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di

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**1. European political parties: the “status quo”**

This study aims to stress the need to consolidate a genuine system of mature European parties that can perform the long-standing task, assigned them by the Treaties, to contribute to the creation of a truly European political awareness among EU citizens as a key way to cope with the broad distrust towards the EU and its institutions arising among peoples of Europe in these times of crisis.

From this perspective, a proper analysis of the European parties’ role in the European political integration process requires to answer three main questions.

Indeed, it is firstly necessary to address the preliminary issue about the very possibility to refer today to European political parties already as a true “system” (Niedermayer, 1983); meaning whether they currently feature a structured and stable party set-up with their own (ideological and

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organizational) identity and characteristics, sufficiently autonomous from their traditional dependence from national parties (Allegri, 2013).

The question seems almost rhetorical and the obvious answer cannot be but negative. Indeed, even the most recent elections for the European Parliament have revealed that they are still almost-entirely entrusted to national parties. Actually, the anomaly still persists that suffrages expressed by electors who are *European* citizens for the appointment of a *European* institution take place with parties of essentially *national* dimension acting as middlemen (Ciancio, 2015a).

Truly, some progress has been made towards the consolidation of a true European-party system as shown by the elections of 2014, occurred through by the single nominations to the Commission presidency supported by the political entities identified in the main European political families (Cartabia, 2014). However, despite all efforts, the leading candidates were unknown to the majority of Union citizens and for many voters even the affiliation of the national parties to the European families was unclear.

Furthermore, since MEPs are proposed and supported by national parties, it is difficult for them to exercise their mandate in line with the primary interests of the Union. They are, therefore, driven to take charge of local political interests and in any case of State needs (Goulard – Monti, 2012, p. 43 ss.), notwithstanding the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon has changed their mandate, making them direct representatives of the Union citizens (Article 10.2 and 14.2 TEU) instead of “representatives of the peoples of the States brought together in the Community”, as previously laid down by the Treaty establishing the European Community (Article 189.1 TCE).

Moreover, national parties often cannot resist the temptation to use the European Parliament campaigns as a chance to still argue issues of strictly local interest and little relevant to the big issues that are currently affecting the Union’s very existence (Offe, 2014, p. 81 ss.). This peculiarity slows down the

process of political integration in Europe as, in the run-up to the European elections, the different political visions and interests concerning Europe itself, its policies, its role in the global context, its future, etc. are not fully presented to the electorate. Rather, election campaigns are played first and foremost in the national political arenas, leaving electors in the dark about the actual Union policy that would result from their votes.

This state of affairs makes it difficult for the citizens-electors to grasp the true supranational dimension of their vote. Indeed, elections are the main instrument of democratic participation, but the current functioning of European elections points out to an unbridgeable gap between the electorate and the European Parliament, exacerbated by the fact that Union citizens are still unable to fully take part in European political debates.

Hence suffers the very nature of the representative relationship. This topic has been argued in depth elsewhere (Ciancio, 2014a, p. 14 ss.) and therefore will not be covered again in this paper.

It is however important to state some considerations drawn from the creation process of European parties, which do not sprout from spontaneous phenomena of social aggregation around common ideas and political objectives, but rather as the “extra-parliamentarian projection” of political groups, which stem within the Parliament from the reunion of representatives from national parties with similar political profiles (Ciancio, 2007, p. 153 ss.). This is to say that European parties, rather than being the result of “social outcomes”, feature instead an “internal” – meaning primarily parliamentary – origin (Duverger, 1954). Their creation process has thus featured a “party-parliamentary group” dynamic closer to the British experience (Rossano, 1972, p. 281 ss.; Massari, 1992, p. 107 ss.; Tripaldi-Teklè, 2001, p. 215 ss.) – where the so-called *Parliamentary parties* precede the *Extraparliamentary parties*, which originally were mere electoral committees of the former (De Vergottini, 1973, p.

168 ss.) – rather than the more widespread experience of representative democracy systems of the European continent. In the latter indeed – as usually claimed - the groups represent parties' *longa manus* in Parliament as well as the instrument for the latter's "occupation" (to use a strong expression) of the representative Assembly and, more in general, of the institutions (Ciancio, 2008).

