Does the use of social networks by the European Parliament during the 2019 election campaign decrease the democratic deficit?

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Année académique : 2019-2020
URI/URL : http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/10844

Does the use of social networks by the European Parliament during the 2019 election campaign decrease the democratic deficit?

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Philosophy and Literature

Media, Culture and Communication

Master Thesis Communication multilingue, à finalité spécialisée en communication interculturelle et des organisations internationales

Academic Year 2019-2020

Summary

With the use of social networks, the citizens became aware of the new challenges in politics. The European Parliament was a pioneer in the idea of enhancing its legitimacy thanks to social networks and saw a possibility to reach a transnational European audience. It is even more convenient as the institution suffers from a perceived "democratic deficit" and "communication deficit": lack of transparency, remoteness of the institution, no support from the citizens, etc. In the context of the 2019 election campaign, however, the social networks turn out to be more complex than expected and the use the institution makes of the social networks is determining in the image it conveys. This work aims at showing the dynamics between "democratic deficit", "2019 European Parliament elections" and "social networks" thanks to the use of theoretical literature but also thanks to the critical discourse analysis of content of the campaign from Facebook and Twitter.

Table of contents

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank all the people who contributed directly or indirectly to the writing of this master thesis. First, I would like to express my gratitude to Geoffrey Grandjean, who promoted my thesis and for the time he dedicated to guide my writing. I would also like to thank all the teaching staff who have contributed to my personal and intellectual enrichment during my experience at the University of Liège. I would also like to thank all the people who surrounded me and supported me during this writing.

Abbreviations

EU: European Union

EP: European Parliament

MEP: Member of the European Parliament

PO: Press officers

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

DG Com: The Commission's Directorate-General for Communication

1. Introduction and definition of the issue

1.1 Introduction

While politics are at a time of crisis and reinventing itself and ICTs are an integral part of citizen's lives, the promotion of institutions and in this case, politics in social networks was seen as an ideal solution: it would make people closer to the institution. Pioneer of this idea, the European Parliament saw the social networks platforms as an opportunity to fix its "democratic deficit", the perception of its illegitimacy by the citizens. In this way, the institution aims at "closing the perceived gap" between the institution and the ordinary citizens. Yet, this ideal solution has been questioned and even more now as social networks have shown some failures to protect users' data and to safeguard the occidental idea of democracy. Data manipulation during important electoral events such as the Brexit Referendum and the election of US President Donald Trump infringed and questioned the democratic process. However, in 2019, not using social networks would mean failing to understand what is at stake for EU public relations. Indeed, in opposition to national media outlets, social networks are transcending national boundaries, which means it is an ideal communication channel for the European Parliament, targeting all the European citizens.

The European Parliament thereby has to figure out how to deal with all these challenges, hence the question is raised: "Does the use of social networks by the European Parliament during the 2019 election campaign decrease the democratic deficit?". This work aims at understanding how the European Parliament, thanks to communication on social networks, deals with the challenges it faces and if it achieves or not to overcome the perceived "democratic deficit".

I am fully aware that, by quoting Chiara Valentini and Giorgia Nesti: *"communication cannot make the European Union (EU) function better, nor solve its economic, social, political and environmental problems. However, it helps raising awareness and mobilizing people. Communication can be a leading tool for enhancing identity, integration, respect and*

democracy"[1]. At first glance, my hypothesis is that communication on the social networks may not reduce the democratic deficit in its "policy achievements aspects" but reduce the democratic deficit perceived by the citizens thanks to its engagement on social networks. In this sense, these effects would overcome anti-democratic aspects such as data manipulation.

To answer the research question, I will summarize and evaluate scientific literature on the key concepts of the question.

First, I will define the concept of "democratic deficit" and analyse the main theories: Weiler's "no demos thesis", Majone's "Regulatory regime", Moravcsik's "Defence of the EU's legitimacy" to Føllesdal and Hix's "upgraded standard version of democratic deficit". From these theories, I will generate my own theoretical framework from which I will be able to evaluate the European Parliament's 2019 campaign on social networks regarding the democratic deficit.

In the second part, I will get a global picture of the scholars' opinions on the 2019 elections in relation with the democratic deficit to understand the dynamics that are established between the elections and the democratic deficit.

The third part analyses the role of communication in the 2019 European Parliament elections. More precisely, I will discuss the communication tradition of the EU and the emergence of the idea of "communication deficit". I will take into account the communication objectives and strategies of the 2019 elections. I will also take into the role of media outlets in European Parliament communication and even more, the role of social networks and its position as a news source. I will deepen my point of view on different aspects of the social networks: the users, the treatment of information and the actual use the European Parliament makes of social networks.

In the practical part, I will evaluate the communication content of the EU 2019 election campaign in regard to the democratic deficit thanks to Critical Discourse Analysis.

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[1] (Ed.)Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.XIII.

Last but not least, the conclusion links all these key concepts, more precisely it links the theoretical framework about the democratic deficit and its dynamics with the use of social networks by the European Parliament in the 2019 elections.

1.2. The use of social networks

First, the following work focuses specifically on the use of Facebook and Twitter during the 2019 EU elections as they are the typical social media for political advertisement. The European Union's political parties tend to make stronger use of social media in 2019 as the European Elections Monitoring Centre (EEMC) reveals. It has observed a clear shift in campaigning tools in favour of social media. Of the 12,556 campaign contents observed by the EEMC, 11,083 contents were Facebook posts.

One of the main reasons is the low cost of content production and dissemination as the EEMC report suggests. As EU elections are typically considered second order elections, the allocated budget is less significant than for national elections. Thus, social networks are seen as an ideal tool.[2]

Then, the unregulated use of social media enables broader campaign opportunities. Each country provides its own laws on electoral campaigns. For example, in Malta, the eve of the polling day is a day of political silence according to the law, which is challenged by the use of social media.[3]

A third reason for this shift may be the lack of electoral preparation as in the case of the United Kingdom. Most of the campaign occurred on social networks as the parties became aware lately of their participation in the EU campaign because of the context of Brexit negotiations.

The last reason is that the social networks are seen as "closer to the people", which can be part of a political strategy as it was the case in Estonia: "*The simple smart-phone video [on social media] seems to be less elitist and more 'ordinary-people-friendly'*"[4]. Besides, the

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[2] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states";. *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* p.15-16.
[3] *Ibid.* p.184.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 94.

European Parliament can take an active part in the EU elections on social media for the same reasons.

2. The democratic deficit

One of the first steps in this work is to analyse the scientific literature on the democratic deficit, as the concept is central to the research question. The research question assumes that there is a democratic deficit. This first assumption is dismissed by some scholars or is interpreted in different ways according to the scholar's theories. I will first provide a general definition of the general meaning of the democratic deficit. Then, the theories of the main authors will be exposed, from which I will provide a general framework for the rest of the analysis.

2.1 Definition of the term "democratic deficit"

The notion of "democratic deficit" emerged in 1977 in the Young European Federalists' (JEF) Manifesto. The Manifesto emphasizes the idea of inadequacy of the political system. It condemns the inability of the state to change the system because of its bureaucracy and lack of closeness to people's needs. Its inability would also go with the interdependence of the European industrialised economies:[5]

> *Looking at Europe today, it is clear that there is throughout our continent a "malaise", a sense of alienation and a lack of confidence in the ability of the economic and political system to solve our problems. The spectacular increase in the number of campaigning pressure-groups, citizen's action groups, and even spontaneous revolts is a symptom of the inadequacy of the current system to take into account people's needs.*

Throughout time, the notion has gained notoriety. It has been studied in the academic world and in the European studies since the 1990s and various theories have emerged. They convey their own views on the idea of "democratic deficit". The term is usually interpreted according to four main theories that are developed in the following sections.[6] Yet, Andreas

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[5] Extract of the Young European Federalists's Manifesto. "The first use of the term ‘democratic deficit". *Federal Union*. http://federalunion.org.uk/the-first-use-of-the-term-democratic-deficit/. Accessed the 24th February 2020.

[6] Kratochvíl Petr et al. "The end of democracy in the EU? The Eurozone crisis and the EU's democratic deficit". Journal of European integration. 2019. Vol. 41. N°2. p.169-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1569001. Accessed 24th February 2020. p.170.

Follesdal and Simon Hix (see 2.1.4 Føllesdal and Hix's upgraded standard version of democratic deficit) provide its general characteristics, used to define the "democratic deficit." [7]

First, "*European integration has meant an increase in executive power and a decrease in national parliamentary control.*"[8] The policy-making system is based on executive actors and the problem is that their actions are beyond the control of national parliaments. National bureaucrats at the EU-level would be more isolated from national control than national bureaucrats who are involved in the national policy-making process. This would lead to the ignorance of national interests in the policy-making process.

The second argument would be that "*the European Parliament is too weak*"[9]. The EP's power has been increased but the loss of power of the national governments is not counterbalanced.

A third argument is that "*there is no 'European' elections.*"[10]"*EU citizens elect their governments who sit in the Council [...] and EU citizens also elect the European Parliament. [...] [However,] the elections are not about the personalities and parties at the European level or the direction of the EU policy agenda.*"[11] The elections issues are focused on national issues. Even more, national parties and media treat the elections as mid-term national contests. This phenomenon was called "second-order national contests" by Reif and Schmitt and it was true from the first EP elections in 1979 to today.

A fourth reason would be that "*EU is simply 'too distant' from the voters.*"[12] Institutionally, electoral control would be too removed. Psychologically, the EU system would be too different from the traditional domestic system. As a result, citizens cannot

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[7] Follesdal, Andreas and Simon Hix. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik". 2006. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 44. N°3. p.533-562. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x. [accessed 25th February 2020]. p. 534-537.

[8] *Ibid.* p.534.
[9] *Ibid.* p.535.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.* p.535-536.
[12] *Ibid.*

understand the EU and are not able to consider it as a democratic system on its own right or to identify with it.

The last argument is that "*European integration produces a 'policy drift' from voters' ideal policy preferences.*"[13] Indeed, the EU would adopt policies that are not supported by the majority of citizens or private interests would be omnipresent in EU decision-making.

In the 1995 article "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces", Weiler, Haltern and Mayer divide the literature on European governance according to three main theories, which reflect different perspectives. All these theories provide their own mode of governing[14].

The first approach is **the intergovernmental approach** mainly theorized by Moravcsik. (see 2.1.3 Moravcsik's Defence of the EU's legitimacy) For the International approach, States are the key players and Governments are the principal actors. From this perspective, the EU is seen as an inter-national arena/regime in which Governments are privileged in their power. The Union is, therefore, a framework within which states/governments interact.

The second theory is **a supranational approach** mainly theorized by Weiler (see 2.1.1 Weiler's "No demos thesis") For the Supranational approach, States are privileged players but the Community/Union is not just a framework but a privileged actor as well. The State governments are mainly important in their executive role.

The third approach is **the infranational approach** mainly theorized by Majone (see 2.1.2 Majone's Regulatory regime) For the Infranational approach, national institutions are not central in decision making. Technical expertise, economic and social interests, as well as administrative competences, are preferred over national interest. It is usually characterized by health and safety standards, harmonization of telecommunications and international trade rules.

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[13] *Ibid.* p.537.
[14] Weiler, J.H.H et al. "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces". *The Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law & Justice*. September 1995. https://jeanmonnetprogram.org/archive/papers/95/9501ind.html. Accessed 25th February 2020.

The following sections focus on the four main basic theories according to which the "democratic deficit" has been theoretically framed. This division is made according to a more recent article (2019) of Kratochvíl et al. and is very similar to Weiler's.

2.1.1 Weiler's "No demos thesis" - Supranational approach

One of the first theories pointed out by Kratochvíl et al. is Weiler's "no demos thesis". The article "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces" first provides an overall picture of the main critical opinions about the European Union. Broadly speaking, this non-attributed opinion repeats the five arguments used in the definition of Føllesdal and Hix (see 2.1). Yet, it also goes further:

> *On this view, a parliament without a demos[15] is conceptually impossible, practically despotic. If the European Parliament is not the representative of a people, if the territorial boundaries of the EU do not correspond to its political boundaries, then, the writ of such a parliament has only slightly more legitimacy than the writ of an emperor.[16]*

In this way, it claims that democracy is the exercise of power by and for the demos, which presupposes the existence of a demos. Yet, in Europe, there are demoi (several demos) rather than demos. This demos would come from an unchangeable "Volk" —an ethnicity, a nation—.[17]

In the second part of the article, the authors criticize this first global opinion. First, they do not consider that the notion "Volk" can be applied. Indeed, they claim that people think themselves in terms of boundaries but not especially in clear, stable, unique and nation-state based boundaries: "*There are, obviously, boundaries in the legal-geographical sense of separating one nation-state from another. But there are also internal, cognitive boundaries by which society (the nation) and individuals come to think of themselves in the world.*"[18] Indeed, for the authors, there could be in-reaching demos (personal national identification) and out-reaching demos (EU identification). Still, this possibility is not yet a reality according to the authors: "*Nationals of the Member States are European Citizens, not*

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[15] "The populace as a political unit, especially in a democracy" (Lexico dictionnary)
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*

the other way around. Europe is 'not yet' a demos in the ethnocultural sense and should never become one."[19]

Even more, Weiler et al. argue that this construct of European demos depends on a shift of consciousness and that individuals must think themselves in this demos for the EU to get full legitimate democratic authority. The authors do not argue that the shift has occurred nor that there will be arrangements to fit this vision. They claim that[20]:

A. *We don't know about public consciousness of a civic polity based demos because the question has to be framed in this way in order to get a meaningful response.*

B. *This shift will not happen if one insists that the only way to understand demos is in Volkish ways.*

C. *That this understanding of demos makes the need for democratization of Europe even more pressing. A demos which coheres around values must live those values.*

Talking about the issue of belonging to two demoi (e.g: double nationality), the authors claim:

> "*The resistance to double loyalty could be rooted in the fear that some flattened non-descript unauthentic and artificial 'Euro-culture' would come to replace the deep, well-articulated, authentic and genuine national version of the same. It could also be rooted in the belief that double loyalty must mean that either one or both loyalties have to be compromised.*"[21]

This fear would be based on the imagery of the nation seen in Volkish terms. Furthermore, they argue that the citizens may see this two-level demoi as a model of critical citizenship:

> *Maybe the national in-reaching ethno-cultural demos and the out-reaching supranational civic demos by continuously keeping each other in check offer a structured model of critical citizenship. Maybe we should celebrate, rather than reject with aversion, the politically fractured self and double identity which dual membership involves which can be seen as conditioning us not to*

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[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*

consider any polity claiming our loyalty to be 'über alles'[22]. Maybe this understanding of Europe makes it appear so alluring to some, so threatening to others.[23]

Weiler et al. defend a supranational approach, claiming that it does not aim at eliminating the nation State but rather to create a regime which mitigates the national interests, that is to control the uncontrolled reflexes of national interests in international background.

The article ends by claiming that "*although the principle of universal suffrage and majoritarianism informs all modern systems of democratic governance, it is not an absolute principle*"[24], which means there should be an agreement on the limits of the competences.

Overall, Weiler's "no demos theory" claims that the non-existence of a European demos means that it is impossible to democratize the European Union. Reinforcing the link between the people and the European institutions by the Parliament cannot lead to a democratic EU-decision making according to this theory. It would increase the power of the bigger European nations to the detriment of smaller nations.[25]

2.1.2 Majone's Regulatory regime - infranational approach

2.1.2.1 Majone's theory

According to Giandomenico Majone, EU literature on the democratic deficit has two limitations. First, it solves the problem in parallel with national government practices, instead of deeply studying the issue. Second, this way of resolving the democratic deficit expands the powers of the EP without any increase in democratic legitimacy. His opinion criticizes Weiler's idea of increasing the EP's powers. For him, the best way to deal with the issue is to

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[22] "über alles" means "above all else"
[23] Weiler, J.H.H et al. "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces". *The Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law & Justice*. September 1995. https://jeanmonnetprogram.org/archive/papers/95/9501ind.html. Accessed 25th February 2020.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Kratochvíl Petr et al. "The end of democracy in the EU? The Eurozone crisis and the EU's democratic deficit". *Journal of European integration*. 2019. Vol. 41. N°2. p.169-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1569001. Accessed 24th February 2020. p.171.

reduce the *"mismatch between the extensive commitments of the EU and its limited normative and institutional resources."*[26]

The democratic deficit would be the consequence of the elitist origin of the integration process. The fact that the Commission, an indirectly elected institution, sets the political agenda violates the fundamental democratic principles, even though the member states may modify the proposals in the Council of Ministers. The method would also violate the principle of separation of powers.[27] Some scholars advocate for giving a power of initiative to the EP to challenge the Commission's monopoly of initiation, and then, to increase democratic legitimacy.[28] In this view, Majone promotes the clear delimitation of powers instead of the increase of powers to supranationalist institutions[29].

The increase of assigned competences and then, the difficulty to enforce political accountability, would have generated greater awareness of the democratic deficit. The issue was not solved with the direct elections of the European Parliament, as it cannot represent the interests of the European demos as efficiently as the national parliaments do. Indeed, the EP would represent the sum of the interests of every single country, not the general interest. Furthermore, Majone argues that the EP lacks democratic control because of its remoteness. The EU would be too large to enable a "punishment at the polls", which guarantees that the politics' decisions correspond to citizens' opinions. Ineffective policies can persist.[30] Thus, increasing competences would mean an increasing democratic deficit.[31]

Majone distinguishes the "non-majoritarian institutions", that is, "*bodies that exercise important public functions, such as economic and social regulation, but are not directly accountable to the voters or to their elected representatives*" from majoritarian institutions[32]. For instance, the European Central Bank and the European Court of Justice are considered

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[26] Majone, Giandomenico. "Transaction-cost efficiency and the democratic deficit". *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2010. Vol. 72. N°2. p.150-175. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501760903561799. Accessed 15th March 2020. p.150.

[27] *Ibid.* p.150-151.

[28] *Ibid.* p.169.

[29] *Ibid.* p.172.

[30] Majone, Giandomenico. "From Regulatory State to a Democratic Default". *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2014. Vol. 52. N°6. p. 1216-1223. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcms.12190. Accessed 25th February 2020. p.1217.

[31] *Ibid.* p.1217.

