supported the Barroso candidacy without knowing the election results, 'prejudges the results of the European Parliament elections.' In their criticism of the current Commission President, they claimed that

Too often he has abdicated his responsibilities, demoting the Commission from 'guardian of the treaties' to lapdog of the most dominant Member States and most influential industries. When he attempted to lead, he has pulled into the wrong direction. His policies have contributed to the financial and economic crisis and failed to respond to them. They have consistently put the interests of unfettered trade and big business ahead of the environment. (EGP 2009)

The entire resolution featured 25 reasons for opposing Barroso's candidacy, based on allegations of a passive approach to the financial and economic crisis, reckless deregulation at the cost of social policy, favouring competition and deregulation at the price of development and solidarity, neglecting climate change and failing to promote democracy and human rights in the EU. The main Green politicians, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, said that given their size the Greens were not in a position to propose their own candidate for the Commission Presidency, but encouraged PES President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen to run for the job, based on a coalition of Socialists, Liberals, Greens and Communists. However, the fact that the four PES-affiliated EU governments—of Portugal, Spain, Britain and Bulgaria—openly supported Barroso

already before the European Parliament elections, made it difficult for the PES not only to find its own counter-candidate, but even to decide whether the PES should nominate a candidate in the first place. And this happened despite a call to the PES to find a counter-candidate against Barroso, signed a few days before the election date by former Socialist leaders such as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González and former French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (Taylor 2009a). In the end the question was solved by the very disappointing election results of the Socialists, which deprived them of any legitimacy to think about the Commission Presidency.

After the elections, Barroso was fully supported by his own EPP (265 MEPs) and the newly created conservative ECR Group (54 MEPs), which favoured his pro-market and anti-red tape policies. According to current treaty rules, it was enough for Barroso to obtain a majority of the votes of those present. However, according to the Lisbon Treaty (at that time expected to come into force after a positive result of the Irish referendum in early October), he would need an absolute majority of seats (half of the total number of MEPs plus one), amounting to 369 MEPs. Given that some MEPs were calling for the vote to be repeated once the Lisbon Treaty came into force, such a strong absolute majority of 369 MEPs would give Barroso greater legitimacy. However, in both cases, apart from the EPP and ECR votes, he also needed the support of at least the liberal ALDE group (84 MEPs). Despite the generally negative approach of the S&D Group, he could also count on those Socialist MEPs whose parties or governments supported his candidacy. Finally, it was clear that for various reasons he could not count in any way on support from the Greens, Communists and Eurosceptics. But above all he had to choose a balanced strategy to ensure the proper recognition of the Parliament's rights as a whole. So it was important that he speak to all the political groups in the EP. The subsequent events can be analysed by looking at the motivations of the actors in this process.

The EPP Group was trying to ensure that the Barroso candidacy was voted on as soon as the EU Heads of States and

Governments agreed on his candidacy, which took place on 18 June. Soon after, the chairman of the EPP Group, Joseph Daul, said that the technical agreement to share the EP Presidency between the EPP and the PES should be based on the PES's support in a vote for Barroso already in July, in the first session of the newly elected Parliament. The Socialists rejected this condition and argued that if Barroso's candidacy were voted on already in July, then they would not have enough time to discuss his programme (Mahoney 2009c). At this stage, PES President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen reportedly still believed that they would be able to find a counter-candidate, and was demanding a vote only after the holidays. The ALDE Group now joined the struggle. Already before the elections, its then leader, Graham Watson, made their support for the Barroso candidacy (and then for an early vote in July) conditional on an agreement to share the Presidency between the EPP and the ALDE, rather than between the EPP and the PES. This agreement did not come into being, partly because the EPP did not want to break the grand coalition, and partly because under the new leadership of Guy Verhofstadt (who replaced Watson) the ALDE had ruled out a centre-right alliance in the EP. Not without importance was the fact that, unlike Watson, Verhofstadt was reported to be sceptical about Barroso and at a certain stage was even mentioned in the press as a possible counter-candidate against him. However, Verhofstadt himself denied that he was trying to bring down the Barroso candidacy, but instead argued that he wanted to be sure that the new Commission President had the right programme for the next five years (Taylor 2009b). In these circumstances, the ALDE group joined the S&D and the Greens and succeeded in, first, postponing the vote at least until September, and second, demanding that Barroso present a written programme for his next five years in office. Soon after this, the Socialists presented 11 demands to Barroso (calling for the adoption of a charter of women's rights and effective regulation of financial markets), and the ALDE issued a list of five demands (most importantly, calling for the creation of a separate Commissioner for human rights and the creation of a European financial supervisory body) (Mahoney 2009b).

In September Barroso presented a 41-page document listing his priorities for his next five years in office. Apart from trying to offer a very balanced programme containing some elements of the programmes of both the ALDE and S&D Groups, he defined the Commission as political but not partisan and offered the Parliament ‘a special relationship’ working together on the political priorities (Mahoney 2009a). Barroso was at the time meeting with all the political groups to convince them to support him. Against the accusations that his views were too conservative, he replied, ‘my party belongs to the European People’s Party, so I could be considered centre right, but I am not a conservative. Not that it’s a crime to be a conservative, but I’m not ... I’m a reformist of the centre’ (Philips 2009a). A few days before the vote (scheduled for 16 September) Barroso managed to win the support of the ALDE Group (except for 14 MEPs from French MoDem). To Barroso’s advantage was the fact that the S&D was deeply divided over whether to vote against him. However, it was clear that smaller groups, the Greens, the Communists and most of the Eurosceptic Freedom and Democracy Group (EFD), would vote against him. In sum, a few days before the vote it was very likely that he would receive the majority of votes, but it was not sure what kind of majority he could count on.