The peculiar group-party relation dynamic at the European level is reinforced by the provisions of the EP's general Regulation (Chapter IV), that refers to internal groups within the European Parliament as "political groups", excluding Parliamentary groupings of members affiliated only "technically", but lacking any political affinity, similar to the Italian "mixed-group" model, unknown to the European system. Indeed, the Regulation has since forever required that members share "political affinities", in addition to the numerical and transnational characters (Art. 30 Reg.), in order to constitute groups (Baroncelli, 2001, p. 14 ss.; Id., 2014, p. 104 ss.). Actually, according to the interpretation given by the European case-law<sup>1</sup>, only shared ideologies and program affinities, however generic and not excessively strict, might allow EP groups to transcend local political particularisms and, therefore, to constitute privileged "venues", in addition to exercising specific parliamentary attributions, and carrying out significant political tasks (Ciancio, 2008, p. 76 ss.). They consist in representing the aggregating venue of national political parties and so to compete to create supra-national parties able to promote European integration, as stated by the Treaties.

## **2. – European parties, fundamental features of the Union's political integration**

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<sup>1</sup> Court of First Instance, sez. III expanded session, 2-10-, joined cases T-222/99, T-327/99 e T-329/99, Martinez – De Gaulle – Front National- Bonino et al v. European Parliament, in *Racc. giur.*, 2001, II-2823.

The citation calls the attention on the provisions of the Union's primary law which, since Maastricht, point to European parties as the intermediate subjects between institutions and citizens<sup>2</sup>, meant to shape, interpret and receive the citizens' political will and convey it into the institutions (Tsatsos, 1995). However, comparing the norms provided for by Art. 138A, later (after Amsterdam's renumbering) Art. 191 TEC<sup>3</sup>, and the Lisbon's outcome, one can notice a slight difference in the wording of the provision on supranational political groupings. The difference would be of little interest were it not for the disappearance of the reference to European parties' role as fundamental "integration factors" provided for by the Treaty of the European Community, but lacking from current Art. 10, par. 4 TEU<sup>4</sup>.

This fact leads us to the second question relating to the actual role that the presence (*rectius*, the absence) of a genuinely European party-system plays in shaping the EU as a true political (no longer solely economic) community, willing to fund its functioning on the principles of representative democracy, as stated by Art. 10, par. 1 TEU. The article – as it is well-known – points to the Parliament as the venue of citizens' direct representation, even if it also provides for the indirect (but however democratic) legitimacy of the Councils (European and of the EU, Art. 10 par. 2 TEU) and states citizens' right to take part in the democratic life of the Union (Art. 10, par. 3), assigning European

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<sup>2</sup> On this point, it is worth mentioning that the first appearance in European primary law of provision on political parties occurred at the same time with the introduction of (then called) "community" citizenship: indeed, notwithstanding the provision on political parties was included in the section of the EC Treaty relating to the Parliament, it manifestly interacts with the idea of the European system as a political, and no longer merely economical, community conclusively accepted with the signature of Maastricht.

<sup>3</sup> "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>4</sup> "Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union".

parties the creation of political awareness and identifying them as the privileged channel to express citizens' will (Art. 10, par. 4).

Actually, extending our assessment to the whole Lisbon provisions, even with the (intended) absence of any "federalist" reference, the EU is now shaped as a truly, even if still in an embryonic state, political union, sufficiently defined in its legal and institutional profile (Weiler, 2003, p. 511 ss.). Indeed, it is provided with common institutions and related attributions, with a defined balance of powers (legislative, executive and judicial), even if according to a scheme of collaboration and complementarity towards a reciprocal equilibrium, rather than a separation. Competences are assigned in relation with Member States. An original system of sources of law is set, furthermore destined to prevail over national ones. A Charter of fundamental freedoms (and more in general, a body of inalienable rights) is defined and European Judges recently have shown to apply them even over traditional economic freedoms. Even more upstream, European case law ensures uniformity in the interpretation of the law through preliminary ruling ex Art. 267 TEU, essential for the very process of, at least, judicial integration (Romboli, 2014, p. 431 ss.). Above all, there is a common value heritage (Caravita, 2015, p. 15 ss.), including, as declared in Art. 2 TEU, the protection of human rights, freedom, equality, democracy and, more in general, the rule of law as shared values by Member States in a society based on pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and gender equality (Ciancio, 2016). These common values must serve the judiciary as canons of interpretation for and legitimacy parameters of European and national laws, as well as a warning and evaluation criterion for further requests of accession to the EU (De Vergottini, 2009).