[32] *Ibid.* p.1216.

non-majoritarian institutions. Critics argued that "non-majoritarian" institutions may lack legitimacy, even more as their competences were increased by several treaties[33]. In this regard, Majone promotes the idea of infranationalism by denouncing the fact that the Commission refuses to delegate policy-making to European agencies while they fit in the exception to the determination of competences of the institutions: "*agencies may be allowed to adopt individual decisions in clearly specified areas of Community legislation, 'where a single public interest predominates and where [the agencies] do not have arbitrate on conflicting public interests, exercise powers of political judgement or make complex economic assessments.*"[34] Indeed, this exception was applied to the Office of Harmonization in the Internal Market, the Community Plant Variety Office and the European Aviation Safety Agency. According to Majone, it should also be the case for the Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) and the Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as they meet with the same conditions. Yet, although the Commission has no expertise competence in these domains, it has the last word. Giving the agencies rule-making power would become more efficient in policy outcomes. For example, the role of the Commission in the EMEA delays the launch of a new life-saving product in the market. According to Majone, the role of the Commission is counterproductive and can deny the expertise of the agencies while making decisions.[35]

In regard to the European Central Bank, Majone points out the limitation of the EU system. In order to fit in long term goals, the European Central Bank is independent. The main goal of the ECB is to maintain the price stability with low inflation, even though it may not correspond to the short-term national government's goals. Yet, the ECB operates in a political vacuum without any opposition or without any effective mechanisms to coordinate the fiscal policies of the member states. ECB determines its own goals. This is problematic for democratic legitimacy and for policy-making efficiency. Controlling the ECB by elected politicians would be a sudden change and would require a new treaty, knowing that reaching

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[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Commission (2002) quoted in Majone, Giandomenico. "Transaction-cost efficiency and the democratic deficit". *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2010. Vol. 72. N°2. p.150-175. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501760903561799. Accessed 15th March 2020. p.162.

[35] *Ibid.* p.162-163.

an agreement is difficult or even impossible. In the meantime, without any means, the ECB should stay independent.[36]

Only a European federation could resolve all the problems and contradictions of the EU but this should not be implemented by remote supranational institutions. Even more as federalism is not supported by the majority of the voters.[37] The use of a flawed "Monnet method of integration by stealth" should end. N.J.D Lucas explains: "*sectorial policies will not be designed simply to produce an optimal technical solution, but to some extent will be designed to promote the influence of the Commission and to forward the aim of European political unity*."[38] In other words, the policies which are put forward do not always aim at tackling a specific problem as it intends to promote further integration. It makes accountability impossible: it is possible to justify the failure of a policy's objective by appealing to another objective. Pascal Lamy explains that this Monnet method enables the EU to "make Europe without the Europeans". Therefore, "*a true competition of policy ideas would open up the debate, making it impossible to pursue the strategy of fait accompli, but this is prevented by the Commission's monopoly of agenda-setting.*"[39] This traditional method of integration by increasing little by little EU's competences only increases the democratic deficit according to Majone.

Majone asserts that EU-policy making should not be "democratic" in the usual sense because it would decrease the policies' efficiency. They should focus on the majority long-term instead of the short term interests promoted by majoritarian institutions. The problem would not come from a "democratic deficit" but rather a 'credibility crisis'. Then, the EU would need more transparency in its decision-making.[40] The democratic deficit would be democratically legitimated. EU regime would be a "regulatory regime" in the sense that it

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[36] *Ibid.* p.165-169.

[37] *Ibid.* p.172.

[38] Lucas N.J.D (1977: 96-97) quoted in *Ibid.* p.158.

[39] *Ibid.* p.159.

[40] Follesdal, Andreas and Simon Hix. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik". 2006. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 44. N°3. p.533-562. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x. accessed 25th February 2020. p. 538.

is the absence of democratic control —neither accountable to voters nor controllable by national governments— that enables the institutions to fulfil their functions.[41]

Vivien Schmidt also points out the importance of attesting regularly of "efficiency, accountability, transparency, openness". She distinguishes several processes that could lead in various ways to EU legitimacy. The input legitimacy corresponds to "*the quality of the process leading to laws and rules as ensured by 'majoritarian' institutions of electoral representation.*" (EU's responsiveness to the participation of and by the people)[42]. Output legitimacy is the concern about "*the problem-solving logics of institutional inputs —direct elections for a government— but also its constructive preconditions, consistive of thick collective identity and a European demos.*"[43] (EU policies for the people) Schmidt adds to the traditional legitimacy triggers, the throughput legitimacy as the governance process based on "efficiency, accountability, transparency, openness". In this regard, accountability and transparency are defined as follows:

> *Accountability is generally taken to mean that EU actors are judged on their responsiveness to participatory input demands and can be held responsible for their output decisions[44] as well as that policy-making processes meet standards of ethical governance, whether with regard to lobbyists[45] or civil servants[46]. Transparency is often seen as a prerequisite of accountability but not as qualifying as accountability on its own because the latter also demands some form of scrutiny by a specific forum, such as EU Commissioners by the European Parliament (EP)[47] .Transparency is generally taken to mean that citizens have access to information about the processes[48] and that decisions as well as decision making processes in formal EU institutions are public.[49]*

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[41] Kratochvíl Petr et al. "The end of democracy in the EU? The Eurozone crisis and the EU's democratic deficit”. *Journal of European integration*. 2019. Vol. 41. N°2. p.169-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1569001. Accessed 24th February 2020. p.171

[42] Schmidt, Vivien A. "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and Throughput". Political Studies. 2013. Vol. 61. N°1. p.2-22. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x. Accessed 25th February 2020. p.4.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Harlow and Rawlings quoted in *Ibid*. p.6.

[45] Cini and Pérez- Solórzano Borragán quoted in *Ibid.*

[46] Nastase quoted in *Ibid.*

[47] Fischer, 2004, p. 504 quoted in *Ibid.*

[48] Héritier quoted in *Ibid.*

[49] Novak quoted in *Ibid.*

For example, analysing the throughput may include analysing the usage of the term 'civil society' by the EU Commission as "the interest groups, including business" in order to improve the perception of legitimacy.[50] Indeed, throughput takes into account the importance of balanced interests and inclusiveness of the civil society. In EU literature on democratic legitimacy, input and output tend to be presented as complementary: lack of output may be compensated by input and the other way round. Also, increasing one necessarily leads to a decrease in the other, that is, more politicized input via citizen participation in majoritarian institutions leads to a reduction of output performance, or greater regulatory output by non-majoritarian institutions decreases citizens' political input. Input and output usually have a positive impact on EU's legitimacy perception. When it comes to throughput, violating one of the concepts (efficiency, transparency, accountability) leads to a highly negative perception of EU's legitimacy. The output and the throughput would be the primary legitimizing criteria while the input seems to be largely found at the national level.[51]

Output legitimacy

For Schmidt, the issue comes from the lack of information on the EU actions reported by the national politicians. The national politicians would rather contribute in blaming the unpopular policies and taking for granted popular policies. The studies of media discourse and debates show that, there has been little increase in attention on EU policies except for the elites.[52]

Input legitimacy

Almost no scholar thinks that the EU has sufficient input legitimacy. They give several arguments to advance this thesis. First, the EU elections suffer from high rates of abstention and continue to be second-order elections in which national issues are the main focus.[53] In addition, the absence of a government in which the citizens can express their approval or disapproval of EU policies[54] as well as the absence of a traditional right-left politics makes it hard to relate to EU politics. It results in the general quest for consensus and

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[50] Schmidt and Smismans quoted in *Ibid.* p.7
[51] *Ibid*. p.8-9
[52] *Ibid.* p.11
[53] Hix and Mair quoted in *Ibid*. p.12
[54] Scharpf quoted in *Ibid.*

compromise promoted by institutional processes, which does not help to increase legitimacy. The structure of the parties does not help as *"the European political parties remain weak, underdeveloped and not very cohesive, with an amalgam in the EP of different national parties with divergent agendas and ideologies in any given European party grouping."*[55] Overall, the EU is characterised by a policy without politics that is *"the EU leaves national citizens with little direct input on the EU-related policies that affect them, and only national politicians to hold to account for them."*[56]

The effects would be the "citizen demobilization and radicalization"[57]. This would also have created cleavages among European citizens: those whose ideas of Europe are more open, liberal and cosmopolitan in orientation and those whose ideas are more closed, xenophobic and nationalist or EU-regionalist oriented.[58]

All this would get worse with communication issues —lack of common EU language, impoverished European media—. Therefore, the communication discourse is largely generated from the national political actors, with the national language(s), the national media and considered by the national opinion.

To decrease the democratic deficit, some scholars have argued for the need to politicize EU policies. Yet, other scholars think that it would worsen the situation, as the problem of the lack of identity, collective will, fully developed public sphere is not solved[59] or because it would not help the policy-making effectiveness. Others argue that EU political parties lack cohesion for politicization.[60]

Throughput Legitimacy

Institutional Throughput

This refers to the decision-making process as a whole and the intermediation processes *"through which citizens organised in interest groups have a direct influence on*

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[55] Ladrech and Mair quoted in *Ibid.*
[56] Schmidt and Risse quoted in *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.* p.13.
[58] Kriersi et al. quoted in *Ibid.*
[59] Scharpf quoted in *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid*. p.14.

policy-making."[61] The EU promotion of input governance by the people has resulted in the "*explosion in interest representation and lobbying*". The EU was criticized for its openness to business in the late 1980s —early 1990s. Then, the Commission wanted to represent the interests of the under-represented groups but its effectiveness is questionable.[62] At the same time, some public interest groups marginalized by national parties are better represented at an EU level (sexual harassment laws, gender equality for example).[63]

The author herself questions the balance in the representation of interests: *"Stakeholder democracy, even if improved is not necessarily public interest-oriented democracy.*"[64] I go further as money usually provides a greater representation of interest groups, which leads to a biased representation of the public interests. Civil society groups and trade unions are gradually more represented but they are outnumbered by the industrial lobby.[65]

Besides, the will to increase transparency was made through greater access to EU documentation for the media and interests group and for the citizens. Paradoxically, this has led to an information overload, making it less transparent.[66] Another issue is the confidentiality of policy making processes: "*For example; although Council meetings are broadcast through live video streaming since 2006, the president can always suspend recording (usual for the debates on controversial issues) and, where debates must be public (because of co-decision with the EP) negotiations take place over lunch or in the corridors.*"[67] The article also underlines the ambivalence between the lack of democracy in opposition to immobilism in policy-making. Indeed, the more participation to the policy-making there is, the more difficult it is to make a decision, as it was seen with the enlargement of the EU, for instance.[68]

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[61] *Ibid.* p.15
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] Zippel quoted in *Ibid.* p.15
[64] *Ibid.* p.18.
[65] Lobby Planet Brussels. "The Corporate Europe Observatory guide to the murky world of EU lobbying". 2017. https://corporateeurope.org/en/2017/06/lobby-planet-brussels. Accessed 13th November 2019. p.10-11.
[66] Schmidt, Vivien A. "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and Throughput". Political Studies. 2013. Vol. 61. N°1. p.2-22. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x. Accessed 25th February 2020. p.16.
[67] Novak quoted in *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.* p.16-17.

Constructive throughput

The article questions the idea of involving experts in policy deliberation: is it really about input democracy or is it rather about providing output policies more efficiently (throughput)?[69] I go further: is including experts fostering a technocratic perception of EU —which may be perceived as lacking legitimacy— Is including experts opening the door for lobby interests as the experts, may also belong to interest groups?

The article also questions the communication choices of the Commission. Indeed, *"generally speaking, the Commission has consciously sought to depoliticize EU policy formulation by presenting its initiatives in neutral or 'reasonable' language, and by using communication techniques."*[70] This communication choice is convenient to national leaders as they can depict EU policies as left, right or centre policies. In this way, EU policy-making processes disappear from the national public view as long as they avoid negative throughput (scandals, oppressive rules, corruption, etc). Yet, the invisibility of the EU leads to an "accountability paradox". The hypothesis is that EU citizens are mainly favourable to EU (59% in 2019)[71] thanks to this depoliticization but, at the same time, it discourages citizens to implicate themselves in EU initiatives, as it is shown by the low voter turnout in EU elections (51% in 2019)[72]. This depoliticization is also reflected in the 2019 EU elections campaign content because EU was mostly depicted in an unclear (31%) or neutral way (23%), outnumbering the positive (34%) and negative (11%) depictions of EU.[73] The EU citizens mainly have a neutral view of the European Parliament (46% in October 2019)[74].

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[69] *Ibid.* p.17.
[70] Barbier 2008, p.231-232 quoted in *Ibid.* p.18.
[71] Public Opinion Monitoring Unit. "Parlemeter 2019: Heeding the Call beyond the Vote : a Stronger Parliament to listen to Citizens Voices". 2019. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fba66e05-3d8e-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-121688437. Accessed 16th March 2020. p.11.
[72] European Parliament. "2019 European elections results". 2019. https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/. Accessed 16th March 2020.
[73] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019. p.19.
[74] Public Opinion Monitoring Unit. "Parlemeter 2019: Heeding the Call beyond the Vote : a Stronger Parliament to listen to Citizens Voices". 2019. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fba66e05-3d8e-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-121688437. Accessed 16th March 2020. p. 22.

Weiler et al. criticize this vision of infranationalism. They identify several democratic problems of neo-corporatist model of governance[75]:

a. The technocratic and managerial solutions often mask ideological choices which are not debated and subject to public scrutiny beyond the immediate interests related to the regulatory or management area.

b. Participation in the process is limited to those privileged by the process; fragmented and diffuse interests, other public voices are often excluded.

c. The process itself might distort power relationships and democracy within the groups represented in the process.

d. The process itself not only lacks transparency but also is typically of low procedural formalities thus not ensuring real equality of voice of those who actually do take part in the process. Judicial review is scant and tends to insist on basic rights to be heard rather than fairness of outcome.

e. In general, the classical instruments of control and public accountability are ill-suited to the practices of infranationalism. They are little affected by elections, change in government and the new instruments introduced.

2.1.3 Moravcsik's Defence of the EU's legitimacy - intergovernmental approach

For Moravscik, the democratic deficit does not exist as the EU has enough legitimacy: "*constitutional checks and balances, indirect democratic control via national governments, and the increasing powers of the European Parliament are sufficient to ensure that EU policy-making is, in nearly all cases, clean, transparent, effective and politically responsive to the demands of European citizens.*"[76] The widespread concern about the democratic deficit would result from the tendency to privilege the abstract over the concrete that is critics

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[75] Weiler, J.H.H et al. "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces". *The Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law & Justice*. September 1995. https://jeanmonnetprogram.org/archive/papers/95/9501ind.html. Accessed 25th February 2020.

[76] Moravscik, Andrew. "In Defence of the ‘Democratic Deficit’ : Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union". 2002. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 40. N°4. p.603-624. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-5965.00390 Accessed 25th February 2020. p.605.

compare the contemporary European policy-making with the idealistic standard model of democracy.[77]

Moravscik looks at the various arguments to support the idea of "democratic deficit" and counters them. First, he argues that the EU is not a superstate because there are tight substantive, fiscal, administrative, legal and procedural constraints on EU policy embedded in treaties and legislation. The national governments have the resources to counteract the fiscal priorities of the EU. The EU decisions are constrained by institutional checks and balances: the separation of powers, decisions at several levels and a plural executive. The most fundamental constraint would lie in the requirement of unanimity in the Council of Europe in determined fields. Accordingly, the EU aims at a broad consensus and that directives promulgated respect of the EU population representation[78]. Also, Moravscik reminds the clear process of separation of powers: "*the Commission must propose; the Parliament must consent; if the result is then challenged, the Court must approve; national parliaments or officials must transpose into national law; and national bureaucracies must implement.*"[79]

Secondly, Moravscick argues that the EU is not an unaccountable technocracy. According to some critics, semi-autonomous supranational authorities (the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice jurisprudence), EU policy would favour national bureaucrats, and ministers at the expense of national parliaments and public. For him, the critics exaggerate as the EU employs two strong mechanisms: direct accountability via the EP and indirect accountability via elected national officials. The process of decision-making is made in various institutions, which makes the monopoly of information impossible. When certain aspects tend to take place in relative secret, it is also the case in the national systems' legislation. He adds that the EU is open to civil society input.[80] This vision can be criticized as the term 'civil society' is used in a specific way, including group interests and business.

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[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.* p.606-610.
[79] *bid.* p.610.
[80] *bid.* p.611-613.

To defend the autonomy of EU institutions in the expertise of central banking, constitutional adjudication, criminal and civil prosecution, technical administration and economic diplomacy, Moravscik gives 3 arguments[81]:

1) First, the "need for greater attention, efficiency and expertise in areas where most citizens remain 'rationally ignorant' or 'non-participatory'". Universal involvement in government policy would impose costs.

2) Second, "the need impartially to dispense justice, equality and rights for individuals and minority groups". It would be part of the representation of individual/minority prerogatives against the immediate "tyranny of the majority".

3) Third, "the need to provide majorities with unbiased representation", that is to avoid lobbying with its specific interests, which do not correspond to the majority interests, less specific. This may be questioned as reducing the problem of lobbying with insulation would paradoxically increase the opacity of the institutions and may decrease the visibility of democracy.

Then, Moravscik analyses why the EU cannot expand participation in its initiatives. Including a sense of political community within the closed institutions may not be a solution for him as insulated institutions are often more popular to the public than open institutions. Thus, it is "*unclear whether more participation in such functions would legitimate them*". He also argues that the most salient issues of the European democracies —in 2002: health care provision, education, law and order, pension and social security policy, and taxation— are not part of EU competence. Therefore, lack of salience, not lack of opportunity would lead to low political participation. Then, "in order to give individuals a reason to care about EU politics, it is necessary to give them a stake in it"[82]. It would mean giving a stake to the individuals in EU politics.

Moravscick counters Scharpf's infranational opinion. Scharpf argues that EU politics lacks democratic legitimacy because policies are biased by particular interests in a neo-liberal direction. Indeed, according to him, a democratic policy should be balanced between market

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[81] *bid*. p.613-614.
[82] *bid*. p.616.

liberalization and social protection. However, Moravscick claims that there is little evidence of strong deregulation of the market as the level of social welfare in Europe remains relatively stable. However, various factors fuel welfare deficits and fiscal stains. Moravscik argues that if the neoliberal bias exists, it is justified by the social welfarist bias of current national policies.[83] Therefore, the EU policies would be very centrist because they take into account various interests (from the left-wing and from the right-wing). This creates frustration as much for the free market liberals as for the social democrats.[84]

Eventually, Moravscick argues that EU enlargement will still rely on democratic accountability as long as these countries remain liberal democracies.[85]

Moravscick's theory is described by Weiler et al. as a Consociational model of democracy and is mainly based on the governance by a cartel of elites. The theory would show the successful aspects of consociationalism, bypassing normal traditional political fora and substituting it by fora with elitist leaders, using consensual politics and denying the principle of majority.[86]To maintain this type of Consociational model, the elites must take into account the issues of political fragmentation in which the model emerges. Weiler et al. argue that several parallels can be made between this model and the EU. Several democratic issues would be generated according to Weiler et al.: accountability and transparency are seen as 'weakening' features for the political system and there is a tendency to maintain the status quo because of political fragmentation.[87]

2.1.4 Føllesdal and Hix's upgraded standard version of democratic deficit

Follesdal and Hix think that Majone and Moravscik's contributions to the "democratic deficit" debate are significant but they disagree with their ideas.