However, in the actual vote, Barroso did unexpectedly well, winning an absolute majority of 382 votes in favour, with 219 against and 117 abstentions. This meant that the newly appointed Commission President met the demands set out by the as-yet-not-in-force Treaty of Lisbon. In addition to the EPP and ECR votes (319 in total), Barroso won 63 additional votes. According to the press, these extra votes came mainly from the majority of the ALDE Group, but also from some in the S&D.

## Conclusions

All these factors led to a situation where—at least at the symbolic level—a typical government–opposition power struggle has started to emerge, although it is still far from the situation known in national politics. Nonetheless, even if we simplify the matter

somewhat, we could say that on the one hand the government is represented by three actors: the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, who was running for another term, the largest group in the EP, the EPP Group, and the majority of EU governments in the European Council, who are affiliated with the EPP. On the other hand, the opposition is represented by the Party of European Socialists and its political group in the European Parliament (S&D). Such were the dynamics of this campaign at the European level before the elections, when the PES fiercely attacked the EPP and its policies, proving however unable to come up with a counter-candidate. The PES also proved to be fractured in its opposition against Barroso. In the subsequent horse-trading, the candidate tried to build a sufficient majority, first within the European Council and subsequently in the European Parliament, being supported by the 'governing' EPP.

The problem is that this conflict between government and opposition, even on the symbolic level depicted above, is not so obvious to the electorate, since they do not recognise the connection between the overall results of the European Parliament elections and the future nomination for the Commission President. Furthermore, the nomination of the subsequent EU Commission was postponed until three months after the elections. This meant that the link between the election results and the nomination of the new EU Commission President was even less visible to the voters. Finally, while fighting for the support both of the European Council and of the European Parliament, the candidate himself, José Manuel Barroso, had to balance between being seen as a partisan candidate proposed by the EPP and as a candidate for the non-partisan position of President of the European Commission. During his speech to the European Parliament on the day preceding the vote on his candidacy, he said:

A strong Commission has to be a political Commission. But a political Commission must not be a partisan Commission. As President of the Commission, my party is Europe. The next College, like the current one, will contain an important number of

members from a variety of political families. I am attached to having Europe's political diversity reflected in the College (Barosso 2009).

However, as the result of the final vote showed, Barroso's calculations aiming to win the support of all the main pro-European political families, including the Socialists, did not prove to be possible, and this sends a very important message for the future. On the other hand, it also showed that partisan considerations at the European level may not always conform to national motivations. Although the PES manifesto strongly criticising the conservative policies symbolised by José Manuel Barroso was supported by all PES member parties, some of them later supported Barroso's candidacy, putting the unity of the Socialist family in question, at least as far as this matter was concerned. Finally, it would be nearly impossible to expect the Portuguese Socialist government and the Portuguese Socialist MEPs to have opposed Barroso, even though he represents a party which they oppose at the national level. The question of nominations for EU jobs is still often treated in terms of national, rather than partisan or ideological, interests.

The Europarties made an effort to show their relevance to the voters and to the national political parties, but still it seems safe to conclude that Europarties must make a greater effort to convince their member parties that they are relevant to them, and that the overall advantages of strongly correlating their activities to those of their Europarty outweigh the costs. However, the number of problems still to be solved is large and one of them concerns low turnout. The final chapter of this paper will start by dealing with precisely this issue.

## 5 Challenges and Prospects for the Future

What can both the Euro and national political parties do in order to increase interest in European elections? This question has not often been asked thus far. The usual explanations for the lack of interest are voter apathy, the low visibility of the European Parliament, low media attention, a lack of understanding of European issues, a lack of Europeanised voting procedures, a lack of popular legitimacy of the EU institutions and so on. If political parties are mentioned as the cause of these problems, they are usually blamed for not emphasising the European elements of these elections strongly enough and instead focusing on national issues. This chapter will therefore focus on the challenges and opportunities that both the Euro and the national political parties are faced with. As such, it will omit some of the more general issues relating to European Parliament elections. A number of factors will be reviewed and commented on in order to explore how the political parties can improve the level of interest in European elections. It must be noted that the sections below focus on certain factors related to the political parties, are thus rather selective and, for the sake of the analysis, simplify certain problems. The first challenge that must be reviewed is low turnout.

### Breaking the vicious circle of low turnout

It has nowadays become commonplace knowledge that participation in the second-order EP elections is generally lower than in first-order national elections (see chapter 1). Researchers have employed very sophisticated analytical tools to explain the low level of participation and interest in European Parliament elections (Matilla 2003). The low turnout has perhaps been the most important element of the so-called second-order election

thesis, proposed by Reif and Schmitt already in 1980 (see chapter 1). One of the elements of this thesis is that people do not vote in these elections since they perceive the role and powers of the European Parliament as being very limited in comparison to those of their national parliaments. However, as explained in chapter 1, even though the institutional role of the Parliament has risen significantly since the 1990s, voter turnout has not kept pace, quite the contrary. For this reason the second-order election thesis is often criticised for not being able to fully explain the question of turnout in EP elections. In the 1990s researchers started to focus on different explanations. One of the lines of argument analysed contextual factors (such as compulsory voting, weekend elections, concurrent elections) that increase or decrease the probability that voters will turn out (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Another explanation is to argue that voters do not bother to vote in European Parliament elections precisely because they do not support European integration (Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson 1997, 1998). However, studies by van der Eijk and Franklin and others conclude that voters' attitudes towards EU integration have little effect on the probability that they will vote. In recent years the academic literature has noted that the second-order character of these elections concerns not only low turnout, but also second-order campaigning by the political parties and second-order media reporting about the EP elections (de Vreese, Lauf and Peter 2007). Overall, there is no doubt that not only does a low turnout give a bad impression about the level of political involvement and civic awareness, and the system of political representation, but also about the way political parties communicate with the voters and the media inform citizens.