And yet, the certainly prescriptive, as well as descriptive, force of these provisions and, more in general, of the whole legal system established by the

Lisbon Treaty still looks insufficient to root a deep sense of common political belonging to the Union, as easily ascertained among European citizens.

The statement is easily verifiable: only to give one example, it is sufficient to see the genuine hostility that most of the British people has shown towards the European integration process.

Actually, no one can doubt the contribution that Great Britain has given to the consolidation of the common constitutional heritage explicitly referenced to in Art. 2 TEU. It is sufficient to refer to the *Magna Charta Libertatum* and the birth of the so-called "*habeas corpus*", pioneer of what in the following centuries would be identified as the freedom of freedoms i.e., personal freedom, as well as to the motto "*no taxation without representation*", summarizing the foundation principles of modern representative democracies, conventionally affirmed in the English political-constitutional experience much before the traditional codification in the Bill of Rights of 1689. Moreover, certainly English, even if hidden in anonymity, was that thinker who foresaw the need to separate the legislative from the executive power in order to guarantee the rights that nature attributes to men, all born equally free in nature, and that the State will later be called upon to acknowledge and, therefore, protect (Locke, 1690). And this occurred, as it is well-known, almost 60 years before another old-world scholar, also to remain anonymous, building up on other philosophical assumptions, refined these considerations and neatly concluded that "*pour qu'on ne puisse pas abuser du pouvoir, il faut que (...) le pouvoir arrête le pouvoir*" (De Secondat, Baron de La Brede et de Montesquieu, 1748, Chap. 4), setting with such a statement the theoretical foundations of Art. 16 of the "*Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*", unanimously considered by law-scholars as the corner stone of constitutionalism's achievements.

Despite of this fact, considering the European political union project, Great Britain has been particularly wary. Indeed, not only has it always declined to be

part of the common currency, which certainly represents a decisive milestone of the political community, being the currency an essential declination of sovereignty. More recently, it has also demanded more and more urgently (further) restorations of its sovereignty to the cost of its own exit from the Union as the majority of the British voters has just decided - as well known - in a referendum on whether to leave the EU (the so-called "Brexit").

Looking elsewhere, the picture does not get any fairer. Just as another example, one can consider the recent events in France, another great European country that, drawing from well-known philosophical assumptions ranging from natural law, enlightenment and rationalism, has historically contributed decisively to the foundation of the value system concisely summarized in the basic principles of the rule of law. It has recently seen the electoral triumph of the extreme nationalist right, first in the administrative elections and afterwards in the European ones. The party led by Marine Le Pen focused its electoral campaign on French exit from the euro, riding the malaise that a great part of the electorate had already manifested towards the project of a European political union ever since the 2005 referendum on the "Treaty adopting a Constitution for Europe".

These examples lead us to doubt that the mere force of legal provisions would prove sufficient to make European citizens feel that *idem sentire*, which represents the necessary condition for the establishment of the (*recte*, of any) political community.

Holding this thought, one cannot but consider that in contrast with a sufficiently defined, even "sophisticated", legal institutional system – already defining the EU as a, however embryonic, political union– it is possible to perceive a manifest lack of consent towards the project of ever closer political integration among the European peoples. The reasons are to be found, among other things, in the ever-lasting lack of democratic legitimacy of the Union in



the new and different shapes it has taken after the signature of Lisbon (Manzella, 2014, p. 5 ss.).