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[83] I*bid.* p.617-619.

[84] Moravscik quoted in Follesdal, Andreas and Simon Hix. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik". 2006. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 44. N°3. p.533-562. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x. [accessed 25th February 2020]. p. 541.

[85] Moravscik, Andrew. "In Defence of the ‘Democratic Deficit’ : Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union". 2002. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 40. N°4. p.603-624. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-5965.00390 Accessed 25th February 2020. p.619.

[86] Weiler, J.H.H et al. "European Democracy and its Critique: Five Uneasy Pieces". *The Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law & Justice*. September 1995. https://jeanmonnetprogram.org/archive/papers/95/9501ind.html. Accessed 25th February 2020.

[87] I*bid.*

First, They disagree on some points with Majone's theory. When Majone claims that some decisions should be attributed to non-majoritorian institutions, the authors point out a problematic point: "*even though a majority of economists and political scientists believe that central banks and competition regulators should be independent from majoritarian institutions, these views are not universally held.*"[88] They highlight that subjective decisions can be made in the market regulation policies. There are good reasons to delegate EU policies such as competition policy and food safety regulation to independent, non-majoritarian institutions. However, the market regulation and the policies with distributive or redistributive effects "have winners and losers" and various solutions are possible. Therefore, Majone offers no reason why they should be isolated from democratic contestation.[89]

Concerning Moravscick's theory, the authors agree with the fact that democratic control is sufficient to ensure that EU policy-making responds to European citizens' demands. However, the EU policy outcomes would be right-of-centre rather than centrist as it is suggested by the free market. In addition, the control via national governments would provide greater control in intergovernmental decision-making than supranational decision-making.[90]

Furthermore, there should be mechanisms that ensure the match between preferences and policies. The key difference between democracy and non-democratic regimes is that the voter's preferences are shaped by the democratic process, following a process of deliberation and partie's contestation. The outcomes of this process should be different from those produced by technocrats. Therefore, the policy outcome does not especially match with the political majority.[91]

When Moravscick argues that EU agenda is not salient enough for voters, Follesdal and Hix emphasize a problematic notion: "*With no articulation of positions on several sides*

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[88] Follesdal, Andreas and Simon Hix. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik". 2006. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 44. N°3.
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x. accessed 25th February 2020. p.542.
[89] *Ibid.* p.542-543.
[90] *Ibid.* p.544.
[91] *Ibid.* p.545.

of a policy debate, it is no wonder that a debate over a particular policy area does not exist and that issues lack voter salience."[92]

The idea of Moravscick that the democratic contest is best handled by private independent interests is interesting. Yet, there are also risks that the regulators use the discretion for promoting other less legitimate objectives as they are heavily lobbied by the producers who are subjects of the regulation In this way, "*constitutions with multiple checks and balances, as opposed to more majoritarian decision-making rules, allow concentrated interests to block policy outcomes that are in the interests of the majority*"[93] — it is for example the case of the gun lobby in the US—.

Follesdal and Hix conclude that Majone and Moravcsik praise the virtues of open bureaucracy against the danger of popular democracy/majoritarian rule because they would protect more efficiently the interests of the majority. Yet, the authors prefer democratic rule in competitive elections rather than open technocracy for various reasons.[94]

They define democracy according to 5 characteristics[95]:

- institutionally established procedures that regulate
- competition for control over political authority,
- on the basis of deliberation,
- where nearly all adult citizens are permitted to participate in
- an electoral mechanism where their expressed preferences over alternative candidates determine the outcome,
- in such ways that the governments is responsive to the majority or to as many as possible

In Majone and Moravcsik's models, there is no opposition, which is an essential feature for the exercise of democracy: "*It is important to ensure that citizens understand*

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[92] *Ibid.* p.546.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] *Ibid.* p.547. Note: They do not aim at making the most precise and accurate definition as the purpose is to give general orientations.

differences between the present government and the (democratic) political order.[96] If citizens do not have alternative leaders or policy agendas, they cannot determine if the political actions could have been better or to identify the responsible for the policies. In the current design of EU institutions, there is no room for a rival set of candidates or for a rival policy agenda. The "anti-EU" sentiment does not oppose the current policy balance and can only advocate for the abolition of the EU system. The authors argue: "*It is precisely because there is no visible quasi-official 'opposition', that citizens cannot distinguish between opposition to the current EU policy regime and opposition to the EU system as a whole.*"[97]

Another characteristic of democracy would be that "*competitive elections are crucial to make policies and elected officials, responsive to the preferences of citizen*s."[98] In the case of the EU, there are few advantages for governments to change the policies to correspond to citizen's preferences. A political opposition would encourage a European-wide debate about specific issues.

The third element that the authors analyse is "political competition is an essential vehicle for opinion formation."[99] They argue again that opposition, and then, competition are essential to democracy: "*Competition fosters political debate, which in turn promotes the formation of public opinion on different policy options.*" According to them, the need for a European demos may not be a prerequisite because European democratic identity might form itself thanks to democratic competition and institutionalized co-operation.[100]

Therefore, the authors do not see "*the salience of the issues for the European citizens as inversely correlated with the EU legislative and regulation activity*". It may change, for example, if media and political parties start to claim that EU decisions impact high-salience issues such as healthcare, education, law, pensions, etc. The lack of competition within EU politics would also be the reason for the national focus in EU elections. The Referendums can represent better the voter's preferences about the EU but they only allow voters to express themselves on isolated issues, not on policy content.[101]

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[96] Shapiro (1996) quoted in *Ibid.* p.548.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid. p.549.*
[99] *Ibid. p.550.*
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid. p.551-553.*

In spite of European politics' deficit, the democracy at the EU level increases with the more suitable party organisation (left-right logic) and the increase of the powers of the EP. Still, it is impossible to reflect the voter's preferences as it is impossible to "punish" wrong decisions made by the members of the EP or by governments because there is no electoral contest linked with these decisions.[102]

2.2 This work theoretical framework

As our research question focuses on the field of communication and especially on the European Parliament, I will focus on the relation between this focus and the various theoretical frameworks that were exposed in the last pages.

Moravsick claims that the increasing powers of the European Parliament, the indirect democratic control via national governments and the various checks ensure that the EU policies are in almost all the cases transparent, effective, politically responsive to the demands of European citizens. I argue that, for the research question, the most important question is not really if there is or if there is no democratic deficit. Indeed, no democratic deficit does not mean that the citizens act as if there was no democratic deficit. It is the belief that there is a democratic deficit that makes the citizens act in such a way. Hence the importance of communication in this field.

The European Parliament embodies the democratic part of the European Union, as it is directly elected by the EU citizens to consent the EU policies. The institution is also responsible for the accountability of the EU policies. Yet, the expansion of the powers of the EP without any other increase in democratic legitimacy is insufficient according to Majone. The accountability is neglected in favour of a greater expansion of the EU with the Monnet method of integration by stealth. Even though the EP is directly elected, it seems to present some flaws in its relation with the citizens.

One of the first flaws is the lack of transparency in the EU policy-making decision. Even though the EP is directly elected, it does not necessarily represent the interests of the citizens. Not only the EU commission is influenced by lobbyists, but the European Parliament members are also influenced by them. It is legitimate for the citizens to wonder

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[102] *Ibid. p.553.*

whether the EU Parliament members' decisions represent their interests or whether they privilege specific interests, and if these specific interests are representing their political preferences. This information is neither fully available to the EP nor to the citizens. In 2004, Siim Kallas, an Estonian commissioner, initiated a list of lobbies based on goodwill for greater transparency. Only 11.000 lobbyists are registered out of 25.000 lobbyists.[103] This results in a lack of transparency and therefore, may lead to distrust in the EU parliament decisions.

Besides, almost all scholars claim that there is no way for the citizens to guarantee that their opinion is respected at the polls. Indeed, there is no punishment at the polls as there is no European-wide electoral contest. Nor is there a possibility to approve or disapprove of the EU policy content. Therefore, ineffective policies may persist. According to Follesdal and Hix, the State members' governments have no advantage in promoting the citizens' opinions.

Specific attention should be given to EU citizens' participation to decrease the impression of democratic deficit. Moravscick claims that there are enough opportunities to participate in political decisions. In this sense, the citizens' participation is usually similar to national parliament elections: elections and referendums. Referendums tend to be circumvented in favour of a quest for consensus.[104] Indeed, even though these referendums increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU, it paradoxically raises awareness of the democratic deficit. It recalls the national dimension of EU politics as referendums are made at a national level. The complexity of the elections is the absence of structure and the lack of initiative from the EU in shaping the citizens' opinions. Indeed, the absence of traditional politics (right vs left) and of coherent European parties makes the electoral choice more complex. To increase the low voter turnout[105], Follesdal and Hix argue that political competition is essential to form public opinion and a political debate. While the EU may lack cohesion for full politicization, the first step for politicization would be to make communication less neutral —making the EU invisible—. Policies should be more criticized (positively or negatively) by the MEPs and their ideological group. Citizens should be more

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[103] Corporate Europe Observatory. The Brussels Business - Who runs the European Union? 2012. https://corporateeurope.org/en/news/brussels-business-who-runs-european-union. Accessed 24th December 2019.
[104] E.g: Irish referendum for the Nice Treaty, French and Netherland referendum on the Constitution
[105] 43% in 2009 and 2014 and 51% in 2019

informed about the opinion of the MEPs. It is not even clear if the anti-EU groups are against the EU decisions or if they are against the whole system. The competition of ideas would enable citizens to compare the political alternatives to make their own choice in order to suit their political preferences.

These flaws are strengthened by the fact that a European-wide communication is complex. There is no common EU language and impoverished European media. Thus, communication is not efficient because it is only reflected in a national dimension. The national politicians say little about EU outcomes, they rather blame it for unpopular policies and take for granted their popular policies.

Weiler's "no demos thesis" is interesting in its idea that there is no democracy without any demos but that the EU citizens could find critical citizenship by enhancing national citizenship and EU-citizenship establishing mutual control between both institutions. From a communication perspective, this shift of consciousness to reach a European demos would be part of a communication challenge. Indeed, nationalism is seen in Volkish terms, as the continuity of older ethnic groups based on myths and values. Yet, according to most scholars, the construction of nationalism emerges from political discourses reconstructing this idea of ethnicity for political interests.[106] Again, the importance does not lie in the fact that there is or there is no European demos. The importance lies in if citizens believe or do not believe in such demos.

Therefore, political communication is essential in building identities. Communication around the 2019 Parliament elections shows the political contest mainly occurred at the national level, with national media and national issues (with a tendency towards EU issues)[107]. Therefore, to reach the EU's legitimacy, building this two-sided identity would require complementary political discourses at both levels. In other words, national governments should leave room for a European identity and the other way round.

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[106] Martiniello, Marco. *Penser l'ethnicité : Identité, culture et relations sociales*. 2013. Presses Universitaires de Liège. p.103-108.

[107] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019.

2.3 2019 elections and the democratic deficit

As our research question focuses on 2019 elections, I will analyse the 2019 elections in relation with the democratic deficit theory. In their analysis, scholars have ambivalent views. While we may see an opportunity in the 2019 elections, we also see the side effects of a growing contestation.

2.3.1 Global trends

For most scholars, the 2019 elections were an opportunity for EU integration. Indeed, the EU would have increased its visibility in the citizens' life with new economic, social and political policies. New challenges would find their solutions at the EU level such as the Brexit referendum, the borders, terrorism, the economic crisis's legacy, etc.[108] Regarding the economic crisis, Kratochvil et al. argue that the austerity measures have grown the politicization of the EU as people were affected by the EU's decisions. This politicization was defined by Michailidou as "*a process of public mediation and contestation through which formalized representative relationships have been conductive but also constrained by mass media attention*"[109]. This process would help in the emergence of a European public sphere as the crisis is a unifying topic. They observe two trends emerging from this observation. The first trend is the growth of Eurosceptic views, which worsens the legitimacy issue. The second trend is the politicization of EU positions which would decrease the democratic deficit[110] by helping the EU citizens to shape their opinions. In this way, "*the growth of Euroscepticism should be interpreted as a decreased emotional attachment to the EU since opinion polls show that it is accompanied by continuous utilitarian belief that solutions have to be found on the EU level*"[111].The Euroscepticism both affected the Southern countries, directly affected by the crisis, and the Northern countries as all the voters were

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[108] Costea, Vladimir-Adrian. "Quo Vadis European Union?". CES Working Papers. 2019. Vol.11. N°3. https://search.proquest.com/docview/2313059347/A5741C523FB24C4EPQ/8?accountid=14630. Accessed 5th April 2020. p.271.

[109] Michailidou, Asimina. "The role of the public in shaping EU contestation: Euroscepticism and online news media". *International Political Science Review.* 2015. Vol. 36. N°3. p.325. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24573395. Accessed 24th September 2019.

[110] Kratochvíl Petr et al. "The end of democracy in the EU? The Eurozone crisis and the EU's democratic deficit". *Journal of European integration*. 2019. Vol. 41. N°2. p.169-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1569001. Accessed 24th February 2020. p.176-177.

[111] *Ibid.* See Apendix 1.

dissatisfied with the management of the crisis.[112] Yet, as Kratochvil et al. argue, the image of the EP is stable throughout time. It would mean that the impact of the crisis is not perceived in the long run[113]. The other figures of the 2019 Parlemeter bear out this observation.[114]

In addition, in the 2019 elections campaign, the main representation of the EU is neutral or positive. Usually, the negative presentation of the EU during the political campaign comes either from specific critics or is either promoted by the minor anti-EU parties —except for the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark[115].

At the same time, Vladimir-Adrian Costea stays critical towards the EU survey tools that seem too "idealistic". Costea claims that the EU surveys may not be fully faithful to identify the opinions and satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the respondents. He reminds us of "the spiral silence" and its effects.[116] Indeed, the Spiral of silence is a communication theory by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann claiming that in public opinion, *"people's willingness to express their opinions on controversial public issues is affected by their largely unconscious perception of those opinions as being either popular or unpopular."*[117] This would result from a fear of isolation. It depends mostly on public opinion defended by public discourses. Regarding the EU, the mainstream public opinion would be in favour of EU integration as Eurosceptics are easily associated with populist or extremist parties. Therefore, people who are opposed to EU integration may not feel free to share their opinion, even more as the opinion survey is made by the EU itself.

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[112] *Ibid.*

[113] *Ibid.*

[114] See Public Opinion Monitoring Unit. "Parlemeter 2019: Heeding the Call beyond the Vote : a Stronger Parliament to listen to Citizens Voices". 2019. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fba66e05-3d8e-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-121688437. Accessed 16th March 2020.

[115] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. p.19.

[116] Costea, Vladimir-Adrian. "Quo Vadis European Union?". CES Working Papers. 2019. Vol.11. N°3. https://search.proquest.com/docview/2313059347/A5741C523FB24C4EPQ/8?accountid=14630. Accessed 5th April 2020. p.273.

[117] Petersen, Thomas. "Spiral of silence". *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/spiral-of-silence. Accessed the 18th April 2020.

In any case, the results of the elections confirm the first observations of Kratochvil et al. Indeed, the graphic[118] shows that the voter turnout was particularly high in 2019 (in comparison with the last elections), which would confirm the growing commitment of EU citizens towards EU elections, probably because of a growing politicization of EU decisions. Galpin and Trenz even claim that the 2019 EU elections were, for the first time, "first-order elections"[119].

This growing commitment towards EU elections grows with Eurosceptic views. In 2014-2019, the Eurosceptic parties represented 28,7% of the seats while in 2019-2024, the Eurosceptic parties will represent 30,2 % of the seats.[120]

Yet, it seems more complex. The scholars expected a more significant rise in Euroscepticism in 2019 elections. Galpin and Trenz argue that the growing participation in the EU elections may be the reaction from the citizens against the growing power of Euroscepticism as Eurosceptic parties also called for their own "Brexit". Some votes would respond to a call for "safeguarding the EU project". Yet, these anti-eurosceptic votes were not absorbed in the mainstream parties[121]. They were absorbed by the alternative coalitions: Renew Europe (former ALDE) and the greens/European Free Alliance group. This means that, for the first time, the mainstream parties need support from other parties.[122] The increase of votes for peripheral parties and the decrease of votes for mainstream parties also show that the votes are used as "a protest against the incumbent parties and governments."[123]

Thus, the EP elections increasingly became a EU-wide blame game towards EU institutions, foreign governments, countries and their population, which are blamed for

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[118] See Appendix 2.

[119] Galpin, Charlotte and Trenz Hans-Jörg. "In the Shadow of Brexit: The 2019 European Parliament Elections as First-Order Polity Elections?". *The Political Quarterly*. Vol.90. N°4. October-December 2019. p.664-671. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-923X.12768 Accessed 10th February 2020. p.666.

[120] I consider some non attached members, ECR, GUE/NGL, EFDD, ID seats as representative of Eurosceptic voices. This aims at giving a global picture of Euroscepticism within the EP. Yet, we should consider Euroscepticism as a discursive attitude, not an essentialist characteristic (see de Wilde and Trenz, 2012) See Appendix 3 and 4.

[121] By "mainstream parties", I mean parties belonging to the Conservative, Liberal, Christian Democratic and Socialist ideologies.

[122] Galpin, Charlotte and Trenz Hans-Jörg. "In the Shadow of Brexit: The 2019 European Parliament Elections as First-Order Polity Elections?". *The Political Quarterly*. Vol.90. N°4. October-December 2019. p.664-671. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-923X.12768 Accessed 10th February 2020. p.665-666.