Opinion polls conducted before the elections revealed that, on average, only 23% of EU citizens felt that they were well informed about the EP elections. The percentage of those who felt they were very well informed never exceeded 5%. This is also connected to the fact that the EP suffers from extremely little media attention, with the majority of citizens (53%) never reading, hearing or seeing anything about the EP in the media (Eurobarometer 2008). Journalists tend to treat European

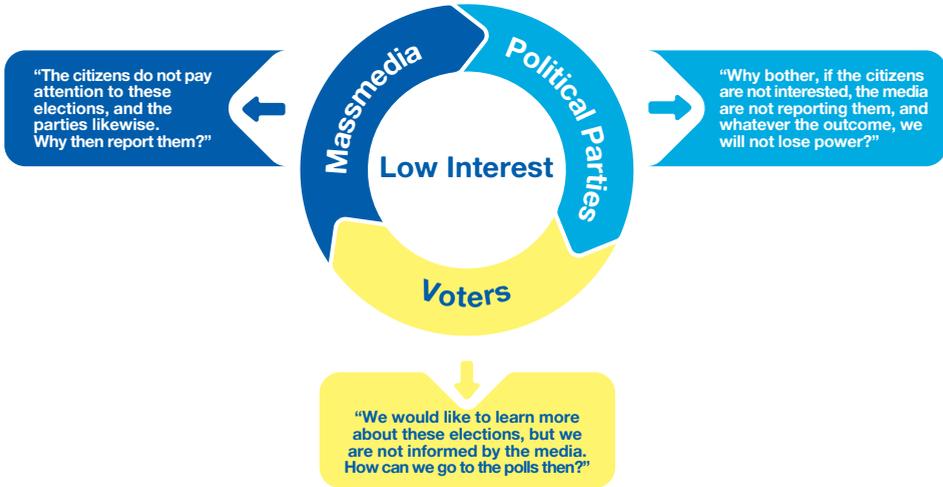
Parliament elections as complex yet marginal events. In consequence, as research has proven, the visibility of campaigns for European Parliament elections has been very low. Furthermore, when the media has reported on them, the focus has been on domestic politicians and has concentrated on domestic rather than European issues. In other words, they have followed the second-order national perspective taken by the national political parties<sup>6</sup>.

Journalists defend themselves by saying that, first of all, voters are not interested in these elections, and second, that the party campaigns are usually of a much lower profile than in national elections. For example, research has shown that parties spend on average only between 10 and 30% of what they usually budget for national elections, and also employ less sophisticated PR techniques. Overall, except for the candidates themselves, first order national politicians tend to marginalise the European aspects of these elections and instead focus solely on national issues. In effect, we are into what some people have called a 'vicious circle.' This mechanism involves three actors: the voters, the mass media and the political parties. In a hypothetical discussion between the three actors, based however on existing research and opinion polls, citizens commonly state that they are uninformed about these elections but would like to have information. They cannot find it in the media, since overall it is not interested in covering the event. The media argue in turn that citizens are not interested and political parties also pay little attention, at least compared with national elections. Finally, the parties observe that first of all the media are not very interested, nor are the citizens, and, with regard to the mainstream parties, no matter what the election result they neither gain nor lose power at home. This mechanism can be presented graphically.

---

<sup>6</sup> See the national case studies on media coverage of the European Parliamentary elections in Tenscher and Maier (2006).

The vicious circle of low turnout



Certainly, for the sake of argument, this mechanism is only hypothetical. However, the valid question remains, how can this cycle be broken?

The arguments concerning the lack of European awareness and the lack of a widespread European identity are indeed valid. However, by focusing only on these aspects, we tend to forget an equally, if not even more important factor: the campaign styles of the political parties. My main argument therefore is that the political parties should take responsibility for breaking this vicious circle. They should consider doing this not only to try to resolve some of the problems that the European Parliament elections face, but also to help them increase their voter share. In some situations it may be the case that a higher turnout will increase the electoral chances of many political parties. For example, the large mainstream political parties should ask themselves why it happens that new parties so often emerge or are given broad support in the European Parliament elections, whereas in national elections they usually do worse. Regardless of this, once the

political parties change at least some elements of their campaign style, it is likely that this will lead to increased media attention and consequently public interest in these elections. In sum, the political parties and their campaign departments should beware of three myths that are often present in national discussions about the EP:

**Myth 1: People do not vote because they do not support European integration**

Much existing research and many opinion polls clearly show that there is no correlation between non-voting and lack of support for European integration. In most countries, citizens tend to treat the EU in positive terms and they know the good things Europe has done for them, yet they abstain from voting. In this context, campaign strategies employed to boost the turnout, based on demanding electoral participation as a kind of gratitude towards the EU or a sign of support for it, should be carefully revised. There are other reasons why people do not vote, and since we are discussing the challenges for political parties, they should reconsider their attitudes and their campaign styles.

**Myth 2: People do not vote because they are uninformed about the European elections**

The relationship between these two factors is never automatic. However, opinion polls show that even when the citizens in a Member State declare themselves relatively well informed about the European elections, their declared willingness to vote is still lower than would be suggested by a theoretically logical correlation between information and voting. In Slovakia, 33% of the citizens feel that they are well informed about European elections (which is 10% above the EU average), yet only 15% are willing to cast their vote. In France, only 20% of citizens feel that they are well informed, yet 44% declare that they will go to the polls.