Indeed, the Lisbon Treaty extended Parliament's legislative and political control powers (Fasone –Lupo, 2012, p. 329 ss.), as well as national Parliaments' participation to the European decision-making process (Lupo, 2014, p.101 ss.) The still-lingering issue is the profound "detachment" between European society and the Union's institutions (Grimm, 2014). A distance largely explained by what has elsewhere been defined as a mere "formal" representation of the EP, due to suffrage's direct expression (Kelsen, 1981, p. 124 ss.), but unsupported by a so-to-say "substantial" representation. The issue will persist as long as people's incentive to participate in the vote and what it stands for in terms of legitimization will not be managed by parties of true European scope, but instead by national parties (Ciancio, 2014b, p. 4 ss.).

Moreover, this state of affairs hinders the creation of a "European political awareness", as hoped for by the Treaties, which ever since Maastricht have identified European parties as the privileged channels to express the political willingness of Union's citizens. European Parties indeed would truly provide for the necessary integration factors. Indeed, consolidating a structured system of European parties, really bounded with society, would favour the creation, among European citizens, of that sense of common identity necessary to transpose everyone's national identity in a wider contest of supranational dimension. Conversely, lacking any European-wide political association, functioning first and foremost as tools to foster, even before receiving, citizens' political will conveying it into the institutions, it becomes difficult to identify the essential integration factor able to replace with a general sense of belonging to the Union the lack of natural cultural identifiers, e.g. a common language (Grimm, 1996, p. 360 ss.).

Therefore, each European political party has the fundamental task to convey popular consent towards certain (i.e. “partial”) political ideas of Europe and, even most importantly, all together towards the idea itself of the EU as a true political Union. They are thus called to work in this direction to confer “effectiveness” to the European political project, in the sense of *spontaneous and generalized adherence to the Union’s legal system and its values*, beyond the effectiveness achieved through judicial means, which however have so far represented an important channel for integration (Ruggeri, 2014, p. 473 ss.; Id., 2016, p. 18 ss.).

Moreover, fostering an *idem sentire (de “europa”)* represents the necessary step for the adoption of the “political fundamental decision”. Without it, it looks unlikely (and in any case futile) to re-launch the constitutional process so long argued for to overcome the Lisbon “compromise” and all the limits it has revealed, particularly upon the spread of the crisis and the following adoption of the so-called “*a latere*” Treaties (Morrone, 2014).

It is also worth mentioning that nowadays at the European level, parties seem not sufficiently involved in, not to say foreigner to, the creation of political agendas. Indeed, national parties in their traditional forms have been *in primis* cultural actors and the main characters of the economic and social planning. On the contrary, the supranational level seems lacking, so to say, such essential political function. Indeed, on the one hand, big decisions are taken elsewhere – if for instance, great issues of bioethics are either solved case by case by judges or regulated differently by national systems; and, on the other hand, macroeconomic decisions are in practice taken by the ECB (an independent, and therefore, apolitical institution by definition) – the capacity for integration, i.e. for identification/mobilization of the so called European parties comes to fail and the appointments to the EU institutions seem to slack off to the application of a “Manuale Cencelli”, so that each State will every time nominate the

member most appreciated to the strongest national party at the time (Bardi-Pizzimenti, 2013).

Therefore, European parties also ought to perform the essential task of elaborating what one might call “performances of political unity” (Ridola, 2009, p. 6), which would further contribute to the creation of European political awareness and, more in general, to perform a task which we might define of “political-cultural mediation” between institutions and citizens. The parties would receive citizens’ opinions, identify and conveying their interests in the European decision-making process, through their preventive, necessary and genuine rooting in society.

### **3. – European political parties’ development prospects: a) Statute and financing**

The third question at this point is consequential and concerns the buttons to push to consolidate a genuine European system of mature political parties.

From this perspective, it is interesting to recall the birth and developments of the Regulation on the “statute ad financing of European parties”, firstly adopted according to the current mandate of Art. 224 TFEU (ex Art. 191, 2 co. TEC) in 2003<sup>5</sup>, amended in 2007 and recently (with the reform of April 2014) directed to define a unitary model of European parties independent from national parties’ structure (and limits) and to favour the positive, factual and concrete commitment of supranational political associations in the elections for the European Parliament.