[123] *Ibid*. p.166.

failures. This reveals disagreement about long-term solutions to the crisis. The anti-EU parties take advantage of the situation by using aggressive rhetoric against the EU and by mobilising national sovereignty. Both anti and pro-EU parties express their contestations against the EU and against the national governments in support and/or in opposition to the EU. In this sense, it reflects the democratic deficit both at national and EU levels and the Member States looking for responses to the various global issues.[124]

However, this global image is more complex. First of all, according to the European Elections Monitoring Center, negative campaigning —using a discourse that discredits other parties and institutions— was limited to 12% of the 2019 campaign, which means that it was not as important as expected. The importance of negative campaign also depends on the countries' political landscapes but mostly, 72% of the negative campaign targeted national institutions, parties and politicians. Only 21% of this negative campaigning targeted foreign institutions, that is "EU or Brussels" and not specific foreign parties or politicians. This would confirm that the political contestation is made at European level and even more at the national level, which seems to contradict Galpin and Trenz's idea of "first-order elections".[125]

In the second place, the taxonomy pro-EU integration/anti-EU is more complex. According to Michael Bossetta, to categorize the parties as Eurosceptic is to oversimplify the situation. Indeed, scholars distinguish several kinds of Euroscepticisms. Taggart[126] (1998) made a differentiation between soft and hard Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism is the complete opposition to engage with the EU, while soft Euroscepticism is criticism about the EU integration with the possibility to engage with a "certain" EU. This distinction was too broad according to scholars, who have tried to provide a more precise picture of Euroscepticism[127]. De Wilde and Trenz, who perceive Euroscepticism as a discursive attitude and performance argue that: "*In order to know what Euroscepticism is, we should not create*

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[124] *Ibid.* p.667.
[125] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.*
https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019. p. 21-22.
[126] Cited in Bossetta, Michael. "Social Media, Euroscepticism and the European Public Sphere". Social Media and Politics channel. Youtube. May 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNC7F3xA6Vk
Link to the powerpoint :
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/events/0519-palermo/day2_bossetta.pdf
Accessed 5th May 2020.
[127] *Ibid.*

an inclusive list of actors that we consider to be Eurosceptic. We should rather ask what kinds of practices are considered to be part of Eurosceptic performances."[128] As a result, the scholars established a table with the different positions towards EU integration (see table 1). This table determines 6 positions towards EU, depending on 1) the position towards the principle EU integration 2) the position towards the EU polity —the competencies and constitutional settlement of the EU — 3) the project of integration. On one side, the *affirmative European* defends the EU integration, the current polity and further integration. *Status Quo* means that the discursive attitude is in favour of EU integration and its polity but is against further integration. On the other side, the *Anti-European position* is against the principle of integration as well as the polity. In between these "poles", we find other positions such as the *Pragmatic*, which paradoxically supports the institutional set-up and denounces the integration process at the same time. It would be in practice, a performance that perceives the EU as undesirable but which would deserve support because of a lack of realistic alternatives. The *Eurocritical* position supports the principle of integration but denounces the current system and further integration plans. *Alter-European* is similar to *Eurocritical* but it is favourable to further integration. This performance criticizes EU polity but provides alternatives with a "pro-EU" solution.[129]

In the 2019 EP elections, the Eurosceptic parties shifted their strategy/point of view. They do not contest the EU as a construction anymore (*Anti-European* discursive strategy). They rather weaken their position by attempting to gain ground within the European Parliament to change policies in favour of their views, which leads them to *Alter-European* or *Eurocritical* positions.[130]For example, the ECR group claims that it is not "anti-european", it is "eurorealist" and aims at changing the agenda for the respect of sovereignts[131].

2.3.2 Relation between these trends and the democratic deficit

[128] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1368431011432968. Accessed 5th May 2020. p. 545.
[129] *Ibid.* p.548. See Appendix 5.
[130] Tallberg, Jonas. "A sign of strength for EU legitimacy" in *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019*.ed. by Bolin Niklas et al. 2019. p.13.
[131] *European Conservatives and Reformists group.* https://ecrgroup.eu/about.

Since there is an emerging politicization of the EU decisions, a growth of voter turnout and a growth in Euroscepticism and contestation, it could mean that the citizens' awareness of the democratic deficit increased with unpopular decisions. Now, the questions, in relation with our research question are: "Is Euroscepticism and contestation the expression of the democratic deficit?", "What is promoting politicization?", "Does politicization of politics increase EU legitimacy?", "Does a Europeanized discourse emerge?".

2.3.2.1 "Is Euroscepticism and contestation the expression of the democratic deficit?"

When it comes to the reasons for the emergence of Euroscepticism, there is an ongoing debate. Making a parallel between Follesdal and Hix, Mair and de Wilde and Trenz's views lead us to see Euroscepticism as a response to the need for opposition and political competition within a political system, essential to democratic systems. The lack of space for political discontent within regular politics would lead to the complete opposition to the entire system as Mair clarifies[132]:

> *Once we cannot organize opposition in the EU, we are then almost forced to organize opposition to the EU. To be critical of the policies promulgated by Brussels is therefore to be critical of the polity; to object to the process is therefore to object to the product. Following Kirchheimer, in other words, we either submit, and hence we accept the elimination of opposition, or we mobilize an opposition of principle and become intrinsically Eurosceptic.*

The difficulty of providing opposition within the system (and not outside of the system) would come from the presentation of depoliticized policies, an idea put forward by Vivien Schmidt (see 2.1.2.2). This depoliticization leads to an impoverished political debate. The Member States are also affected by depoliticization as the EU urges them to depoliticize politics. The lack of political opposition and the depoliticization reduce the quality of democracy, decreasing popular participation —the impact of elections is limited—and electoral accountability. Therefore, it worsens the democratic deficit at the EU level and at the domestic levels.[133]

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[132] Mair, Peter. "Political Opposition and the European Union". *Cambridge University Press*. 2007. Vol. 42. N° 1. p.7. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44483177. Accessed 6th May 2020.
[133] *Ibid.* p.7-8 and 13-14.

In addition, several intellectuals, Follesdal, Hix and Schmidt among others, claim that the citizens cannot express their approval or disapproval of EU policies with "no punishment at the polls" as for the national governments. There is no possibility to ensure that their opinion is respected. The decrease in votes for mainstream parties and the fact that citizens are more and more likely to vote for alternative parties would show the citizens' discontent. These Eurosceptic and alternative votes are, therefore, similar to "punishment at the polls". Contestation is particularly related to opportunities of expressions found in treaties, referenda and similar events with the purpose to challenge further EU integration.[134]

Another study from de Wilde et al.[135]corroborates this vision as it shows that, on the internet, when it comes to discussing EU legitimacy, the citizens are likely to perceive the EU in terms of democratic criteria. In their opinions about democracy, they tend to discredit EU legitimacy. This shows the concern of citizens towards the democratic deficit.

For de Wilde and Trenz, popular discontent is exploited by populist parties from the right and left-wing. Yet, Euroscepticism should not be neglected as an irrational, emotional and marginal phenomenon because it will continue to take part in EU integration. The problem is that popular discontent still needs to find narratives that are attractive without popular or extremist content.[136]

As a conclusion, Euroscepticism and contestation are the expressions of democratic deficit. Following unpopular policies, the need for politicization was even more important. Since there was no space for political opposition or competition, sign of a democratic deficit, Euroscepticism emerged. It shows the citizen's discontent through the idea of "punishment at the polls".

2.3.2.2 "What is promoting politicization?" and "Does politicization of politics increase EU legitimacy?"

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[134] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1368431011432968. Accessed 5th May 2020. p. 541.

[135] de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". *European Journal of Political Research*. 2014. N°53. p.777. https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1475-6765.12050. Accessed 6th May 2020.

[136] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. p.550.

The origin of politicization is debated in the literature. Statham and Trenz's interpretation of politicization seems persuasive. The growing awareness of EU power on citizens' lives would lead to a higher salience of EU integration in citizens' lives. This would result in a polarization of interests and opinions, triggering public expression about EU policies.[137] As a consequence, "*Europeanised public spheres proliferated, not through consonances of unified discourse and understanding, but through the resonances of diverging opinions and conflicts*".[138]

According to Hooghe and Marks[139], as the centre-left and centre-right parties have guided EU integration, the opposition to the integration was led by populist non-governing parties. These parties mobilized exclusively national identities, which then, influenced public opinion. The traditional parties and the elites had a depoliticized discourse on EU policies—for example during the Eurozone crisis, unpopular measures were justified by depoliticization and by expert assessment. Besides, Statham and Trenz emphasize the role of mass media to enhance democracy by shaping public opinion and featuring the polarised opinion on EU integration. For instance, during the Eurozone crisis, the countries were discursively divided between the creditors and the indebted countries, fostering polarisation.[140] This visible polarisation, through the media coverage, led to public contestation, leading itself to the repoliticization of EU policies, creating a debate on EU legitimacy[141].

To decrease the democratic deficit, some scholars thought that the politicization of EU policies was the solution. For instance, Follesdal and Hix argue that competition of ideas would enable citizens to compare the political alternatives to make their own choice in order to suit their political preferences. (see 2.1.4) Although at the first glance, greater politicization is in correlation with higher Euroscepticism as most scholars point out, de

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[137] Statham, Paul and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Understanding the mechanisms of EU politicization: Lessons from the Eurozone crisis". *Comparative European politics*. 2015. Vol. 13. N°3. p. 288.
[138] Eder and Trenz (2003) cited in de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". *European Journal of Political Research*. 2014. N°53. p. 770.
[139] Hooghe and Marks cited in Statham, Paul and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Understanding the mechanisms of EU politicization: Lessons from the Eurozone crisis". *Comparative European politics*. 2015. Vol. 13. N°3. p.290.
[140] *Ibid*. p.299-300.
[141] *Ibid*. p.297-298.

Wilde et al. do not confirm this impression. Indeed, they conclude that politicization does not mean more Euroscepticism. It would rather amplify the diversity of arguments towards EU aspects in positive and negative ways.[142] Yet, at the same time, this impression of correlation with Euroscepticism is linked to a media bias. Online media debates on EU legitimacy tend to draw attention on negative perceptions of the EU over positive ones.[143]

Therefore, politicization can be seen as an opportunity for citizens to challenge the system according to the perceived democratic deficit, which would help to decrease this democratic deficit. Still, the political decisions need to be responsive to this challenge in order to decrease the democratic deficit.[144] Also, politicisation would mean a process towards legitimation if there is an equal diffusion of the various arguments across various national publics, elite and mass publics. If not, the audiences get limited access to the exposed arguments, which decreases the legitimation potential of politicization.[145]

2.3.2.3 "Does a Europeanized discourse emerge?"

First of all, there are different possibilities to consider Europeanization. As the idealistic European demos considered by Weiler (see 2.1.1) turns out to be absent according to most scholars, other forms of Europeanization were considered and particularly the idea of Europeanisation of several national identities. The Europeanisation of the discourses and public sphere would mean that "Europeanization of public and media communication can be analysed as a process that enlarges the scope of public discourse beyond the territorial nation state"[146]. According to the typology of Hänska et al., there are five type of Europeanization in the mass media context. First, the supranational approach means an increased mediatic attention on EU actors and institutions. Second, the vertical approach consists in

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[142] de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". European Journal of Political Research. 2014. N°53.p. 775.

[143] *Ibid.* p.779.

[144] Statham, Paul and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Understanding the mechanisms of EU politicization: Lessons from the Eurozone crisis". *Comparative European politics*. 2015. Vol. 13. N°3.

[145] de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". European Journal of Political Research. 2014. N°53. p.770.

[146] Trenz (2008, p.278) cited in Dutceac Segesten, Anamaria and Michael Bossetta. "Can Euroscepticism contribute to a European public sphere? The Europeanization of Media Discourses on Euroscepticism across Six countries". *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2019. Vol. 57. N° 5. p.1054.

communication between the institutions and the national level. It can be bottom-up or top-down. Third, the horizontal approach strengthens the links between the national entities. The weak horizontal Europeanization means increased attention on events/issues of another member state, while the strong horizontal Europeanization means a direct linkage between two or more EU countries.[147]

According to the European Elections Monitoring Unit, the 2019 European Elections campaign is rather several national campaigns. This confirms Schmidt's idea that the citizens mostly perceive the EU policies through the national politicians' discourses. The national focus was felt especially in the Southern and Eastern countries. Generally, when Europe or European issues were discussed, it depended on and overlapped with national policy matters. For example, the immigration topic, despite its EU jurisdiction, was especially discussed within the limits of each country, particularly in Hungary and Italy. The political agenda also depends on each country's geopolitical situation. This national focus for 8 countries (Belgium, Italy, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Spain) may have been triggered by concurrent national/local elections, but, at the same time, it increases the voter turnout.[148] In addition, the communication strength of the EU parties was very low. The adoption of transnational lists has failed, promoting national lists. Thus, at first glance, EU elections are still "second-order elections".[149]

When we further analyse the campaign, we also notice few supranational key moments in the campaign. On the 15th May 2019, a debate between the six *spitzenkandidaten* was broadcast live on 35 TV channels and more than 60 online platforms. Another key moment is the Sibiu declaration but it failed to challenge the issues which besmirch solidarity between the Member States as the election campaign should not be affected.[150] The role of *spitzenkandidaten* as supranational "links" between countries did not counter the national

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[147] Hänska Max et al. "Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis". *Social Media + Society*. Vol. 5. N°3. July 2019. p.2-3. See Appendix 6.

[148] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019. p. 15-18.

[149] Costea, Vladimir-Adrian. "Quo Vadis European Union?". *CES Working Papers*. 2019. Vol.11. N°3. p. 274-275 https://search.proquest.com/docview/2313059347/A5741C523FB24C4EPQ/8?accountid=14630.

[150] *Ibid*. p.274.

focus of the campaign. Few *spitzenkandidaten* focused on personal campaigns across various countries.[151] Therefore, these supranational moments lack visibility and supranational character. According to Costea, Galpin and Trenz, the Member States and the EU institutions needed a common (re)definition of the principles and values of EU as the political actors have a different interpretation of concepts such as democracy, solidarity and cooperation.[152]

Communication issues (lack of common language, impoverished European media) make supranational campaign complex but the social networks make it more and more achievable as the flexibility of the social networks enable the various parties to reach a wider audience. (see 3.2.4.1) The social networks also enable the establishment of a *lingua franca*, namely English in the case of Twitter[153]. Galpin and Trenz argue that the 2019 election campaign went beyond the idea of "second-order elections" as the campaign is not only about national issues but also about the legitimacy of the EU project, opposing various positions towards the EU. They provide examples of supranational campaigns:[154]

On the one hand, among the "pro-EU" defenders, even though the UK campaign was mostly made at the national level, the Labour party tried to promote the election of the *spitzenkandidaten* Frans Timmermans as a Commission president.[155]

On the other hand, among the "anti-EU" defenders, Matteo Salvini (Lega) tried to manage a transnational far-right campaign with Poland, France, Denmark and Austria.

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[151] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed 71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019. p. 15. The supranationality of the *spitzenkandidaten* will be discussed later on.
[152] Costea, Vladimir-Adrian. "Quo Vadis European Union?". *CES Working Papers*. 2019. Vol.11. N°3. p. 275 https://search.proquest.com/docview/2313059347/A5741C523FB24C4EPQ/8?accountid=14630.
[153] Hänska Max et al. "Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis". *Social Media + Society*. July 2019. Vol. 5. N°3. p. 10.

Risse 2010 in Ruiz-Soler, Javier et al. "Commenting on Political Topics Through Twitter: Is European Politics European?". *Social Media+Society*. 2019. p. 3

[154] Galpin, Charlotte and Trenz Hans-Jörg. "In the Shadow of Brexit: The 2019 European Parliament Elections as First-Order Polity Elections?". *The Political Quarterly*. Vol.90. N°4. October-December 2019. p.664-671. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-923X.12768 Accessed 10th February 2020. p.666.
[155] *Ibid.*

Indeed, the observations of the campaign show the creation of a network of eurosceptic parties was created. For example, Marine Lepen's Rassemblement national (France), Matteo Salvini's Lega (Italy) and Smerodina (Slovakia) among others united their forces in the creation of Identity&Democracy (former Europe of nations and Freedom). Another example: Vox, Spain's eurosceptic party was not very active in the EU campaign but it became more active to increase the power of the other Eurosceptic parties of the European Conservatives and Reformists group according to experts.[156]

The conflictual opinions on EU integration and the polarization of opinions are likely to reproduce themselves within the European public space through mass media, leading to a (limited) Europeanisation of the public spheres[157]. If the topics of diffusion are Europeanized, then, the politicization may lead to a legitimacy potential.(see 2.3.2.2)

Ducteac and Bossetta argue that Europeanized discourse may precisely be found in relation to legitimacy in the form of a weak horizontal Europeanization. Indeed, they argue that there is a transnational discourse about Euroscepticism both in the printed press and in social media, which is confirmed by the analysis of 6 various countries' media coverage. The results show that Euroscepticism is more likely to be discussed within a European context, except for the UK. Also, the content of the European topics was particularly similar. For instance, among the common topics of the 2014 EP elections, there was the Eurozone crisis, the Ukrainian crisis and the formation of a Eurosceptic party. Overall, it shows that few topics are unlinked, which means that common topics are shared across several countries. In the case of Euroscepticism, 70% of the articles are discussed in a European context—not a national context.[158]

This study is limited as it only takes into account discourses during the 2014 EP elections. In addition, the fact that common topics are shared does not mean that the same

[156] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". EU publications. July 2019. Publications Office of the European Union. https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e6767a95-a386-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-104505708. Accessed 14th September 2019. p. 240.
[157] Koopmans and Erbe (2004) cited in de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". European Journal of Political Research. 2014. N°53.p.770.
[158] *Ibid.* p.1058-1060.

narratives are used. According to the country, the diffusion of the topic is not the same. This means that the citizens are still very likely to be influenced by national media coverage of the topic as that is the main channel through which they perceive EU-related topics. Of course, the level of Europeanization depends on various factors. For instance, Ducteac and Bossetta study shows that a tabloid is more likely to be national than a broadsheet, fostering Europeanization. Also, the more successful the national Eurosceptic party is, the more national the discourse on Euroscepticism will be. Budget contributors of the EU are more likely to provide a national discourse than EU net receivers.[159]

A more recent study on the 2019 elections mass media coverage in Italy shows a greater visibility of the EU (1 out of 3 news covered the EU) in comparison with the 2014 media coverage (1 out of 5 news covered the EU). In addition, this corresponds with a higher salience of EU matters within the political groups and especially in Eurosceptic parties.[160] The prevalent form of coverage is still the national approach as the vertical bottom-up dynamic focuses on Italian political actors. Negative coverage of the EU is less prevalent (31,2%) than negative coverage of national actors (39,3%). However, there are also signs of a horizontal coverage of EU matters in some particular media outlets. Indeed, 42% of the EU news covered political events of another EU member state. For instance, the Italian media focused on the Gilet Jaune's protest in France and on the Spanish elections. Again, this study shows limitation as it only focuses on Italian mass media.[161]

Thus, we can say that there is a Europeanisation of national discourses mostly in the case of Euroscepticism or negative events, as the Europeanised public spheres emerge through the resonance of diverging opinions and conflicts. Yet, the perception of EU-related topics is still first and foremost, made through national media, opting for a Europeanised or national depiction of phenomenon according to several criteria. This leads to a debate on EU legitimacy in which the democratic deficit takes part.

3. The role of communication

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[159] *Ibid.* p.1061-1062.
[160] Cremonesi, Cristina et al. "The European Union in the media coverage of the 2019 European election campaign in Italy: towards the Europeanization of the Italian public sphere." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*. 2019. Vol. 24. N°5. p. 676-677
[161] *Ibid.* p.680-685.