**Myth 3: People do not vote because of the lowly position of the European Parliament in the EU institutional structure**

The Eurobarometer polls show that the vast majority of citizens

(70%) identify the role and significance of the European Parliament as important or very important; 45% of citizens tend to think that this role has been strengthened in recent 10 years, whereas 23% believe it has largely stayed the same and 21% have no opinion.

Certainly, focusing solely on the opinion polls does not reveal the full picture, but nevertheless it is quite telling and, from the point of view of my argument about the role of political parties, can teach us a lot. What, therefore, can the political parties do in order to increase turnout?

First of all, the EP elections must become more politicised. Arguments that the only way for real European elections to emerge is through the introduction of a common electoral procedure should be treated with caution. What is needed in the first place is a greater level of politicisation of the campaign both at the national as well as at the European level. By the term 'politicisation', I mean both the need to show that parties really differ as to their solutions, and also that the Parliament is in fact the institution of all the EU institutions where partisan rather than national factors play the biggest role. Research has shown that in those Member States where the political parties disagree in relation to European integration, the media report on the campaign much more intensively (de Vreese, Lauf and Peter 2007, 128). This paper will return to this issue below. However, the first and foremost suggestion regarding the campaign for the European Parliament is that in general the political parties should try to combine both political and didactic messages in their campaign strategies.

## Combining the political and didactic message

The European Parliament tries relentlessly to inform citizens of the reasons for voting in European Parliament elections. As it had done on a previous occasion, the EP again commissioned a PR agency to consider how to reach the citizens and increase the

turnout<sup>7</sup>. Similar tasks are carried out by many NGOs, which in different countries organise the information campaign regarding the EP and the elections. Yet, as previously discussed in this paper, the parties have always taken a more political approach, focusing on national themes. This has not left much space for explaining to the citizens how the EP works. This is, in my opinion, one of the most important challenges for the political parties to face. In other words, their campaign should combine the political and didactic message in equal measure.

The reason for this strategy is that, although in many areas relating to the EP citizens correctly understand its characteristics, in others they fail to do so. One of the areas where they tend to be mistaken relates to the partisan and political character of the European Parliament. First and foremost, 44% of EU citizens believe that the MEPs sit according to their nationality, whereas 33% correctly answer that MEPS sit according to their political affinities and 23% do not know. From the point of view of the mainstream political parties, if there is one thing about knowledge of the EP that should be improved, it is exactly its partisan character, the role of the political groups in the EP and the significance of transnational party cooperation. Citizens should also know better the areas in which EP decisions affect their daily lives, and that in general 75–80% of the legislation affecting EU citizens originates from the European Parliament. Such a strategy may lead to a greater politicisation of the campaign, with citizens understanding that sending their representative to Brussels is not only about him or her being able to represent the national interest, but also about supporting a certain ideology and political programme embodied by his or her party.

In addition to citizens, the political parties should also target journalists. In an ideal scenario journalists would try to cover the areas mentioned above in their releases, focus on the differences between the political parties, ask the parties what they have done in the European Parliament during the previous term, and ask

---

<sup>7</sup> On the results of this campaign see Meyer (forthcoming).

them about their transnational party connections and how they benefited from them. Above all, it is absolutely crucial that reporting on the EP not be limited only to the time preceding the EP elections, as has been the case so far. In order not to lose the momentum that exists just after the elections, more attention should be devoted to the EP and its activities also during its term.

### Increasing the media presence of the Europarties

So far, the recognition of the Europarties in national mass media has been extremely limited, with only a few exceptions. One of the tasks that the Europarties faced in these elections was therefore to build their name recognition across Europe. They tried to do this in different ways, beginning with the use of the new technologies. New developments included their own online TV channels, the podcasting of various information, reports and news of party life, as well as increasing the number of their press and communication advisers. The Europarties realised the need to increase their presence in public debates. For these types of activities, they do not seem to need a green light from their member parties; to produce a TV channel they neither adopt common positions nor decide on any internal organisational changes. These TV channels simply report on their activities, and quite often also transmit live party events. In other words, the Europarties are looking for new fields complementary to those already occupied by their member parties and then trying to develop activities around them. By increasing their presence in the media, they will fill the gap left by many of their member parties. For example EPP President Wilfried Martens does not blame the national and European media for not being interested in Europarty activities; it is rather the national member parties in some countries which do not stress their transnational links enough. In sum, by developing their own means of communication, the Europarties are likely to reach citizens through national mass media, which might in turn force some national political parties to stress their transnational party links to a much greater extent than today. It could even be argued that political parties at the EU level might become more and more

similar to national political parties, in the sense of their focus on media techniques, TV, their own campaign, a greater presence in national political systems and direct contact with political journalists.