It is unnecessary here to retrace the details of the events that led to the approval of provisions on the financing of European parties (Grasso, 2008, p. 623 ss.). For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to signal the highlights of the evolution

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<sup>5</sup> EC Reg. n.2004/2003.

of a regulation, born with the ambitious name of “statute”. They, far from creating a true statutory scheme common to all European political entities featuring the typical contents of party statutes, have initially pursued the (more limited) aim to define the requirements that supranational political groupings must comply with in order to reach the status of “European parties”, title which makes them eligible for financing from the European budget (Martinelli, 2004, p. 418; Grasso, 2010, p. 620 ss.).

Notwithstanding the fact that the first norms of 2003 showed the subordination of the “European party” figure to the structure adopted by parties within the national systems, nevertheless from the whole original regulation it is nevertheless possible to perceive the push towards a sort of institutionalization of supranational political groupings (Lippolis, 2002, p. 959). In other words, the result was at least to start the consolidation process of a European political representative system independent from national political groupings (Fusacchia, 2006, p. 88), achieved mainly through the prohibition to use funds given to European political entities to finance, behind them, national parties (art. 7).

The purpose appeared even more evident and better served already by the first amendments, adopted in 2007 with the approval of the new rules on the activity and financing of European parties<sup>6</sup> (Ciancio, 2009, p. 19 ss.), according to a 2006 European Parliament Resolution<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, the Parliament acknowledged and urged to overcome some of the limits of the original financing system in order to deliver a “true and genuine statute of European political parties” with the aim to define their rights and duties and give them the possibility to obtain legal personality based on European law and recognized in all Member States<sup>8</sup>. The main goal was to make European political parties “active players in choices

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<sup>6</sup> Reg. n. 1524/2007 of Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> 2007, in GU L 343 of December 27<sup>th</sup> 2007.

<sup>7</sup> EP Resolution on political parties of March 23<sup>th</sup> 2006, in GU C 292 E of December 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, 127.

<sup>8</sup> So n.4 of the Chapter titled “The political contest” in the Resolution cit.

of European politics, connected with all levels of society and open to the effective participation of citizens not only through European elections, but also in all other aspects of European political life"<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, on the assumption that parties at the European level are a "fundamental element to create and express public opinion, without which it is impossible to achieve further developments of the European Union"<sup>10</sup>, the EP considered desirable to strengthen financial assistance.

Leaving out other rules, it is worth assessing those mainly intended to free European parties' activities from their dependence from national ones. In particular, the disposition increasing (from 75% to 85%) the maximum contribution eligible from the Union's budget (Art. 10), approved with the aim to proportionally decrease the financing by national parties. Also, at last allowing European parties to use EU contributions to finance activities connected with the electoral campaigns for the EP (Art. 8, III co). Considering that such option was forbidden before, it is easy to grasp the innovative scope of the provision, which for the first time considers parties with a European dimension as entities able to autonomously commit in the elections for the European Parliament, together with and in addition to national parties. The norms also look forward to national parties' progressive dispossession, with the purpose to give a genuine European scope to the electoral conference.

Also worth mentioning, among the 2007 novelties, the expectation that "European political foundations"<sup>11</sup> work together with parties in order to supplement political targets, training and information activities by carrying out

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<sup>9</sup> Point 2 of the Chapter on "The political contest", cit.

<sup>10</sup> Point 3 of the Chapter on "The political contest", cit.

<sup>11</sup> Art. 1 Reg. 1524/2007, amending art. 2 of the 2003 Regulation, adding point 4 which identifies as the political foundation at the European level "an entity or network of entities" with legal personality in one Member State, "affiliated with a political party at the European level, which through its activities, within the aims and fundamental values pursued by the European Union, underpins and complements the objectives of the political party at European level".

e.g. “activities of observation, assessment and enrichment of the debate on European public policies and the European integration process”, as well as promoting actions concerning “issues of European public policies”, including organizing seminars, training events and conferences with the purpose to “promote democracy” (Gagatek-Van Hecke, 2011). It is significant that such foundations are eligible for financing only if formally associated with a European party. Indeed, they are able to apply for financial contributions exclusively through existing European parties, and by doing so contribute to the strengthening of the latter’s political and - one might say - also cultural mediation role.