After having drawn attention to the relation between the 2019 EP elections and the democratic deficit, I shall give an overview about the role of communication in shaping EU politics. For further details, I would like to analyse the 2019 national and supranational election campaign discourses. Eventually, I will provide consideration on the relation between democracy and media/communication. The aim of this point is to give a full picture on the importance of communication and current democracy.

3. The role of communication in the EU

3.1. What is the role of communication for the European Parliament?

Public communication supports the creation of democratic legitimacy. Indeed, it is a prerequisite for democracy as it connects European institutions with its citizens. Yet, it cannot solve the democratic deficit nor improve EU governance, mostly related to the EU structure. Overall, communication within the EU aims at decreasing the democratic deficit by optimizing the input-output chain legitimacy and throughput. More precisely, it allows electoral participation and participation in policy-making by improving citizens' knowledge; it enhances political responsiveness by improving the visibility of the citizen's preferences, it enables transparency and accountability and participates in the creation of a sense of belonging.[162]

3.1.2 Historical communication strategy

Throughout the time, the main communication objective of the European Union has been to tackle the democratic deficit.[163] Originally, in the 50-60s, the European Economic Community (EEC) Communication targeted academic, political and economic elite, considering them "ambassadors" of the integration project. The aim was to select "multipliers" with political influence to influence their social sphere. As a result, integration

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[162] (Ed.)Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p. 6-8 and p.23.

[163] Brandel, Daniela. *Closing the Gap: How the European Union turns to communication to engage the citizens in the elections*. Master of Art Thesis. University of Uppsala and University of Göttingen. March 2016.

initiation has a clear technocrat and elitist base. [164] However, as the competences of the EEC grew, diffuse Euroscepticism spread among the EU citizens. [165]

As a response, in 1973 the Commission adopted a *Report on the European citizenship* providing citizens rights and guidelines defending the principles of representative democracy, law, social justice, etc. In the 70s, a dialogue emerged between the citizens and the EU institutions. In 1977, the main focus of the European Information Action was to prepare the first direct election of the European Parliament in 1979. The aims were to provide objective information about the institutions, to stimulate public interest and to bring citizens to vote. The target public was divided between the elites and the general public. A first campaign targeted especially the elite to promote some opinions. Later, a campaign targeted a wider public to reach as many voters as possible, mostly through mass media. It resulted in a voter turnout of 63% but despite this success, the 1980 program established that the general public had been under-informed about the European Community's activities and that the support of some countries had been low. [166]

From the 1980s onwards, the democratic deficit was already the target of the communication strategy as it focused on providing transparency, openness and the idea of a European identity emerged. Indeed, the 1980s was a context of tensions between the countries towards European integration. The information program was aware of the need for credible policies and proactive informative responses. It presents a shift in communication strategy because the Commission became aware that presenting a positive image of itself would not solve complex integration issues. The objective became even more difficult as disillusion grew with an overload of information. [167] In practical terms, transparency meant simplification of the rules and practices and the European identity, through citizenship, was made a reality with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. [168] The adoption of symbols promoting EU

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[164] Terra, Ana Lucia in (Ed.)Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.50.
[165] Nesti, Giorgia in *Ibid.* p.27-28.
[166] Nesti, Giorgia and Terra, Ana Lucia in *Ibid.* p.40 and 56-57.
[167] Terra, Ana Lucia in *Ibid.* p.58.
[168] Nesti, Giorgia in *Ibid*. p.40.

(flag, anthem, etc) and the identification of the need for greater information about the integration process, actions were, for instance, two concrete communication strategies.[169]

In the 1990s, the new issues related to the democratic deficit entered in the original objectives. A reflection of the MEP Gianni Baget-Bozzo led the EU to reconsider its information programs. In regard to over-institutionalised proposals, he emphasized the need for the use of communication with an accessible language, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). He also identified the need for an active role of Member States in promoting interest in the EU and in creating a communication flow with the other countries without hierarchical relations.[170] It also shows signs of a marketing-oriented communicative strategy. Yet, the 1999 resignation of the Santer Commission because of corruption and fraud suspicions revealed a failure in the communication purposes as it damaged transparency and legitimation attempts, leading to a major legitimation crisis.[171]

In the 2000s, communication was relaunched to face the several issues for better governance. The EU adapted itself to the new ICTs to improve communication effectiveness. After the failure of the 2005 referenda in France and in the Netherlands, the Barroso commission (2004-2014) also aimed at promoting a pan-European political culture and a European public sphere. The idea of decentralisation (communication depends on regional contexts) and partnerships are also put forward as part of communicative responsibilities.[172] The Commission recognizes the increasing impact of the EU on citizens' lives but the failure of communicating correctly to the general public, widening the gap between the people and the institutions.[173]

The Communication policy only found a legal basis in the Charter of Fundamental Right linked with the Lisbon Treaty (2009). As it basically gives the right to access information and freedom of expression, it gives the EU the responsibility to communicate its decisions and its activities to EU citizens and other parties. The policy is based on three main principles: "*listening to the public, and taking their views and concerns into account;*

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[169] *Ibid.* p.30.
[170] Terra, Anna Lucia in *Ibid.* p.59.
[171] Nesti, Giorgia in *Ibid.* p.32.
[172] *Ibid.* p.42.
[173] *Ibid.* p.46.

explaining how EU policies affect citizen's everyday lives; connecting with people locally by addressing them in their national or local settings, through their favourite media."[174]

Under the Juncker commission (2014-2019), the main objective was: "*Citizens perceive that the EU is working to improve their lives and engage with the EU. They feel their concerns are taken into consideration in European decision making process and they know about their rights in the EU*". For the 2019 elections campaign, they launched a campaign with the reason why the elections and the citizens' votes matter.[175]

3.2 Communication during the 2019 European Parliament elections

3.2.1. How did the EU institutions communicate?

From the beginning of the EU construction, public communication has been treated as an add-on duty more than a strategy to gain public support as the historical background reveals. A lack of coordination between the institutions, a technocratic mindset and lack of professional communication was associated with EU communication.[176] Even though the EU institutions have improved their communication policies throughout time, some scholars claim that the EU institutions still suffer from these critics related to a "communication deficit". The communication deficit is inherently linked with the democratic deficit. Indeed, a lack of citizens' knowledge leads to an impoverished democratic system. In the context of the 2019 elections, how does the European Parliament deal with communication?

Each major institution (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council) have their own press office dedicated to the gestion of journalists' demands.[177] More precisely, the European Parliament has Press officers specialised in the member states and Press officers based in Brussels and Strasbourg. A communication team is dedicated to the president of the EU parliament and the political groups also have their own press services. The Spokeperson's Unit answers the media's demands and reacts to

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[174] European Parliament. "Communication Policy". *European Parliament.* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/144/communication-policy Accessed 14th May 2020.
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Meyer, Christoph. "Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit". Journal of Common Market Studies. 1999. Vol. 37. N°4. p.624-629.
[177] Laursen, Bo and Chiara Valentini. "Mediatization and Government Communication: Press Work in the European Parliament". *The International Journal of Press/Politics.* 2015. Vol. 20. N°1. p. 27.

disinformation about the EP. It also provides elements of answer for the members of the European Parliament. Audiovisual services are available to the EU institutions and to mass media.[178] It is the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication which coordinates the communication campaigns (including on social networks) to the citizens. It analyses the public opinion and media trends to guide the Commission.[179]

3.2.1.1 The EU Commission

The EU commission determines the communication strategies of its mandate. For the 2019 EP elections, it is the Juncker Commission which set communication objectives with a plan from 2016 to 2020. The Commission mostly follows the strategies established by the Barroso Commission with the aim of decreasing the democratic deficit. To achieve this objective, it emphasizes the idea of "connection with the citizens" through sub-objectives such as[180]:

- Communication should emphasize the benefits provided by the EU to the citizens daily lives;
- Communication should emphasize the fact that their concerns are taken into account by policy-making.
- The citizens should be aware of the commission's priorities which are "growth, jobs and investment" and be aware of the EU as a whole, values and its work. Citizens know their rights.

To fulfil these objectives, the Commission takes into consideration external factors, specifically the specific content of the message and the 28 national contexts and emerging European public space. These spaces are influenced by[181]:

-International, national and regional political factors

-International, national and regional economic factors

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[178] European Parliament. "Press Room". https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/contacts Accessed 18th May 2020.
[179] European Commission. "DG Comm-DG for Communication".
https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/organisation/dg-comm-dg-communication_er. Accessed 18th May.
[180] European Commission. "Strategic Plan 2016-2020 DG Communication". 2016. Part I. p.4-13.
[181] *Ibid.* p.4.

-Level of trust in political institutions (international and national) and media

-Media habits/practice/attitude

-Technological developments, notably in the information and communication technologies

The message that is conveyed should be clear, simple, understandable, that stimulates citizens' interest in EU affairs and strengthens the trust in the EU. It should focus on the Commission priorities in one unique voice. It should be conveyed to targeted media, other multipliers and to EU citizens. To stimulate interest, the strategy plans the use of corporate communication strategies thanks to a digital transformation program. The web should be reorganised along themes (with the Commission priorities) and provide online services. The EU should be also more present in online communication, including social media. In addition, communication should be shaped in a dialogue with citizens specific to each country. The Commission listens and replies to the most important issues through all media in all EU official languages. The success of communication is measured in the Eurobarometer. Effective communication increases the positive replies of citizens about EU image.[182]

3.2.1.2 The European Parliament

Since the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has now the responsibility to communicate what Europe is about and to foster citizens' interests in Europe. Therefore, it provides factual information and documents in all 24 official languages on its website, on social media platforms and through the media. The institutional communication is non-partisan and neutral but it supported the various political parties and candidates on what they achieved, not on what they ought to achieve.[183]

In the literature, scholars notice the increasing efforts of the EU institutions to adapt themselves to the logic of media following the mediatization of politics. The mediatization of politics is the result of the increasing influence and independence of the media in relation to politics. Nowadays, politics have to adopt the media logic to reach the citizens and with the

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[182] *Ibid.* p.3-20.
[183] European Parliament. "Communication Policy". *European Parliament.* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/144/communication-policy Accessed 14th May 2020.

hope that their ideas will shape and influence the news.[184] This brings them to deal with two main challenges.

The EP's Press officers have to find a balance between the media's criteria and their status as civil servants. This is called the civil servant challenge. Adapting their message to the media means fitting with timeliness, identification, sensation, conflict, relevance, etc. This involves selecting certain facts while omitting others to fit in the media agendas. This selection may lead to biased messages in opposition to the presumed neutrality of public institutions. Indeed, the POs see themselves as assistants helping journalists covering EU affairs. As a consequence, they would like to adapt their content to increase media interest by focusing on separate MEPs, debate or even conflict than on consensual ideas. At the same time, they should provide institutional and consensual accounts of all MEPs and political groups. They should stick to adopted texts, avoid controversial information and should not promote a political group. They also see themselves as publicists as they also have the objective of boosting the EP's visibility in the media and shaping its image. One of the PO interviewed in Laursen and Valentini's study said, "*Our aim, after all, is to sell the institution*". They need to find a balance between these two poles. The problem is that impartial information makes them credible and attractive resources for journalists. If they promote the institution, they compromise this image as journalists will perceive them as publicists.[185]

The Press officers have to deal with a second challenge: the national media challenge. As the EU has several heterogeneous media contexts, converging news agenda is a challenge. Shared mediated space in the form of a European public sphere is not tangible. This implies that most of the citizens are informed by their national media, which makes the EP press work decentralized and more complex. The POs have to focus on national angles to approach EP's events by varying the coverage of EU events according to the sensitivity of the country to the topic. In this way, each POs is specialized in one policy area but also in one official language and/or one member state. They work with Brussels-based journalists but also with

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[184] Strömbäck, Jesper. "Four Phases of Mediatization: An analysis of the Mediatization of Politics". *Press/Politics.* Vol. 13. N°3. p.240.

[185] Laursen, Bo and Chiara Valentini. "Mediatization and Government Communication: Press Work in the European Parliament". *The International Journal of Press/Politics.* 2015. Vol. 20. N°1. p.30-38.

nationally-based journalists to a lesser extent (for major events).[186] To spread their message, POs rely on "multipliers": trusted elitist journalists from influential media and renowned for their skills by other journalists, who will use them as sources.[187]

When it comes to the 2019 European Parliament elections, in 2018, the Commission took time to present ideas to improve communication before the elections. Juncker, the President of the Commission insisted on the performance of *Spitzenkandidaten*. Therefore, the political groups should already think about a *Spitzenkandidaten* to represent their parties. He also pointed out the importance of emphasizing the link between national parties and European parties. Ideas of reorganisation of the institutions were also put forward. The Commission also wants to increase interactive debates to 500 more debates with the public between 2018 and the elections.[188]

The campaign took place in three stages. The first stage began in 2018 with the aim of "laying the groundwork"—ensure that the citizens understand the work, relevance and power of the European Parliament in their arenas of concerns. The second stage in late 2018 and early 2019 puts an emphasis on the *spitzenkandidaten* process. The third stage is the intensive "go-to-vote" stage about the practicalities linked to voting, which occurred 30 days before the elections.[189]

In the EP's vision, the communication process is found at three levels: the most visible campaign organised by national and European political parties and candidates which is personalised; the Spitzenkandidaten campaign as it was a success in 2014; a dedicated campaign to the European Parliament's role and the importance of citizens' implication.[190]

During the campaign, one of the major objectives of the European Parliament strategy was to reach a wide network of civil society multipliers to spread the "European message".

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[186] *Ibid.* p.30-32 and 39.
[187] *Ibid.* p.36.
[188] Bertaud, Natasha. "A Europe that delivers: Commission presents ideas for a more efficient European Union".European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_743. Accessed 26th May 2020.
[189] European Parliament. "Proposal for the European Parliament’s institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019". 2017. p.1. In https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-parliament-plans-election-campaign-against-euroskeptics/ Accessed 18th May 2020.
[190] *Ibid*. p.2-3.

This was a crucial element for the success of the campaign. The EP had to align its message with the Commission: "*The Commission will focus on pro-European messages relating to how the EU protects, empowers and delivers to citizens. The European Parliament will complement this narrative with the specific goal of ensuring voters understand why it is important to vote at the European elections and how their vote counts.*" Overall, the objectives of the European Parliament are to make the citizens understand the European project and the EP as well as bringing the citizens to the polls.[191] To meet the objectives, the EU showed concrete examples of reasons to vote and concrete actions the EU does for the citizens. Even a "citizen's app" was developed and launched at the beginning of 2019 with audiovisual content related to this same subject. The campaign is not only developed online. For example, the Open days of the EU institutions occurred on the 4th May 2019 and the European Day is on the 9th May, these were other occasions to promote EU actions.[192]

The strategy implies that the campaign must be clearly pro-European by convincing the citizens to vote in favour of Europe as the EU is at stake in a context of nationalized and protectionist discourses. It follows the idea of a decentralised and localised campaign, that is, the communication strategy and the message depends on a local network, audience and channel. The various messages are conveyed by a network of institutions and media in cooperation with the EP and national governments.[193] In the part of the strategy dedicated to citizens, the citizens are also mobilised themselves to convince the others citizens to vote mostly through the platform thistimeimvoting.eu with 150,000 volunteers in all Member states who signed up to encourage as many people as possible to vote but also thanks to a Facebook group. As a result, one part of the campaign is dedicated to providing content to multipliers (media, citizens who participate in thistimeimvoting, etc.), more concretely a Press kit, access to audiovisual content and to a download centre with information.[194]

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[191] *Ibid*.

[192] European Union. "European Elections 2019 Communication Toolkit". *Publications Office of the European Union*. April 2019. doi:10.2775/55385 Accessed 2nd September 2019.

[193] European Parliament. "Proposal for the European Parliament’s institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019". 2017. p.3-4. In https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-parliament-plans-election-campaign-against-euroskeptics/ Accessed 18th May 2020.

[194] European Union. "European Elections 2019 Communication Toolkit". *Publications Office of the European Union*. April 2019. doi:10.2775/55385 Accessed 2nd September 2019.

Tailored messages target different audiences through the most effective channels in order to reach the wider and more diverse public as possible. The EP targets especially three target groups who have maintained a pro-EU attitude but did not participate optimally to the last elections: opinion makers (employed professional, management and director section), young voters (under 24) and students.[195]

The main message/narrative is to make the European project relevant to the decisions to be taken for a better future, providing a good reason to go to the polls. The final key message that was chosen is "Choose your future" providing the citizens a sense of empowerment and control, planting the idea of a prospect for change.[196] More specifically, this message was conveyed thanks to a video posted on Facebook and on Youtube. I will analyse its content in the practical part. (see 4.2)

Regarding the media strategy, it aims at maximising cost-free media coverage. Media do not need ready-made material but good stories and guidance — the EP Press Officers should establish a dialogue with the media to meet their needs. TV debates are the strongest channel for any political campaign. The 2019 elections should convince televisions to broadcast the presidential debate. The paper adds: "*Media are key allies in building a positive narrative about the EU*". In order to reach its full potential, emphasis should be placed on television and digital media and regional media. The dialogue established with the media will be established mostly through contact with national media and through Press seminars. The traditional media have also an essential role in helping the Parliament in fighting fake news[200]. The EU particularly paid attention to disinformation by preventing disinformation thanks to an established plan against disinformation along the electoral campaign. They raised citizen's awareness of disinformation issues, boosted the capacity of the EU to react to disinformation, supported quality journalism and independent fact-checking with the development of EU services. In the light of the elections, it prepared its cybersecurity team in case of threats and the Commission put into force a law which fines up to 5% of their budget

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[195] European Parliament. "Proposal for the European Parliament’s institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019". 2017. p.4. In
https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-parliament-plans-election-campaign-against-euroskeptics/
Accessed 18th May 2020.
[196] *Ibid.* p.5.

the political parties which try to influence the results of elections by misusing personal data.
[197]

The key audiences of the EP are mostly digital natives, which means communication strategy occurs mostly online through multiple channels and social media groups. Multipliers and supporters should be fed with online tools of the campaign. The 2019 strategy repeats successful tools that were used in 2014 such as an "I voted" button or a Twitter election banner. It also wants to develop new tools such as chat-bots.[198] The European Parliament has now a chat-bot on the messenger function of its Facebook page.

In the first instance, the EP delivered the message through its own networks and through social media but it also relied on paid media and advertising for decentralised highly targeted audiences, which means it uses mixed media. The EP strategy tends to develop a higher internalisation of strategy rather than relying on external agencies because they have a "*poor understanding of the specific challenges and constraints of institutional communication*".[199]

The proposal concludes that the context of the 2019 elections is very different from the 2014 one. It must take new parameters into account especially unpredictable international relations, the Brexit aftermath, the intense migration or the fake news.[200] This idea was repeated on Euronews and on the social networks campaign (see 4.2).