However, this does not mean that their potentially greater visibility will ensure a growing influence within the EU political system. Certainly, if the now-familiar proposal to elect a portion of MEPs in a Europe-wide constituency is ever adopted, this would further increase their visibility in the election campaigns. This idea has been debated since the late 1990s but has not been picked up on by the Member States. Today, except for the Greens and some individual politicians (such as Liberal MEP Andrew Duff), the Europarties themselves no longer stress it, and if they do, they simply express their hope that it could be maybe possible in the 2014 European elections. What could increase the influence of the Europarties without treaty reform, however, is the previously mentioned further politicisation of EU business, both policy and office-seeking, along the Left–Right continuum, not only in the Parliament but also in the other EU institutions. The literature has widely discussed how such a revolution could change not only the way the EU works, but also how it could serve as a catalyst for greater interest in EU politics among European citizens (see the work by Hix 2008). From the point of view of the Europarties, such a change would at the same time provide them with great opportunities, and this would be possible without a radical shift in the EU institutional architecture. Not only might the citizens become more interested in their activities but, even more importantly, the Europarties would become highly relevant to their member parties, which would voluntarily wish to be a part of the winning coalition of national parties under the aegis of their Europarty, both concerning policy and office-seeking. In this context, the most important question relates to the nomination of the President of the European Commission along party lines.

For the Europarties, it would seem to be an ideal scenario if each of them came up with their own candidate for the Commission Presidency. Their coordinating capabilities, the network they

created and their working methods would then probably be applied to arriving at a common candidate. However, the fact that the parties agreed on a common candidate and then supported him or her in the elections would not automatically mean the political strengthening of the Europarties as vehicles for bringing about these changes. It might well be that continuing in the current mode, the names 'EPP' or 'PES' would not appear in the public discourse, but instead 'the Left' or 'the Right' would appear. There are many other important questions: who would decide on the programme of the candidate for Commission Presidency, or, at a later stage, should coalitions in the Parliament and in the Council be accepted. Most likely, it would be the party leaders. But it would be very unlikely to involve the statutory organs of the Europarties, such as the congress. So, this indeed would be a main task before the Europarties: how to use the growing interest of national political parties to encourage transnational party candidates to build their identity among voters. It does not seem to be a completely impossible scenario that in, say, 20 years time the candidates for the Commission Presidency will be nominated during party conventions (or during the congresses). This would bring a real democratic ethos to the Europarties, as the powers of the leaders' conferences would diminish to the benefit of the delegates to the Congress. From a more general perspective, such a scenario would lead us to the 'Americanisation' of EU party politics and, even more generally, to its 'presidentialisation'.

## Conclusions

This chapter has presented a few selected topics related to the development of the campaign strategies of both national and European political parties. This aim can be well carried out through the politicisation of the European Parliament elections. Perhaps it sounds a bit tautological to ask that something be politicised which by definition should be political, but in the case of the EP elections at least three matters must be improved. First of all, the parties should emphasise the differences between them so that citizens realise that there is something at stake in these

elections. Second, citizens should be better informed about the partisan character of the European Parliament and the role of its political groups. Third, in order to achieve these first two aims, the political parties should combine both political and didactic elements in their electoral messages. Although it would perhaps require more effort to break the vicious circle of low interest in these elections, political parties can play an important, if not the most important, role in achieving this goal to the benefit of the citizens. Citizens might then be more likely to vote in these elections and would consequently legitimise the EU political system and the EP in particular.

Referring to the role of the Europarties, this chapter has rejected the commonplace arguments that the only way to increase the role of political parties at the European level is to standardise the election procedure across the EU. The Europarties should first try to present themselves to the citizens and emphasise the differences between them. In the not so distant future, the truly European parties can fill the missing link between the electorate and the political groups in the European Parliament, which in fact is the reason why they were created in the mid-1970s in the first place. However, it is rather misleading to expect that the Europarties will somehow resemble national political parties. Instead, the Europarties should identify the areas in which they can become relevant to their member parties, thus giving them added value. One of the areas reviewed in this chapter is the coordination of efforts relating to the nomination of the candidate for the Commission President, but certainly there are more, not only related to the European Parliament, but also to the other institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, and to other areas of activities such as building direct links with ordinary members of national political parties.

# Conclusions: Towards a Greater Politicisation of European Parliament Elections

Complex phenomena can rarely be explained in a simple and straightforward way. This paper has started with the assumption that the European Parliament elections constitute such a phenomenon, and from this point of view, the number of recommendations, schools of analysis and lines of argument may be quite large and varied. However, what the paper has tried to convey is that when we think about the challenges and opportunities faced by the political parties, or more generally about the European elections, we too often tend to neglect the basics and instead offer solutions and explanations that are too complex and distant. The political parties often develop sophisticated tools to convince the voters of their ideas but they forget to mobilise them to vote in the first place. The Europarties too often rely on top-down strengthening of their positions (such as through securing direct subsidies) but tend to overlook that what is needed without any institutional boost is an emphasis on the different policy ideas and solutions that they propose and the different ways in which they function. In other words, this paper has had the aim of reminding us about what in my opinion are the basics, and additionally reviewing the most recent developments relating to the campaign strategies of the Europarties.

Over time, the European People's Party (EPP) and lately the Party of European Socialists (PES) have focused their activities on organising leaders' summits on the eve of European Councils, thus becoming much more visible within the EU political system. What these parties recently faced when campaigning for the European Parliament elections was an even more important change, as they were given the opportunity to contribute to the electoral success of their member parties and thereby become

relevant to all of them. Many of the challenges the Europarties have to overcome concern wider characteristics of the EU political system and general changes in national politics, which impact the range of possibilities open to them. For example, despite some attempts to democratise the EU, there are still many areas for improvement (e.g., greater transparency in the proceedings of some EU institutions). Other changes have to do with the still-growing indifference of the national electorates towards politicians and political parties in general; these changes especially concern the notion of European elections as second-order contests.