Already the approval of the first norms on European parties’ financing and, even more, the 2007 amendments constituted an important step in the direction of giving to the European political debate an autonomous dimension, different from the local and national one. Such transformation has to occur through the intervention of political groupings institutionalized at the supranational level, tasked with becoming the main characters of the European elections and, more in general, required to deliver the mandate the Treaties ascribed them, i.e. expressing the voice of European citizens, receiving their political demands, enabling their effective participation and thus contributing to the consolidation of European democracy.

In this direction, the most important change seems to be the last amendment, occurred through the draft of a further new Regulation, definitively approved in 2014 (Allegri, 2014; Savoia, 2014, p. 10 ss.). The main feature it provides for our topic is the possibility for eligible political groupings to obtain, upon registration at the Parliament, a legal personality under European law and the relative common *status*, which allows them, through the acquisition of a single status based on Union law, independence from the national judicial features, which have so far influenced their structure and defined their limits. The

purpose is to at last enable European parties<sup>12</sup> to deliver the objective assigned them by the Treaties, i.e. “contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union”.

Indeed, only through an electoral competition wholly managed by supranational political parties, it will be realistically possible to achieve the objective of gathering citizens’ consent on European issues, programs, demands and ideals, thereby shaping their European “awareness” or, perhaps better, “consciousness”.

#### **4. b) European parties and uniform electoral law: waiting for the turning point**

In any case, the last amendment, expected to enter into force (only) on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, could not fully accomplish its desired objectives without the adoption of (at last) of a uniform electoral procedure, according to the current requirements of the first part of Art. 223.1 TFEU<sup>13</sup>. As widely argued (Vigevani, 2003, p. 175 ss.; Raspadori, 2009, p. 121 ss.; Habermas, 2014; Ciancio, 2014b, p.8), this would allow to present electors, within electoral constituencies of supranational scope (or a single constituency for the whole Union, even if difficult to implement in practice), unitary lists of candidates committed on the basis of common political programs and centred on genuinely European objectives and issues. Such organization would thereby foster public debate at a supranational level as a fundamental moment and truly structure Parliament

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<sup>12</sup> Literary defined in such a way only with the approval of these last provisions (whereas previously they were still identified as parties of “European scope”), which would then manifest in their very name at last attributed to European political groupings, the intent to free them from subordination and dependence from national parties, in which they had so far been entangled.

<sup>13</sup> Also in this case, we refer to a not-new provision, preceded by a similar provision already stated in art. 190.4 TCE.

elections as “authentically” European. In addition it would also constitute a further step towards the ultimate and long-argued-for goal of consolidation into a real system of European parties sufficiently independent from national parties (Lippolis, 2002, p. 956 ss.).

Considering actual implementation however, up until now the maximum achievement has been the Council decision n. 772 of 2002 amending the 1976 European Electoral Act with the formulation of some mere common general principles, among which the main one concerns the adoption of the proportional method by all Member States. Actually, since 1998 the EP has proposed to attribute a percentage of seats based on the proportional method in the contest of a single electoral district made up by the whole Union’s territory, but the proposal was declined by the Council, which decided to impose on Member States only the adoption of a common electoral method in the procedure for the EP elections , thereby making prevail the alternative (already laid down by the Maastricht Treaty and today by the last part of art. 223.1 TFUE) that elections occur “according to principles common to all member states”, however respecting the diversity of the single national laws.

Given these precedents, there is today great expectation for the Council’s final approval of the Proposal for amending the Act of 1976 regulating the election of the MEPs, contained in a new EU Parliament Resolution, finally approved on November 11<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>14</sup> (Ciancio, 2015b). Indeed, the Parliament decided to initiate once again the reform of its electoral procedure, well ahead of the 2019 elections, with the aim of “enhancing the democratic and transnational dimension of the European elections and the democratic legitimacy of the Union decision-making process, reinforcing the concept of citizenship of the Union and electoral equality, promoting the principle of representative

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<sup>14</sup> EU Parliament Resolution of November 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 on the Reform of the electoral law of the European Union [2015/2035 (INL)], in [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).



democracy and the direct representation of Union citizens in the European Parliament (...), improving the functioning of the European Parliament and the governance of the Union, making the work of the European Parliament more legitimate and efficient, enhancing the effectiveness of the system for conducting European elections, fostering common ownership among citizens from all Member States, enhancing the balanced composition of the European Parliament, and providing for the greatest possible degree of electoral equality and participation for citizens of the Union”<sup>15</sup>.