3.2.2 Critical analysis

In line with the idea of "communication deficit", I will provide critical analysis of the plan provided by the European Institutions on the basis of scholars' point of views.

First, the "communication deficit" is characterized by a lack of coordination between the institutions. According to Meyer, the European Parliament has the advantage to modify legislation according to its requests but holding accountable the Commission for the decision.

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[197] *Ibid.* p.6-7.
[198] DG Com. "Action Plan against Disinformation". 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union*. doi:10.2775/18729 . Accessed 16th September 2019.
[199] European Parliament. "Proposal for the European Parliament's institutional communication strategy for European Elections 2019". 2017. p.7-8.
[200] *Ibid.* p.9.

[201] It is true that in daily communication the EP and the EC consider themselves as two different entities. For example, it is possible to increase the EP's visibility at the expense of the Commission and the Council: "*When Parliament has really obtained a victory because it felt that what the Council wanted was unacceptable, and it succeeded in the negotiations with Council in obtaining what Parliament wanted, then clearly we're going to communicate that,*" said a Press Officer that was interviewed about their job.[202] In the case of the 2019 elections, the message was coordinated between the EP and the EC: the EP conveys the message of the importance of voting while the EC shows how the citizens benefit from the EU. The EP is supposed to remain neutral, probably the reason why the EC has to promote the EU but the coordination of both institutions leads the EP to inevitably favour the EU, undermining its supposed neutrality.

All the more, the strategy is to clearly promote a pro-EU stance, following the 1993 de Clerq report that claims that the EU policies, instead of being technical, should highlight what is beneficial to the citizens in a marketing-oriented way: "*the Commission should be clearly positioned as the guarantor of the wellbeing and quality of life of the citizen of Europe... It must be presented with a human face: sympathetic, warm and caring*"[203]. Although this strategy seems appealing, this results in a lack of space for opposition, leading itself to Euroscepticism. (see 2.3.2.1) The Swedish Eurosceptic MEP Peter Lundgren reacted to this strategy: "*the EU federalists are desperate after losing the argument and recent elections in Austria and the Czech Republic. The European Parliament will now use taxpayers' money to build a propaganda machine to silence critical voices*".[204]

The treatment of Euroscepticism and opposition is also mismanaged according to scholars. When citizens doubt European integration, the EU dismisses their critical reviews,

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[201] Meyer, Christoph. "Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit". *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 1999. Vol. 37. N°4. p.632.
[202] Laursen, Bo and Chiara Valentini. "Mediatization and Government Communication: Press Work in the European Parliament". *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. Vol. 20. N°1. 2015. p.35.
[203] De Clerq report (1993) cited in Podkalicka Aneta and Cris Shore in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.97.
[204] Cooper, Harry. "European Parliament plans election campaign against Euroskeptics". *Politico*. 2017. https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-parliament-plans-election-campaign-against-euroskeptics/. Accessed 18th May 2020.

assuming that they need to be more aware of the benefits of the EU. For Podkalicka and Shore, the challenge of the EU is to "*recognise the intelligence of ordinary Europeans and their cultural aspirations, including those who vote 'no' to EU institutional reforms and treaties.*"[205] De Wilde and Trenz share this view arguing that Euroscepticism should be seen as a public discourse response to pro-integration arguments. As a consequence, "*increased efforts to provide justifications for European integration, would provide the breeding ground for Euroscepticism*"[206]. As above mentioned, Euroscepticism can emerge in different ways (see 2.3.1). Euroscepticism attitudes also change throughout time and space and will continue to shape the European Union with future integration as it is not a marginal phenomenon.[207] A Eurosceptic response can criticize pro-EU arguments, challenge the legitimacy of the political actors and institutions which advanced pro-EU arguments or even underline the lack of justificatory arguments. As a result, "*European integration has opened a vicious circle in which the discursive building of legitimacy correlates with its own de-legitimation.*"[208] Therefore, the EU should not try to overcome it by rational ways of communication but should understand it as a process of politicization towards a potential legitimization. (2.3.2.3) In the case of the 2019 elections, the communication targets groups that are already pro-European—the youth, the students, the opinion makers. This is a failure to reach a wider public which also has the right to participate in politics.

Even though the communication strategy aims at creating a dialogue with the citizens, the ideas that the public puts forward are difficult to implement and lack real feedback. For example, officials typically reply in a "neutral way" to dialogue as it would also be the case with the European Parliament: "*the Commission is not in the business of convincing people, or winning their hearts and minds. It is not our job to sell Europe. [...] We are not elected politicians, we are civil servants. So we have to provide objective information.*"[209] In addition

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[205] Podkalicka, Aneta and Cris Shore in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.109.

[206] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. p. 541-542.

[207] *Ibid.* p.550.

[208] *Ibid.* p.542.

[209] Brügemann, Michael in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.79-80.

to the fact that the 2019 elections communication was not neutral, providing neutral information is not enough to engage in a 'real' dialogue. Opinions should also be part of a real political dialogue.[210] It is true that anticipation of media reaction and public interest in bureaucratic systems is logistically complex but dialogue with citizens is treated in a superficial way: it is only a means of persuasion to legitimize the institution. Public relations, in this sense, serve to "clean up" after political decisions as a political strategy linked to the integration by stealth (see 2.1.2.1) in which decisions become "fait accompli" when the citizens take notice of it.[211] Dialogue is, therefore, clearly linked to the top-down approach of the EU. In their approach, the emergence of a European public sphere would come from the institution, not from the citizens. The latter are "constructed as a passive and homogeneous object of communication rather than an active subject of political communication"[212]. It is for example exemplified in the campaign with the idea of empowering citizens with European ideas.

To promote participative democracy in a decentralised approach, the EU wishes to develop its dialogue with civil society. Yet, the term "civil society" remains unclear; this would mean every organization between the citizens and the institutions. The EU has developed an approach based on the dissemination of messages thanks to the cooperation with "multipliers". These multipliers can ensure more effective dissemination of information and foster local debate. They could also provide feedback to the institutions by informing them about the most salient issues, questions, opinions, suggestions of the citizens.[213] One of the issues with these multipliers is that they are themselves funded by the EU and actively support it. (ex: the European Movement, the Federal Trust for Education and Research, Young European Federalists, the Unions of European Federalists, Friends of Europe, Centre of European Policy Studies, etc)[214] In addition, these multipliers are renowned for their elitist features, which would mean it does not target a general public but an elitist public, who is likely to be favourable to the EU. Another issue is the little impact it has on participatory

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[210] *Ibid.*

[211] *Ibid. p.81.*

[212] Podkalicka, Aneta and Cris Shore in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.99.

[213] Valentini, Chiara in *Ibid*. p.139-142 and 147.

[214] Podkalicka, Aneta and Cris Shore in *Ibid*. p.100.

democracy: there is no real dialogue with the citizens. The EU multipliers are there to make the public aware of EU decisions instead. No space is given to opposition. Furthermore, it is the occasion to promote corporate interest in policy-making. Last but not least, these civil society organisations do not exclusively decide to get involved in this project to promote EU integration but also to enhance their organisational objectives. It would be principally to influence EU policy outcomes.[215] In the 2019 elections, the fact that the EU relied on general citizens to encourage vote shows an improvement in the democratic reflection around the reliance on multipliers.

The promotion of the *Spitzenkandidaten* manages to create engagement from the citizens. Indeed, the *Spitzenkandidaten* are ideal to promote a transnational campaign, promoting a horizontal emergence of a public sphere, that is why I argue that *Spitzenkandidaten* can be conceived as "supranational links". Taking a personal approach to the campaign is ideal to meet with the media logic, which is more likely to focus on personalities. It also improves democracy as the Lisbon treaty declares that *"the European Council should take into account the elections to the European Parliament when proposing a new President of the Commission."*[216] The EP argues that the promotion of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was a success as the voter turnout increased but " *it is hard to conclude that the Spitzenkandidat-system alone is behind the increased electoral mobilisation."*[217] Also, there are some flaws in the system. First, the *Spitzenkandidaten* did not get significant attention in several countries as in 2014. According to Katjana Gatterman, there was no significant increase in media coverage of the *spitzenkandidaten* between 2014 and 2019. Overall, the countries of origin of the candidates were those who brought more attention to this process but for instance, only 19 countries covered the presidential debate according to the European Broadcast Union.[218] Second, there is no real result in return. Indeed, in 2019, the EP interpreted differently the *Spitzenkandidaten*-system by introducing a notion of "tolerance". The EP wanted to find a compromising solution by choosing a candidate from

[215] Valentini, Chiara in *Ibid.* p.158-160.
[216] Lisbon Treaty cited in Von Sydow, Göran. "Spitzenkandidaten- make or break?" in (ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections: Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019. p.18.
[217] *Ibid.*
[218] Gatterman, Katjana. "The ‘spitzenkandidaten’ in the media: a comparative study" in (ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections: Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019. p.84.

the centre who could be tolerated by the majority. The fact that only a centrist could be tolerated shows the contradiction with the idea of promoting greater coherence and competition between left and right. In addition, several national parties were skeptical regarding the *Spitzenkandidaten* process.[219] Eventually, the *spitzenkandidat* of the major party, the EPP was chosen. As a result, Ursula von Der Leyen, the current President of the Commission, was not the *spitzenkandidat* of the EPP, her party, but the candidature of Manfred Weber was rejected for political reasons.[220]

3.2.3 The media, a determining factor

The European Parliament is constrained to rely on the media to reach a wider audience. As de Wilde puts it "*whomever is present in media coverage has the advantage of a stage in front of a wide audience to the discourse, frame policy issues and set the agenda*"[221]. While the media is an opportunity, it can turn out into a poisoned chalice. Indeed, the mass media can facilitate or restrain the European integration. Even more, as the EU cannot rely on mass media as much as national governments and it has to face the unpredictability of the media and its fragmented audience.[222]

The media can even favour or put at a disadvantage a political group or a MEP. For example, in Portugal, National Renovator Party (PNR) accused television channels of censorship because these did not invite the party to participate in the first television debates over the European Parliament.[223] In the Netherlands, the media focused on a personalised battle between the two local *Spitzenkandidaten* Bas Eickhout and Frans Timmermans, reducing the whole political contest to this duel. The public did not reduce the elections to

[219] Von Sydow, Göran. "Spitzenkandidaten- make or break?" in *Ibid.* p.18.

[220] Appenzeller, Gerd. "Why Manfred Weber will probably not be elected". *Der Tagesspiegel*. Translated by Daniel Eck in *Euractiv*. May 2019. https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/why-manfred-weber-will-probably-not-be-elected/ Accessed 19th May 2020.

[221] de Wilde, Pieter. "Media logic and grand theories of European integration". *Journal of European Public Policy.* 2019. Vol. 26. N°8. p.1194. DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1622590. Accessed 10th February 2020.

[222] Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "New media dynamics and European integration". *Revista científica de Información y Comunicación*. 2013. p.41.

[223] "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states". *EU publications.* July 2019. *Publications Office of the European Union.* p.212.

this battle, though.[224] Thus, the media plays an important role in giving legitimacy (or not) to political groups and MEPs.

In addition, the media are to guarantee a sufficient level of information to the citizens. This was an issue in the 2019 EP elections in countries such as France, Latvia or Portugal in which respondents who correctly indicated the day of the elections in 2018 was below 25% but in which 32 to 47% of the population declared that they were interested in the elections of the EP.[225]

The strategy of the 2019 election campaign was to target journalists to make them report a favourable image of the EU. This is linked to the de Clerq report, which advocated the targeting of journalists and persuaded of the benefits of the EU in order to make them supporters of the cause. In reaction to the report's release, EU-accredited journalists protested. Indeed, this idea is controversial as it would be associated with a form of propaganda. At the time, some Officials of the European Commission admitted that the report's approach was "too commercial" but none of them criticised the idea of communication used to "manufacture consent"[226].

The attempts to provide "democratic justifications" to EU legitimacy are associated with pro-European elites' discourses, amplified by media, which could further Eurosceptic counter-reactions. Indeed, the technocratic mindset of the EU communication strategy is a critical issue. The nature of the policies makes communication easier with governmental and non-governmental elites, neglecting the wider public.[227] In the 2019 elections, the strategy is to target specific media. In her book, Chiara Valentini shows that the EU spokespersons consider "specialised journalists", who work for specific and detailed printed broadsheets such as *the Financial Times* or *Le Monde* as more important in their work than journalists

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[224] Vliegensthart, Rens. "A mislifting logic: How Dutch media failed to fulfil their task in reporting on the EP elections". in (ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections: Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019. p.88.

[225] Eurobarometer survey 89.2 cited in Costea, Vladimir-Adrian. "Quo Vadis European Union?". *CES Working Papers.* 2019. Vol.11. N°3. p.273-274.

[226] Podkalicka Aneta and Cris Shore in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.98.

[227] Meyer, Christoph. "Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit". *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 1999. Vol. 37. N°4. p.628-629.

who target a general public audience, who needs less specific details. This choice is justifiable: specialist journalists are followed by others, and, as a result, it is important to make sure that their content is adequate[228]. It is also true that the transnational experts have to deal daily with the EU policies. If the EU stops providing information on issues and would provide information on political conflict, the consensus-orientation of EU policy would be dysfunctional.[229] This logically confirms Ducteac and Bosseta's idea that the broadsheet paper is more likely to convey a Europeanized discourse than a tabloid[230]. (see 2.3.2.3)

Furthermore, there is a gap between Brussels-based journalists and nationally based journalists. The complex treatment of EU matters affects both Brussels-base and nationally-based journalists: complexity in its structures, jargon, long and opaque decision-making which are not especially "good news"; hybrid news between home and foreign content; difficulty to personalize the campaign with a lack of powerful domestic personalities; supposition that the audience is uninterested and lacks knowledge about EU matters.[231] Yet, this complexity is more present among the nationally based journalists. Nationally based journalists complain about the technical, complex messages of Brussels press releases while Brussels based journalists claim that press releases are becoming superficial as they already know information.[232] This is facilitated by the fact that in Brussels, there are more diverse sources: leakage of information or contact with officials out of the communication channels while the national journalists are constrained to use national sources and have little contact with EU sources as they receive less attention from the EU.[233] In addition, conflict frames are used by both Brussels based and nationally based journalists in one-fifth of the EU matters that are covered. Yet, we perceive a significant difference between conflict frames. Brussels-based journalists tend to use a conflict based on the

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[228] Valentini, Chiara in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010.p. 204-205.
[229] *Ibid.* p.197.
[230] Dutceac Segesten, Anamaria and Michael Bossetta. "Can Euroscepticism contribute to a European public sphere? The Europeanization of Media Discourses on Euroscepticism across Six countries". *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2019. Vol. 57. N° 5. p.1063.
[231] Price, John in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p. 219-220.
[232] Spanier, Bernd in *Ibid.* p.207.
[233] Price, John in *Ibid.* p.229.

opposition between the EU versus an external power such as a nation (eg: USA), a major company (eg: Microsoft) or a more general threat (eg: terrorism). According to Gavin (2000) this imaginary may promote legitimacy of the EU for the public spheres of the Member States. In contrast, nationally-based journalists are more likely to use a conflict that opposes the nation and the European Union. In this way, the EU is perceived as external to the country, undermining the relation with the EU. They are also more likely to depict the EU in a negative way. This is related to the way both types of journalists perceive themselves. Members based in Brussels see their roles as explaining complex subjects clearly to an uninterested public in order to highlight the relevance of the EU in citizen's daily lives while nationally based members see their roles as holding Brussels to accountability, highlighting its flaws and bad practice.[234]

The fact that national media are more "nationalized" than European media is also linked to the fact that national governments are more visible than other actors while covering EU affairs. National parliaments and the European Parliament are almost invisible.[235] The European institutions are more likely to be covered in matters in which they have the major part in competencies, such as international trade.[236] Overall, the national political elites, the civil society tend to maintain the public debate within national boundaries.[237] In principle, national governments are still the main interlocutors for the citizens about the EU matters but they invest themselves modestly in this kind of communication except when it deals with EU referendums and EU presidency.[238] As a result, the national point of view predominates on European matters and the EU politics lack interactive content.

All this preferential treatment is reflected by the mass media coverage that either accounts for the complexity of the issues but targets the elite "European media" or specific sections of national broadsheets, either oversimplifies the issues by referring to established

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[234] *Ibid.* p. 223-225.
[235] Gatterman (2013) in e Wilde, Pieter. "Media logic and grand theories of European integration". *Journal of European Public Policy.* 2019. Vol. 26. N°8. p.1195.
[236] Koopmans and Statham (2010) in *Ibid.*
[237] Fähnrich, Birte in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010.
[238] Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "New media dynamics and European integration". *Revista científica de Información y Comunicación*. 2013. p.44-45.

frames or clichés in tabloid or audiovisual media.[239] This fosters a gap between the elite and the other social classes. Indeed, decisive decisions with a potential impact for the general public are predominantly discussed in specialised printed broadsheet media but the general citizens discuss EU matters through national perspectives, referring to national media in their national language and particularly through audiovisual supports.[240] De Wilde et al. observe a gap between the elite and the citizens in their 2014 study. It shows that citizens are more likely to contribute to diffuse Eurosceptic attitudes than political actors. They are also less likely to praise the EU in public arguments. Also, the elite and the citizens evaluate the EU polity differently as citizens tend to evaluate EU polity in democratic deficit terms while the elite evaluate it in functional terms — its regulatory framework or the security it provides.[241]

According to John Price, *"if the EU is serious in its attempts to improve the way it is portrayed in national media, it must make a far greater effort to influence national-based journalists. The evidence provided here suggests that these journalists produce a lot of EU news and that it tends to be for more hostile than that emerging from Brussels."*[242] It also suggests that the EU should treat elitist and more popular media outlets evenly in order to reach both elitist and general citizens.

All in all, the audience of traditional media is socially and nationally fragmented. As a result, the audience is not equally informed which decreases the legitimacy provided by a potential "Europeanized debate". (see 2.3.2.3)

3.2.4 Social networks as a news source

Looking at the European Parliament Report on Polarisation and the News media in Europe, the majority of people in European countries use the internet to access news (61% in 2017 according to Eurostat) especially in Nordic and Western countries. The internet source

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[239] Spanier, Bernd in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.191.

[240] Spanier, Bernd in *Ibid*. p.195-196.

[241] de Wilde, Pieter, Asimina Michailidou and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Converging on Euroscepticism: Online polity contestation during European Parliament elections". European Journal of Political Research. 2014. N°53. p.774-777.