Whether the Europarties can gain greater visibility depends both on them (how effectively they develop their communication tools), but also on the national political parties (the extent to which they emphasise their transnational links). In this statement is revealed the limitation to the independent political campaigning that the major Europarties can undertake and it speaks volumes about the nature of their campaign involvement. However, the areas where the Europarties could independently increase their presence are through establishing closer ties with the public and with journalists. Certainly, one cannot expect the Europarties to have all-embracing aims (their resources are too limited for that goal), but there exists much potential, as illustrated in this paper, where they could develop their activities without entering too bluntly into national party politics.

Such a change is in the interest of the national political parties. Because of the relative lack of knowledge about EU politics, they should combine in their electoral message both a political and a didactic appeal. While doing so, they should also emphasise the political weight of the election result, stress the differences between them and the other parties, and explain the internal political functioning of the European Parliament. How can candidates honestly make promises about what they will do in the EP without mentioning that in order to do so, they need to find backing first in their political group and then across the Parliament? In other words, in order to do this, they will most

often start by building alliance across partisan, rather than national, lines. A failure to convey the message of urgency is likely to lead to further voter apathy. Yet the political parties have the responsibility to break the vicious circle of low interest that has been described in the previous chapter. Although there is no guarantee that they will succeed, implementing some of the basic ideas presented here may be a good start. One of these is to introduce the Europarties to the public and to journalists, and emphasise the collective and partisan nature of the Parliament's functioning. Certainly, the small parties would prefer to be silent when the large parties use this argument, but for the sake of the general public debate, spreading the knowledge about the partisan character of the EP, about the fact that MEPs sit according to political affiliation, should be one of the major goals for the national political parties.

Whether people like it or not, in some Member States national political parties will be forced to mention their transnational links. The change brought about by Libertas, both in terms of its political message and especially of its pan-European ambitions, required focusing more on the European elements during the campaign in some Member States. In that sense, Libertas was in fact both a challenge and an opportunity for the other Europarties, because in some Member States their national political parties for the first time needed to use their transnational party links electorally.

The financial crisis established the atmosphere during this campaign. This was a prime opportunity for the Europarties to highlight the differences between them and catch the attention of the media and the voters. To date, especially when questions relating to the political aspects of EU integration are concerned, the major Europarties (at least the largest four) have usually presented a common stance. It was rather difficult to spot many differences in their overall support for EU integration. The focus on economic issues demanded by the voters therefore offered the pro-European political parties (both at the Euro and national level) the chance to distinguish themselves from one another.

Furthermore, given the pan-European character of the crisis and the number of common dilemmas and issues that it has led to, the question of what is a national and what is a European issue was not so visible, to the benefit of the campaign debates, thus bringing the aim of realising the European character of the European elections closer to success.

There are a great number of challenges which the individual Europarties will need to face in the next five years prior to the 2014 EP elections. To name just a few, EPP insiders believe that before the next campaign they need to continue to convince member parties to use more common slogans and develop common priorities for political work. Like other Europarties, the EPP also needs to intensify its press and media work. By creating the post of EPP spokesman, one step in this direction has already been taken. The PES clearly needs to prepare very well so that in the next EP election they can come up with a single candidate for the Commission Presidency. PES insiders declare that they will continue to strengthen their political family and polarise the European debate between the different parties. Finally, the ELDR and the Greens share one important challenge: their weak status in Central and Eastern Europe. All of the Europarties also want to follow more closely the policy discussions and negotiations in the European Parliament, for example by informing national member parties on developments in the EP more frequently, especially targeting ordinary members.

Since David Cameron won the Tory leadership, one of his promises was to withdraw the Conservative MEPs from the EPP and establish another political group in which they would be more independent and able to express their reservations about EU integration. This decision also marks the end of the 20-year-long EPP enlargement strategy. In the early 1990s, the EPP decided that the only way to outnumber the then largest group in the European Parliament, namely the Socialists, was to enlarge its traditional Christian Democratic base to include the Conservatives and other like-minded parties of the centre-right. Accordingly, the EPP Group accepted among its ranks the British Conservatives

(1992), followed later on by the Scandinavian Conservatives (1995–96) and by Forza Italia (1998), among others. As a result, by the 1999 EP elections it had again become the largest group in the European Parliament. Thanks to its 2004 electoral success, its position as the largest group in the EP was further stabilised. However, the price that the EPP had to pay was both its ideological widening (or, as some people believe, the watering-down of its political programme) and the departure of a few parties protesting against this strategy (such as the French UDF of François Bayrou and the Italian Margherita of Romano Prodi). With the entry of 10 new EU Member States in 2004, the internal variety of the EPP and its group became even greater. Furthermore, the EPP Group may change not only due to the loss of the British Conservatives, but also due to different electoral fortunes, which weakened the leading position of the Germans and strengthened the Italians and Poles. Sometime after June 2009 we will be able to witness how these developments will affect the future of the EPP, its political group in the EP and the Parliament's internal coherence and power balance.

## Reference list

- Agnew, P. 2009.** Walesa the surprise guest at Libertas convention. Irish Times, 2 May. <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2009/0502/1224245838434.html>. Accessed May 2009.
- Barroso, J. M. D. 2009.** Passion and responsibility: strengthening Europe in a time of change. A speech to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 15 September. SPEECH/09/391, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/391>. Accessed October 2009.
- Blondel, J., R. Sinnott and P. Svensson. 1997.** Representation and voter participation. *European Journal of Political Research* 32: 243–272.
- Blondel, J., R. Sinnott and P. Svensson. 1998.** *People and Parliament in the European Union: participatidemocracy, and legitimacy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brug, W. van der, and C. van der Eijk. 2007.** *European elections & domestic politics: lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Centre for European Studies (CES). 2009.** The tellbarroso.eu Project. <http://www.thinkingeurope.eu/content.php?hmlID=26>. Accessed October 2009.
- Eijk, C. van der, and M. Franklin. 1996.** *Choosing Europe? the European electorate and national politics in the face of union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Eurobarometer. 2008.** Standard Eurobarometer 70. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_en.htm). Accessed February 2009.