Actually, a big part of the proposed reforms concerns the need to ensure that European citizens exercise their right to vote (and to stand as a candidate in the EU Parliament’s elections) under comparable conditions across Member States, in accordance with democratic principles – equality, above all – without any regard for either national citizenship or country of residence.

Moreover, the Resolution shows the will to enhance the connection that ought to exist between the electoral procedure for the European Parliament and the role of European political parties in managing the elections, with the aim to strengthen democratic development and political integration in the EU, without forgetting the new rules for choosing the President of the European Commission, now strictly dependent on the results of the elections as enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon (Curti Gialdino, 2014; Id., 2015).

From this perspective, the drafters have highlighted the need to show the voters, during all the campaigns for Parliament elections, the true “political” meaning of their vote beyond the choice for a particular national party, due to the connection between the vote itself and its impact on the size of a European political group inside the Parliament as well as implicitly on the election for the Presidency of the European Commission. For these reasons, it has been argued

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<sup>15</sup> Point 1of the EU Parliament Resolution of 11 November 2015 on the Reform of the 1976 Electoral Act.

that the procedure for the selection of the leading candidates for this position should be an integral part of the election campaigns, constituting an important aspect of it, because the nomination both provides a link between votes cast at national level and the European dimension and enables European citizens to be informed about alternative political programs (Bonvicini-Tosato-Matarazzo, 2009, p. 182 ss.). Furthermore, the designation of leading candidates for the office of President of the Commission by open and transparent procedures reinforces democratic legitimacy and strengthens accountability. Consequently it has been urged that a common “deadline for the nomination of candidates by European political parties should be codified in the Electoral Act”<sup>16</sup>. This term has been set in 12 weeks in advance of elections, so as to enable the presentation of electoral programs to the voters and the organization of political debates among the candidates.

But, above all, since European political parties are best placed to “contribute to forming European political awareness” (Art. 10.4 TEU), they should therefore play a stronger role in the whole management of European elections and their visibility should be increased (Calossi, 2015, p.16). With this aim, it has been established to place their names and logos on the ballot papers and wherever possible on posters and other materials used in election campaigns, in conjunction with those of national parties affiliated with them. This kind of arrangements is mainly addressed to highlight the link between national parties and the big European political families, since those measures would make European elections more transparent and improve the democratic way in which they are conducted, as citizens will be able to clearly connect their vote to the impact it has on the political influence of European political parties and their ability to form political groups inside the Parliament. For the same reasons, the

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<sup>16</sup> Lett. O of the Draft Report approved last 30 of June 2015 by the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the EU Parliament [2015/2035 (INL)] in [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).

Member States are now encouraged to facilitate the provision of those affiliations on television and in other media and electoral campaign materials shall include a reference to the manifesto of the European political party, if any, to which the national party is affiliated.

Last, but not least, a notable amendment to the 1976 Electoral Act is laid down in Article 2a of the approved Resolution. It establishes that “the Council decides by unanimity on a joint constituency in which lists are headed by each political family’s candidates for the office of President of the Commission”.

Actually, as argued before, this is precisely the rule that would both greatly strengthen European democracy boosting the role of the European political parties in the elections and also mostly contribute to “create a pan-European moment”, enhancing the common European character of the European elections. Indeed, this purpose would be further served by lists of candidates evenly led by the leaders of the big European political families competing for the President post within a joint constituency.

Hence, from the perspective of this paper, the desirable ultimate approval of the proposal by the Council would truly represent a fundamental turning point towards the implementation of a genuine system of European parties as a necessary propulsive factor in the European political integration process.

How urgent it is after the “Brexit Referendum” outcome anyone can easily see.

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