[242] Price, John in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.233-234.

challenges the traditional television as the most widely-used news source. Both exceed the use of print media in popularity[243]. In Eastern and Southern Europe, television news still dominates but the online news is growing with the people getting access to the internet.[244] Do social networks fundamentally change the dynamics of traditional media? Can social networks enhance EU legitimacy?

In the first instance, the use of social networks in political communication was seen as revolutionary for EU communication. The use of the internet as a news resource and more specifically of social networks are beneficial to EU initiatives in many ways. First, it makes EU communication more accessible. It reduces the costs of promoting EU activities, it widens the possibilities to target specific groups with specific messages. It allows citizens to access more easily to information. Second, it enables a two-way communication with greater interactivity between the citizens and the EP as there is no intermediary, which means it makes the debate more accessible.[245] Indeed, social media are an opportunity to go beyond the top-down approach of the EU, to increase citizen's input in EU politics enhancing institutional legitimacy and thus, decrease the democratic deficit. Third, it also enables greater visibility for the MEPs, who lack visibility.[246]

However, empirical studies proved that the new online services had a limited or negative impact on satisfaction with democracy. For example, Ceron et al.'s study shows that news from unmediated social networks allows the circulation of alternative point of views, which negatively affect the judgement of democratic responsiveness.[247] Another example is Chang's study, which shows that the potential negative effect of online news on satisfaction with democracy is twice stronger than the effects of the use of traditional media.[248] Even though it is generally thought that social networks have the potential for political campaigns,

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[243] Newman et al. (2018) in European Parliamentary Research Service - Scientific Foresight Unity (STOA). *Polarisation and the news media in Europe*. March 2019. p. 26.
[244] *Ibid.*
[245] Jordanka Tomkova in (ed.) Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p. 275.
[246] Scherpereel, John A. et al. "The Adoption and Use of Twitter as a Representational Tool among Members of the European Parliament". *European Politics and Society*. 2017. Vol. 18. N°2. p.114.
[247] Ceron, A. et al. "Flames and Debates: Do Social Media Affect Satisfaction with Democracy?". *Social Indicators Research*. 2015. N°126. p. 228.
[248] Chang, Wen-Chun. "Media Use and Satisfaction with Democracy: Testing the Role of Political Interest". *Social Indicators Research*. 2017. N°140. p. 1009.

not all scholars are enthusiastic about its use. Social media has the potential to undermine political deliberation and foster populist discourse[249] After all, some scholars still believe there is the possibility to enhance democracy through the internet in some ways.[250]

Overall depending on the selection of criteria, research may show three possibilities: *"1) online media reflect globalised approaches that challenge national differences and reflect convergence 2) online media reinforce existing structures and practices of media systems, and 3) online media develop differently in media systems but in a way that challenges existing patterns"*[251]. My approach is to hypothesise that these three possibilities highly depend on: 1) how the user selects information (for instance, if the user follows traditional media online, it will reinforce the "power" of traditional media) 2) how the institution (in this case the European Parliament) uses social networks. This use may either challenge the traditional system or maintain/reinforce the traditional system. 3) how the algorithms select information.

As theorized in the theoretical framework and in the previous pages, what may enhance democracy (and decrease the democratic deficit) is the creation of a European debate on EU politics, allowing opposition and political competition. In addition, this debate should not favour elitist interests. It should provide a clear picture of the opinion of the various political groups to shape the citizens' opinions. The limitation of a Europeanised debate is that it would not systematically end in favour of EU legitimacy and reconstruction but it would open a discussion on EU legitimacy to the public favourable or not to EU integration, and possibly improve the EU's functioning. Now, the question is if the online environment, and particularly the social networks is an appropriate tool for this constructed debate.

3.2.4.1 The users' engagement

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[249] Davies, Ron. "Social media in election campaign".*European Parliamentary Research Service.* 2014. p.6-7.
[250] For example, see Boulianne (2018). Larsson, Anders Olof. "The EU Parliament on Twitter -Assessing the Permanent Online Practices of Parliamentarians". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*. Vol. 12. N°2. p.149.
[251] Hallin and Mancini (2016) in European Parliamentary Research Service. *Polarisation and the news media in Europe.* March 2019. p.17.

This section evaluates the behaviour of the users while using social networks. Through social media, users can practice their engagement as citizens but do their general reactions in the social networks environment suit a real debate on political news?

First, Michael Bossetta et al. conducted research to understand how social media users engage themselves with political news. Indeed, one of the topics is to understand if the social media reproduce the slow engagement brought by television spectatorship or if it encourages greater engagement towards political news.[252] While some scholars claim that social networks gather heterogeneous people including people less engaged, other suggestions claim the opposite, that is, that most active political users are also those who are already the most politically engaged and like-minded people. In the case of these "echo chambers", the risk is that the political news they meet would strengthen their views.[253]

In reality, the degree of engagement is more subtle and any form of engagement, even the more passive one, can have an effect on citizens' political opinions and behaviour.[254] Yet, it does not mean that this engagement emancipates completely the citizens. This deficiency is interpreted in different ways according to the group psychology — social networks users perceive social risks and behave according to mechanisms of social control[255] — or according to legal and institutional structures —the technological architecture is built for financial gains [256]. Both interpretations are sceptical about the potential democratising effect offered by social networks as the "social media language is often self-directed, emotional and subjective to morality and taste"[257]. In addition, other critics found social media debates removed from the decision-making context with limited impact on political decisions.[258]

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[252] Livingston (2013) in Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.4. (pre-print version).
[253] G.Mascheroni (2012) in Davies, Ron. "Social media in election campaign". *European Parliamentary Research Service.* 2014. p.6-7.
[254] Boulianne (2009) in Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.4.
[255] Sunstein (2009) and Keen (2012) in *Ibid*. p.5.
[256] Fuchs (2014) in *Ibid*. p.5.
[257] Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.5.
[258] *Ibid.*

Bossetta et al. categorize three types of engagement with political content: factual (contributing with information in a neutral/scientific language), partisan (claiming one's opinion with a strong opinion or identitarian features) and moral (taking a normative point of view and attribute responsibilities to an actor/an entity in order to find common ground for a greater moral principle). These engagements correspond to three ideal roles: the witness (factual), the advocate (partisan) and the judge (moral). Of course, these roles are not exclusive.[259] These engagements can take various degrees of political engagement: making (creating political content), commenting (responding to pre-existing political content), diffusing (liking or sharing content), listening (reading or watching content without any visible trace)[260].

Civic forms of engagement with politics may realise the democratisation potential of social networks as citizens are empowered to challenge the media and political power structures. This includes forms of alternative discourses such as the discourse of whistle-blowers (factual engagement), of marginalised groups who lack visibility (partisan engagement). Of course, this kind of engagement online is not always about tolerant views and may also serve extremist organisations.[261]

One important feature of social networks is the 'network' effect produced which spread information accordingly.[262] Bossetta et al. explore the various degrees of engagement on social networks by understanding the "digital architectures" of Facebook and Twitter regarding *"the nature of the connection between the users, the reach of posts, the level of algorithm filtering, and user demography"*[263]. Facebook algorithm is based on reciprocal ties (usually closer relations) and therefore, reflects one's personal relations offline thanks to an EdgeRank technology predicting what is relevant to the user. Twitter is based on non-reciprocated ties, and the various posts appear in a chronological order. As a result, a

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[259] *Ibid.*
[260] Crawford (2009) in *Ibid*. p.6.
[261] *Ibid*. p.9.
[262] Davies, Ron. "Social media in election campaign".*European Parliamentary Research Service.* 2014. p.6.
[263] Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.11. (pre-print version).

post reaches a wider audience on Twitter than on Facebook.[264] Besides, the number of Facebook users represents better demographically Europe —about 2,5 billion monthly users and 406 million monthly users in Europe[265]— than Twitter —330 million monthly users among which 133 million of daily users out of the USA[266]. The Twitter audience is less diverse while Twitter users are more likely to be interested in politics. In addition, there is an anglo-saxon bias on Twitter as the United-States and the UK represent most of the users.[267]

When it comes to users' engagement, the Facebook Friend structure discourages users to publicly claim their own political opinions because of the fear of exclusion and stigmatisation of their peers[268]. The users' engagement may take mostly the form of commenting pre-existing posts with more universal moral content, while Twitter users are less likely to comment on political content as the network is based on weak ties between users and content is less relevant for the users. They are more likely to be "observers" looking for the last news. Even though it leads less easily to users participation, its impersonality is associated with lower social risk and with greater transnationalisation by going beyond the main national interpretation[269], even more as Twitter is based on events as Europeanization would be (based on events such as the elections or the Brexit referendum)[270]. As users are more interested in politics, the content tends to be partisan.

In this way, we can consider Twitter as a more ideal space for a Europeanised political debate but the pre-existing interest of the users in politics and the Anglosaxon bias means that a part of the European population is left out of the debate. Indeed, it is difficult to determine accurately who participates in the debate and if the debate is limited to the EU. The participants in the debate may be from other countries. This means that we cannot isolate

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[264] *Ibid*. p.11-12.
[265] Coëffé, Thomas. "Chiffres Facebook 2020". *Blog du modérateur.* 2018 (update 2020). https://www.blogdumoderateur.com/chiffres-facebook/. Accessed 12nd June 2020.
[266] *Ibid*.
[267] Perrins (2015) in Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p. 11-13. See appendix 7.
[268] Elison et al. (2007) in *Ibid*. p.14-15.
[269] Barberá et al (2015) in *Ibid*.
[270] Hänska Max et al. "Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis". *Social Media + Society*. Vol. 5. N°3. July 2019. p.2.

Europeanisation from transnational debate.[271] Thus, equal diffusion of the arguments is less possible.

While a demos cannot be found within the debate in its purest form, Hänska et al. have categorized various forms of European public spheres within Twitter during the Eurozone crisis. Supranational Europeanisation would mean stronger attention on European matters. vertical Europeanisation means that Twitter users would address themselves directly to EU actors. Horizontal weak Europeanisation would be found if users of one or more countries tweet about EU politics and/or events/issues from other EU countries. Strong horizontal Europeanisation would be observed if direct linkages are found in cross-border conversations (with specifically addressed @messages showing the intention to answer, unlike a simple retweet) between actors from two or more countries, which is less likely to happen on traditional media.[272] They conclude that the national boundaries seem more open on Twitter than on broadcast outlets as it shows greater horizontal Europeanisation.

In contrast with Twitter, Facebook political campaigns appear to be more fragmented. National frames and languages maintain significance on the social media. The issues are more developed at a local or national level and thus, are not as suitable for transnationalisation.[273]

3.2.4.2 The treatment of information

This section gives a sound grasp of the ideas surrounding the user selection of news. This selection raised questions among the scientific community. It is also interesting to take into account disinformation and fake news as they intrude on the information flow. The limitation of the following claims is that fake news or disinformation usually depend on subjective criteria. As a result, one may claim that another's statement is "fake news" because one disagrees with the statement. Yet, the "intrusion" of information flow may lead to "news

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[271] Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.19.

[272] Hänska Max et al. "Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis". *Social Media + Society*. Vol. 5. N°3. July 2019. p.2-3. See appendix 6.

[273] Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.16

avoidance". This section also analyses the behaviour of people with populist attitudes[274] towards news.

The EPRS report on polarisation and the news media in Europe assumes that when people are able to select themselves the news media, they are more likely to choose media outlets that suit their views. Some studies have shown that this concept of "selective exposure" can be applied to social networks as the people have an important set of news outlets to choose from and costs (time, effort and money) are lower. Yet, it does not mean the social networks' users would not find cross-cutting news from opposed views. For that matter, in Europe, interest in news and politics is more important than the exposition to similar or different views, that does not systematically change people's attitude.[275]

Before the self-selection of news on social networks, there is a first edition by editors (in this case EP's communication team) and journalists as well as a second regulation of information by algorithms on social networks. These algorithms personalise the news that is shown according to the users' data and elaborate a pre-selection of news. The literature does not support the idea of "echo chambers" (see 3.2.4) and tends to show an important exposition to cross-cutting news.[276] On Twitter, the users will also be exposed to opposite political opinions. Various ideological points of view will meet each other but exchanges about political matters may become polarised over time. On the other hand, a study of Bakshy, Messing and Adamic (2015) on Facebook has shown that self-selection of news drove people to see less news from the opposite political views.[277]

It is generally assumed that cross-cutting news leads to greater openness. Yet, the effects of cross-cutting news are unclear: we do not know if it polarizes society, if it moderates people's opinions, or if it has no impact. A study from the USA on Twitter supports the idea that exposure to cross-cutting news contributes to the polarisation of

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[274] According to Ernesto Laclau, populist attitudes and discourses are based on the notion of "people" and oppose itself to a perceived enemy. Its leader promises a definitive solution to all the issues. (See Ernesto Laclau in Enrique de Lafuente. "Repensar el populismo: Ernesto Laclau y la lógica populista". *Horizontal.* 2015.)

[275] European Parliamentary Research Service. *Polarisation and the news media in Europe.* March 2019. p.26-30.

[276] Barberá et al (2015) in *Ibid.* p.34.

[277] *Ibid.* p.31-32.

attitudes on the long run[278]. On a small sample, the researchers used bots to share cross-cutting content and the users had their political attitudes measured regularly. The results show that Democrats exposed to the opposite views were slightly more liberal in their attitudes but not significantly while Republicans became more and more conservative but this study is under-representative to get a clear picture of the cross-cutting news effects and other studies claim the opposite.[279]

When it comes to disinformation, in general, according to the 2019 Reuters Institute Digital report, the general trust in the news found via social media is extremely low but remains stable. In addition to this, people tend to spend less time on Facebook in the majority of Western countries than in the past.[280] Regarding social networks, they also have a particular policy towards these issues. Facebook has decided to de-prioritise news in favour of other content. Facebook also provides more transparency on political advertisement. In addition, Facebook and Twitter have devoted more importance on the identification of bots and fake accounts, on the moderation of hate speech and on the verification of news quality. Specifically for the European elections, "war rooms" were created with an important team which tried to detect any threats to the elections.[281] These actions completed the initiatives that the EU took in their campaign but are also constrained by national laws as in France.

Overall, major disinformation and misuse of data were not found during the 2019 election campaign. According to the Oxford Computational Propaganda Unit, "*less than 4 per cent of sources circulating on Twitter during our data collection period were junk news or known Russian sources, with users sharing far more links to mainstream news outlets overall (34%), except in the Polish sphere, where junk news made up 21 per cent of traffic.*"[282] The identification of fake profiles and bots is efficient but various researchers found a slight increase in attempts to use bots boosting hate speech or extremist polarising content. Indeed, in the days preceding the elections, the European parliament identified and blocked online platforms and accounts spreading disinformation and hate speech. This impact was

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[278] Bail et al. (2018) in *Ibid.* p.35-36.
[279] *Ibid.*
[280] Newman, Nic et al. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019. 2019. p.9 and p.19.
[281] Tambini, Damian. "Disinformation, data, manipulation and the European elections of 2019". (Ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019.* 2019. p.78.
[282] Oxford Computational Propaganda Unit in *Ibid.*

still significant as it generated 763 million views.[283] When it comes to data/financial abuse, the potential for abuse is the same as the laws remain unchanged. The discreet use of external companies such as Cambridge Analytica remains possible. Of course, potential abuses may be revealed in the next years.[284]

All in all, we may say that the environmental space remains vulnerable to threats but at the same time, others may argue that regulation of social networks also reduces the potential "freedom" in the debates. The challenge is, therefore, to satisfy freedom of speech without enabling obstacles to pollute the public opinion.

Following low trust in this media (and in the media in general), this raises the idea of "news avoidance". Particularly in the UK, following Brexit, one-third of the respondents claimed that they often or sometimes avoid the news in the UK. Coverage would negatively affect their mood or they feel powerless to affect events. Overall, due to differences in online and offline reading habits, users tend to spend less time on online news. The least interested and motivated people may avoid news completely.[285] Besides, the audience is more and more aware of organizations' "hidden messages", decreasing trust in online media.[286] As a result, the phenomenon of news avoidance may create a gap between news avoiders and news users. For example, Prior's study[287] shows that news avoiders are less aware of current affairs and are, therefore, less likely to vote. This means that the population following the result of the elections look more polarised[288] in appearance.

When it comes to people with populist attitudes, the Reuters report shows that in the United States people with populist attitudes are not more likely than people with non-populist attitudes to use social media as a news source as the television remains their main source of

[283] European Commission and European External Action Service. *Action plan against disinformation*. June 2019. p.3.

[284] Tambini, Damian. "Disinformation, data, manipulation and the European elections of 2019". (Ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019. p.78.

[285] Newman, Nic et al. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019. 2019. p.25-27.

[286] Valentini, Chiara. "Is using social media "good" for the public relations profession? A critical reflection." *Public relation Reviews*. 2015. Vol. 41. N°2. p.175

[287] Prior (2007) in Newman, Nic et al. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*. 2019. p.27.

[288] By "polarisation", we mean "(i) a state where people's attitudes have diverged to ideological extremes, or (ii) the process by which people's attitudes are diverging to ideological extremes" (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996). in European Parliamentary Research Service. *Polarisation and the news media in Europe*. March 2019. p.9 .

news (with a stronger preference for commercial television outlets and a weaker preference for public service media). Yet, people with populist views are more likely to diffuse content and take part in a social network group about news and politics. They also tend to prefer Facebook, while non-populists are more attracted to Twitter. Other studies also show that populist parties are generally more active on Facebook than traditional parties.[289]The report concludes that the combination of these trends may create a social media environment (particularly Facebook) in which populist ideas and opinions are over-represented but research still needs to be done to confirm this idea.[290]

This must be qualified as a study shows that increased exposure to populist ideas does not increase systematically populist attitudes. More precisely, it generally increases populist attitudes for those who already had strong populist views while it decreases populist attitudes for those who had weak populist views. At the same time, it means that exposure to populist views tend to polarize opinions.[291]

To sum up, the social networks news environment involves risks for the possibility of a Europeanised debate that must still be analysed to get a more precise idea of the future challenges. These risks (disinformation, over-representation of popular ideas) highly depend on the behaviour of citizens online. The trust in this online channel remains low and leads a share of the population to avoid information, and thus, withdraw themselves from political decisions which may have an impact on their daily lives.