**European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR). 2009.**

Founding of the ‘Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR)’ asbl/vzw. 30 October.  
<http://www.ecrgroup.eu/founding-of-the—quot-alliance-of-european-conservatives-and-reformists—aecr—quot—asbl-vzw-news-19.html>. Accessed 17 November 2009.

**European Court of Auditors. 2000.** Special Report No 13/2000 on the expenditure of the European Parliament’s political groups. Official Journal of the European Union, 2000/C 181/01.

**European Green Party (EGP). 2009.** Resolution adopted by the 10th Council Meeting, Brussels, 29 March 2009.  
[https://www.ecogreens-gr.org/Docs/EGP/Stop\\_Barroso.pdf](https://www.ecogreens-gr.org/Docs/EGP/Stop_Barroso.pdf). Accessed April 2009.

**European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). 2009a.** ELDR electoral programme 2009–2014. <http://www.eldr.org/en/press/electoral-program-2009.php>. Accessed June 2009.

**European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR). 2009b.** European Liberal Democrats Campaign 09.  
<http://www.voteliberal2009.eu>. Accessed June 2009.

**European Parliament (EP). 2003.** Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding. Official Journal of the European Union, 15 November, L 297/1.

**European Parliament (EP). 2008.** Code of conduct governing the practice of campaigning for European political parties in European Parliament elections. Note to the Bureau, PE413.463/BUR.

**European Peoples Party (EPP). 2009.** Strong for the people.  
[http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/en-epp-manifesto-european-elections-final\\_copy\\_3.pdf](http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/en-epp-manifesto-european-elections-final_copy_3.pdf). Accessed October 2009.

- Five Institutes. 2009.** Give European citizens a voice: executive summary of the Five Institutes' study. March 2009.  
[http://www.iai.it/pdf/call/supporting\\_the\\_call.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/call/supporting_the_call.pdf). Accessed April 2009.
- Gagatek, W. 2004.** British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships. *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny* 6.  
[www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc](http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc).
- Gagatek, W., ed. Forthcoming.** The 2009 elections to the European Parliament – country reports. Florence: European University Institute.
- Gagatek, W., K Grzybowska and P. Rozbicka. Forthcoming.** Poland. In W. Gagateg, ed., *The 2009 elections to the European Parliament: country reports*, Florence: European University Institute.
- Ganley press conference (Declan Ganley). 2009. 27 February.**  
[http://www.polityczni.pl/libertas\\_atakuje\\_bruksele,audio,51,3395.html](http://www.polityczni.pl/libertas_atakuje_bruksele,audio,51,3395.html). Accessed March 2009.
- Hix, S. 2008.** *What's wrong with the European Union and how to fix it*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hix, S., and C. Lord. 1997.** *Political parties in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Hix, S., M. Marsh and N. Vivyan. 2009.** *Predict09* (website).  
<http://www.predict09.eu/default/en-us.aspx>. Accessed April 2009.
- Judge, D., and D. Earnshaw. 2008.** *The European Parliament*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Johansson, K. M., and T. Raunio. 2005.** Regulating Europarties: cross-party coalitions capitalising on incomplete contracts. *Party Politics* 11 (5): 515-534.
- Libertas. 2009.** Putting principles into practice – Libertas’ agenda for change. Libertas press release, 19 March 2009, <http://www.libertas.eu/en/news/162-putting-principles-into-practice-libertas-agenda-for-change>. Accessed March 2009.
- Libertas may run candidates for Europe. 2008.** RTÉ News. 4 October. <http://www.rte.ie/news/2008/1004/eulisbon.html>. Accessed March 2009.
- Mahony, H. 2009a.** Barroso fears lame-duck commission. *EU Observer*, 7 September. <http://euobserver.com/843/28619>. Accessed September 2009.
- Mahony, H. 2009b.** Barroso to publish policy programme for next commission. *EU Observer*, 2 September. <http://euobserver.com/9/28610>. Accessed September 2009.
- Mahony, H. 2009c.** EU Parliament continues to be divided on Barroso vote. *EU Observer*, 25 June. <http://euobserver.com/?aid=28374>. Accessed September 2009.
- Marquand, D. 1978.** Towards a Europe of the parties. *Political Quarterly* 11: 425-445.
- Martens, W. 2006.** *Memoirs*. Brussels: Éditions Racine.
- Martens, W. 2009.** Strong for the people. *European Voice*, 4 June. <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/strong-for-the-people/65051.aspx>. Accessed June 2009.
- Matilla, M. 2003.** Why bother? Determinants of turnout in the European elections. *Electoral Studies* 22: 449-468.

**Meyer, L. forthcoming.** The biggest marketing campaign in the history of the EU. In W. Gagatsek, ed., *The 2009 elections to the European Parliament*, Florence: European University Institute.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2006.** A stronger PES for a more progressive Europe: PES report of activities 2004–2006. Adopted by the PES 2006 Congress. [http://www.pes.org/downloads/ReportActivities20042006\\_FIN\\_AL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.pes.org/downloads/ReportActivities20042006_FIN_AL_EN.pdf). Accessed June 2009.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2008.** People first: A new direction for Europe. [http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook\\_EN\\_Online.pdf](http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook_EN_Online.pdf). Accessed June 2009.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2009a.** <http://old.manifesto2009.pes.org/en/documents/#link1>. PES Manifesto 2009: Documents. Accessed June 2009.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2009b.** 12 terrible candidates. 28 May. <http://www.pes.org/en/news/12-terrible-candidates>. Accessed June 2009.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2009c.** <http://elections2009.pes.org/en/print/en/yourspace/your-manifesto>. Accessed June 2009.

**Party of European Socialists (PES). 2009d.** <http://www.pes.org/en/news/epp-rely-usual-conservative-tax-cuts>. Accessed March 2009.

**Philips, L. 2009a.** Barroso holds his own in spectacular brawl with Greens. *EU Observer*, 10 September. <http://euobserver.com/843/28646>. Accessed September 2009.

**Philips, L. 2009b.** Far-right alliance fails to get EU Parliament cash. *EU Observer*, 12 November. <http://euobserver.com/843/28982>. Accessed 17 November 2009.

**Pop, V. 2009.** EU conservatives accuse Left of ‘agit-prop’ over economy. EU Observer, 23 January.  
<http://euobserver.com/883/27457>.

**Pridham, G., and Pridham, P. 1981.** Transnational party co-operation and European integration: the process towards direct elections. London: Allen and Unwin.

**Reif, K., and H. Schmitt. 1980.** Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European elections results. *European Journal of Political Research* 8: 344.

**Rosso, U. 2009.** Ue, sì dei big a Franceschini Pd nell’ Asde con i socialisti. *La Repubblica*, 17 June.  
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2009/06/17/ue-si-dei-big-franceschini-pd-nell.html>. Accessed September 2009.

**Schmitt, H. 2005.** The European Parliament elections of June 2004: still second-order? [http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/publications/papers/HS\\_EP\\_ParElec\\_2004.pdf](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/publications/papers/HS_EP_ParElec_2004.pdf). Accessed May 2009.

**Słojewska, A. 2009.** PiS we frakcji z Polakiem z Litwy. *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 June.  
[http://www.rp.pl/artukul/243283,323685\\_PiS\\_we\\_frakcji\\_z\\_Polakiem\\_z\\_Litwy.html](http://www.rp.pl/artukul/243283,323685_PiS_we_frakcji_z_Polakiem_z_Litwy.html). Accessed June 2009.

**Smyth, J. 2008.** MEPs seeking source of Libertas funding. *Irish Times*, 23 September.  
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2008/0923/1222105125507.html>. Accessed March 2009.

**Taylor, S. 2009a.** Former Socialist leaders call for challenger to Barroso. *European Voice*, 3 June.  
<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2009/06/former-socialist-leaders-call-for-challenger-to-barroso/65027.aspx>. Accessed September 2009.

- Taylor, S. 2009b.** Parliament groups vie to decide Barroso's policies. *European Voice*, 16 July.  
<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/parliament-groups-vie-to-decide-barroso%27s-policies/65501.aspx>. Accessed September 2009.
- Tenscher, J. 2006.** Low heated or half-hearted: the 2004 European Parliament campaign and its reception in Germany. In Tenscher and Maier 2006.
- Tenscher, J., and M. Maier, eds. 2006.** Campaigning in Europe - campaigning for Europe: political parties, campaigns, mass media and the European Parliament elections 2004. Berlin: Lit.
- Tindemans, L. 1979.** Le Parti Populaire Européen: finalités et perspectives d'action. In *Panorama démocrates Chrétien* 4:5-10.
- Van Hecke, S. 2006.** On the road towards transnational parties in Europe: why and how the European People's Party was founded. *European View* 3: 153160.
- Vreese, C. H. de, E. Lauf and J. Peter. 2007.** The media and European Parliament elections: second-rate coverage of a second-order event? In W. van de Brug and C. van der Eijk, eds., *European elections & domestic politics: lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*, 116–130. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Wierzejski: zaproszenie Wałęsy na kongres Libertas to sztuczka Ganley`a. 2009. 3 May.**  
[http://www.money.pl/archiwum/wiadomosci\\_agencyjne/pap/art ykul/wierzejski;zaproszenie;walesy;na;kongres;libertas;to;sztuczka;ganleya,95,0,448607.html](http://www.money.pl/archiwum/wiadomosci_agencyjne/pap/art ykul/wierzejski;zaproszenie;walesy;na;kongres;libertas;to;sztuczka;ganleya,95,0,448607.html). Accessed May 2009.

## 2009 European Party Manifestos

**EPP:** Strong for the people. [http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/EN-ELECTION-DOC-FINAL\\_copy\\_2.pdf](http://www.epp.eu/dbimages/pdf/EN-ELECTION-DOC-FINAL_copy_2.pdf)

**PES:** People first: a new direction for Europe.

[http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook\\_EN\\_Online.pdf](http://elections2009.pes.org/files/u1/ManifestoBook_EN_Online.pdf)

**ELDR:** European Liberals' top 15 for EP elections.

<http://www.eldr.eu/pdf/manifeste/eldr-manifeste-electoral-en.pdf>

**EGP:** A Green new deal for Europe.

[http://europeangreens.eu/fileadmin/logos/pdf/manifesto\\_EUROPEAN\\_GREENS.pdf](http://europeangreens.eu/fileadmin/logos/pdf/manifesto_EUROPEAN_GREENS.pdf)

## Wojciech Gagatek

Wojciech Gagatek is Lecturer at the University of Warsaw. He also collaborates with the Observatory on Political Parties and Representation based at the European University Institute in Florence. Gagatek's most recent publications include the edited volume *The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament Country Reports*, published online by the European University Institute in Florence.