3.2.4.3 An opportunity to generate opposition lacking to the EU political model?

Euroscepticism is performed through mass media as it aims at drawing media attention. To receive more attention, it tends to adopt a media logic by dramatising and emphasising the threats to solidarity, security, wealth, etc. In order to provoke public resonance, the narratives distinguish what/who is good and what/who is bad. As we already pointed out, the expression of Eurosceptism varies according to the space and the time of the

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[289] This idea is found in the EEMC report "2019 European Elections Campaign : images, topics, media in the 28 members states".
[290] Newman, Nic et al. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*. 2019. p.24 and p. 42-43.
[291] European Parliamentary Research Service. *Polarisation and the news media in Europe*. March 2019. p.38.

utterance by the use of adapted narratives.[292] Social media tend to amplify popular contestation and thus, contribute to a growing politicization.[293] This focus on negative polity can be explained by many factors. The negative pieces of news are often perceived as more valuable for the journalists in their role of "gatekeepers" of media content. In addition, ruling politics have fewer opportunities than discontent politics to claim their opinions online. And especially, citizens gain stronger salience with diffuse Eurosceptic opinions.[294] This is also linked to social networks' algorithms. According to Paul Vacca and Guillaume Grignard, social networks structurally polarize debates because of their fast interactions, the oversimplification of arguments and their algorithms. Debates on social networks become fundamentally identitarian based on group ideologies. Indeed, to create engagement, social networks expose opposite views from a group with different ideologies as the users are more likely to interact with a statement they strongly disagree with. This is one of the reasons why extremist actors tend to be more successful on social networks and it is linked to the polarising feature already present in their discourse. Political actors do not get any interest in having a mixed/ambivalent opinion on social networks.[295]

This polity bias which favours negativity is also present in the more traditional media outlets, which tend to focus on negative stories about the EU and disproportionately amplify the Eurosceptic ideas[296] and polarisation is generally present in mass media. Political actors' discourses appeal to a specific identity creating a polarising effect between "us" and "them". Political opinions based on identitarian values are more successful in shaping the media agenda. In a media logic perspective, the most important is not the main identity citizens rely on but rather which identity is most visible in media discourse. In mass media, the national identity is dominant when discussing European integration.[297] As a result, being exposed to

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[292] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. p.544 and 547.

[293] Michailidou, Asimina. "The role of the public in shaping EU contestation: Euroscepticism and online news media". *International Political Science Review*. 2015. Vol. 36. N°3. p.325.

[294] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. p.547.

[295] Falcinelli, Sylvia. "Réseaux sociaux : le débat est-il (encore) possible ?". *RTBF*. june 2020.

[296] Galpin, Charlotte and Trenz Hans-Jörg. "In the Shadow of Brexit: The 2019 European Parliament Elections as First-Order Polity Elections?". *The Political Quarterly*. Vol.90. N°4. October-December 2019. p.668-669.

[297] Koopmans (2017) Leupold (2016) in de Wilde, Pieter. "Media logic and grand theories of European integration". *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2019. Vol. 26. N°8. p.1206.

content related to EU integration means being exposed to one's national identity and identifying even more with one's nationality in "traditional" media. This effect leads itself to direct one's political demands for EU politics by one's national parties.[298] According to the theoretical framework, the presence of this kind of opposition in mass media helps to shape the public opinion, which helps to decrease the democratic deficit.

Even more as these negative comments about EU matters are not systematically correlated with feeling anti-European as theorized by de Wilde et al. This idea was confirmed by Ruiz-Soler et al. On social networks, when analysing tweets about Schengen and the TTIP in three languages, it revealed negative sentiments towards these projects. The main tendency is to hold a negative sentiment towards the issue, but positive sentiment towards the EU. The issue shows a high tendency (more than half of the content) for neutral positions but which were not taken into account as the purpose of the study was to understand the pro/against dynamics. The study also shows that the users reacted to the topic as citizens of the EU rather than citizens of a nation. This shows again the potential for Europeanization of Twitter, greater than the potential of mass media shown in previous studies but again, the transnationalisation of national public spheres is more tangible. The authors explain that Twitter users discuss the EU matters from a European perspective but it is difficult to determine if they understand content in other languages. As a result, this Europeanization would be separated by linguistic groups. [299]

The media and the EP presence on social networks leads to a media dynamic. Trenz explains:

> *The more the EU system of governance confronts public demands and expectations of democracy, the more it relies on the generation of publicity for its internal functioning. To the extent that mediatization is imposed upon the political system of the EU from the outside, there is a growing demand to engage with media from within the EU system of governance.*[300]

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[298] *Ibid.*

[299] Ruiz-Soler, Javier et al. "Commenting on Political Topics Through Twitter: Is European Politics European?". *Social Media+Society*. 2019. p.7-10.

[300] Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "New media dynamics and European integration". *Revista científica de Información y Comunicación*. 2013. p.41.

If democracy is mediatized, therefore the EU has a chance to correct its elitist bias and enhance Europeanization within mass media. As a result of mediatization, EU politics tend to be more emotional and less rational but at the same time, they are more popular and less elitist.[301][305] The EU may see it as an opportunity for mass publicity while the citizens may see it as an opportunity for contestation, which may lead to a potential debate towards more legitimacy. However, the EU mediatized democracy still needs to be improved to realize its full potential.[302]

3.2.4.4 Do social networks challenge the traditional media status quo?

Overall, even though social networks offer an alternative and dialogical space, we may wonder if social networks are fundamentally different from traditional media. According to Michailidou, the online news report has the same dynamic as traditional news and still relies on the coverage of the elites, offering little space for alternative views. As a result, traditional discourse is unchallenged.[303]

The use of social media reduces the dependence people have on traditional media but social media are still dealing with the main "traditional news" agenda. Traditional and online media outlets do influence each other. For instance, the "softer" news of social media leads to the rise of soft news and "infotainment" in traditional media. Yet, factual content is still mainly generated by traditional media elites and established institutions of the national environment and television is still the main source for political news.[304] As a result, political and social actors can get around traditional media outlets by using the internet and reach a wider audience but in the absence of traditional coverage, the audience attention would rarely be significant.[305]

3.2.4.5 The use of social networks by the European Parliament

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[301] Chambers (2009) in *Ibid.* p.48.
[302] *Ibid.*
[303] Michailidou, Asimina. "The role of the public in shaping EU contestation: Euroscepticism and online news media". *International Political Science Review.* 2015. Vol. 36. N°3. p.330-333.
[304] Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.15.
[305] Strömbäck, Jesper. "Four Phases of Mediatization: An analysis of the Mediatization of Politics". *Press/Politics.* Vol. 13. N°3. p.243.

It is interesting to recall that the use of social networks by the institution may be a determining factor in analysing if it follows the status quo of traditional media or if it promotes an alternative view. In addition, the other question is whether this use contributes or not to a "Europeanised debate" with the potential of enhancing legitimacy. As Chiara Valentini puts it: "*Too often research studies show only organizations' perceived, rather than real benefits of social media use*"[306]. While the EP shows signs of a less technical communication promoted by the 1993 de Clerq report, it also shows recent traditional features.

When it comes to more "popular" communication, the European science-media hub uses "branding" techniques such as the ZEUS technique: Zeitgeist, by relating content with what the users are already talking about; Emotion, the attempt of triggering people's emotions; Usefulness, content that people find useful; Stories, use of storytelling. This type of technique makes the content more attractive for the citizens.[307] Another important point is that the European Parliament Facebook profile is a pioneer in political online communication with the creation of its page in 2009 and which profile is built by professional communication managers. This shows endeavours to promote itself in more popular channels.[308] It targets citizens from various member states with entertaining but useful information to the citizens. The will to promote information to "the people" is again shown in the call to action "thistimeimvoting", along with online consultation.

In other ways, the EP does not use interactive or two-way communication in its full potential according to critics. Sharing content is not sufficient to argue that social networks have a dialogical dimension in this case.[309] Of course, the risk of the "network" aspect of social networks is that the institution may lose control of its communication. This would

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[306] Valentini, Chiara. "Is using social media "good" for the public relations profession? A critical reflection." *Public relation Reviews*. 2015. Vol. 41. N°2. p. 171.

[307] European Parliament. "Understanding viral online content and social media's influence." *Youtube*. June 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymW0pU38_10.

[308] Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "New media dynamics and European integration". *Revista científica de Información y Comunicación*. 2013. p.45-46.

[309] Valentini, Chiara. "Is using social media "good" for the public relations profession? A critical reflection." *Public relation Reviews*. 2015. Vol. 41. N°2. p.171.

explain the lack of dialogical content on its page but a real dialogical political space must not be dismissed.[310]

As above mentioned, the rejection of opposition is still present in the way the EU deals with social networks, denying the idea that its public sphere may be constructed horizontally (and not vertically) thanks to the internet. Aneta Podkalicka and Cris Shore underline it: "*EU approaches to the new media information still reflect the same flawed assumptions on the past: namely the idea that the EU can be "packaged" and promoted as a brand product, and the assumption that such political advertising can somehow provide a "fix" for the EU's unresolved problem of political legitimacy*"[311]. According to them, this branding approach does not give credit to the audience with sceptical views. In the sense, that those who are skeptical about EU integration do not need to be "made more aware" of what the EU does for its citizens.[312]

To this idea, the continuity of an elite-driven communication was pointed out by some scholars. Michal Krzyzanowski notices that in 2014, journalists who previously covered EU affairs across the EU became themselves spokespeople of the European Commission. We also saw a tendency towards personalisation of the spokespeople on Twitter by the creation of their own accounts.[313] This personalisation helped in making the discourses more familiar and less official, less close to the European "demos". Later on, in 2015, this aspect of familiarity was not found anymore and it became an elite-driven strategy of political communication. This discourse was also praising EU as an international leader, a desirable image in a time of crises (natural disasters, the European migration "crisis").[314]

According to Michal Kryzanowski, despite using new channels, the EU still repeats its previous (pre-social media) political communication. The communication reuses the same discursive features such as promoting the EU as an international leader or perceiving it as the

[310] Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "New media dynamics and European integration". *Revista científica de Información y Comunicación*. 2013. p.46.
[311] Aneta Podkalicka and Cris Shore in (Ed.)Valentini, Chiara and Giorgia Nesti. *Public Communication in the European Union - History, Perspectives and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2010. p.107-109.
[312] *Ibid.*
[313] Krzyzanowski, Michal. "Social media in/and the politics of the European Union." *Journal of Language and Politics*. 2018. Vol.17. N°2. p.287.
[314] *Ibid*. p.293-296.

achievement of European history, treating the EU as a soft power or promoting neoliberal ideas over political considerations. The author even claims EU communication is *autopoietic,* which means its communication is almost limited to the European institutions' ecosystem.[315]

As we have already stated, personalisation is growing. Actually, social media reinforces this trend as it focuses on individuals. As a result, information depends also on how the members of the European Parliament convey information. The MEPs also participate in the greater transparency of policy-making by sharing content about the political process. They may also enable interactivity with the citizens. This is interesting in the sense that the MEPs tend to use more and more social networks[316] and the MEPs' and political groups' communication in opposition with EP's neutrality, is perceived as "conflictual" as it advances itself in political "battles"[317]. Most of the EP groups have multiple social media to reach various types of citizens. The tendency of the 2019 campaign for MEPs on social networks was visual communication. It also showed a great mix between content-based social media (as Instagram) and profile based social media (Facebook and Twitter). Facebook aims at targeting supporters and members of the political groups while Twitter aims at targeting a large audience with news content.[318] When it comes precisely to MEPs, despite the interest the MEPs could find in Twitter to interact with the citizens and to enhance their visibility. Approximately one-quarter of the 2014-2019 MEPs do not have a Twitter account.[319]

The most popular parties on the social networks are the parties from the far-right (Facebook) and parties from the right (Twitter).[320]While traditional parties are more likely to

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[315] *Ibid.* p.299.

[316] This must be qualified as the study Lappas, G et al. "Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on Social Media: Understanding the Underlying Mechanisms of Social Media Adoption and Popularity". *The Review of Socionetwork Strategies*. 2019. Vol. 13. p. 59-62.

[317] Laursen, Bo and Chiara Valentini. "Mediatization and Government Communication: Press Work in the European Parliament". *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. Vol. 20. N°1. 2015. p. 26-44. *Sage*. p.34.

[318] Valentini, Chiara. "Social media use by main EU political parties during EP elections 2019" in (Ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019.*Euroflections*. p.80-81.

[319] This must have changed since the 2017 study. Scherpereel, John A. et al. "The Adoption and Use of Twitter as a Representational Tool among Members of the European Parliament". *European Politics and Society*. 2017. Vol. 18. N°2. p.114.

[320] Larsson, Anders Olof. "The EU Parliament on Twitter -Assessing the Permanent Online Practices of Parliamentarians". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*. 2015. Vol. 12. N°2. p.160.

adopt social networks[321], candidates and users with extreme positions have shown several times their active engagement on social networks.[322] This may be linked to the polarising effects of social networks which highlight their views.

In spite of the interaction aspect, the Twitter accounts that are followed by the political parties are quite low in comparison with the number of users that follow them.[323] In addition, from a small sample of MEPs' tweets, 84% are one-way communications and only 7% are replies[324]. This shows the lack of reciprocate interest for Twitter users, showing the limits of a possible debate with political parties on Twitter. While retweet is inherently responsive to other tweets, it does not necessarily lead to dialogue with citizens. MEPs tend to retweet content from the 'Brussels bubble' (tweets from the Commission members or from other EP members) or content from the press, which shows the "broadcast rather than chat" dimension of Twitter.[325] This reinforces the image of EP is an isolated institution, reinforcing the perception of the democratic deficit.

In addition, previous scholars have shown that the elitist target was also present in MEP's communication. Indeed, elected politicians were usually involved in interactions with elitist people. These interactions lead to more engagement from the MEPs as these elitist groups may act as influential stakeholders or "multipliers" in the EP's terms[326].

Another aspect pointed out by scholars is that the use of social media by MEPs is particularly used for campaigning but neglected in everyday life. Moreover, Larsson's study

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[321] Nulty, Paul et al. "Social media and political communication in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament". *Electoral Studies*. 2016. Vol. 44. p.434.

[322] Jungher (2014) in *Ibid.* Confirmed by Larsson, Anders Olof. "The EU Parliament on Twitter -Assessing the Permanent Online Practices of Parliamentarians". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*. 2015. Vol. 12. N°2.

[323] Valentini, Chiara. "Social media use by main EU political parties during EP elections 2019" in (Ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. 2019.*Euroflections*. p.80-81.

[324] European Parliamentary Research Service. *Polarisation and the news media in Europe*. March 2019. p.6.

[325] Scherpereel, John A. et al. "The Adoption and Use of Twitter as a Representational Tool among Members of the European Parliament". *European Politics and Society*. 2017. Vol. 18. N°2. p.113 and p.118.

[326] Coleman and Shane (2012) Conover et al. (2011) in Larsson, Anders Olof. "The EU Parliament on Twitter -Assessing the Permanent Online Practices of Parliamentarians". *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*. 2015. Vol. 12. N°2. p.160.

shows that the engagement of MEPs on Twitter does not systematically increase trust in their political role.[327] This might mean the same for the EP's engagement.

Overall, the strategy on social media of political parties during the 2019 elections shows an increased "maturity" in their strategic thinking but still fail at providing a dialogical space for debate.[328] In this way, Twitter does not revolutionize MEP's communication: the ordinary MEP tweets irregularly and prefers "broadcasting to "chatting". Their retweets tend to give attention to elitist criteria, which depict an image of the EU as an "elitist bubble".

4. Illustration with Critical Discourse Analysis

The objective of this practical part is to get a global picture of the European Parliament's social networks campaign in terms of discursive strategies as well as in the EU self-representation. The aim is to show how the EP uses social networks and what implications it may have on the representation of the democratic deficit.

4.1 Methodology

To get a clear sample of the online campaign, I decided to analyse Facebook and Twitter content on the European Parliament accounts in English (as it is the lingua franca) or from its initiative in relation with the theory as well as the discursive strategies of the written content from the 1st to the 26th May 2019. To get the corpus, I used social networks' advanced research tools. Twitter's advanced research tool is more precise while Facebook constrains users to select a keyword. After the gathering of the content, I selected the content that was most representative of the campaign to analyse it in detail. The structure of the analysis goes from the main messages linked to the campaign strategy of the DG com (see 3.2.1). The following analysis focuses on other themes that were found in the campaign.

For the analysis, I will analyse discursive strategies and the effect the content has on the democratic deficit according to the theoretical framework. Discursive strategies are treated as M.A.K Halliday has conceived critical discourse analysis. More precisely, M.A.K

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[327] *Ibid.*

[328] Valentini, Chiara. "Social media use by main EU political parties during EP elections 2019" in (Ed.) Bolin, Niklas et al. *Euroflections : Leading academics on the European elections 2019.* 2019.*Euroflections.* p.80-81.

Halliday analyses language in terms of meaning potentials that are chosen within a set of discursive choices. Discourses convey and promote a motivated world view as he puts it: "*Grammar goes beyond formal rules of correctness. It is a means of representing patterns of experience [...] It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them*"[329]. This methodology has limits as the critical discourse analysis is not systematic and is based on the interpretation of the discursive strategies. Yet, it enables us to understand the meaning potential of the European Parliament discourse on social platforms.

More precisely, I will analyse the content according to various criteria:

First, I will analyse the content according to M.A.K Halliday's register model[330]: that is what is the field, the tenor and the mode. The field is the situation/event in which language activity takes place and the field is defined by the subject matter (topic) and the institutional focus (the social structure in which the discourse takes place). The tenor is the type of role interaction, that is the set of relevant social relationship among the participants involved (for example the use of "vous", or "tu" in French. The mode is the channel/medium of the language activity.

Second, the analysis aims to detect the main discursive strategies thanks to the analysis of the social actor representation according to Theo Van Leeuwen's model[331], of the metaphors[332], as well as the intertextuality, the formulas, use of the blur and performative verbs.[333] This list is non-exhaustive. Only the elements that are relevant to the analysis will be highlighted.

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[329] Halliday, M.A.K. *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 1985. p.101.

[330] Halliday, M.A.K. *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Oxford University Press. 1985. in Tunca, Daria. *Linguistique synchronique anglaise c: Critical Discourse Analysis*. Université de Liège. 2019. Class lecture.

[331] Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. 2008. Oxford Univeristy Press. p.23-54.

[332] According to Georges Lakoff. *Metaphors We Live by*. in Tunca, Daria. *Linguistique synchronique anglaise c: Critical Discourse Analysis*. Université de Liège. 2019. Class lecture.
"*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*". This means human beings also understand and experience the metaphors that are conveyed through the discourses.

[333] Krieg-Planque, Alice. *Analyser les discours institutionnels.* Armand Collin.

Third, the discourse involves interpretation. The sentences involve presuppositions in the form of an entailment or a presupposition. The entailment refers to "*the relation between a pair of propositions such that the truth of the second proposition necessarily follows from (is entailed by) the truth of the first*"[334] The presupposition which is an assumption that is built into the text, but which is not asserted. The presuppositions have many subtypes that I will not detail here. On another level, the discourse may convey implicatures that are inferences and interpretations. Only the elements that are relevant to the analysis will be highlighted.[335]

Fourth, I will analyse the discourse according to the democratic deficit, theoretical framework and the theory that is found above. As a reminder, in the theoretical framework, my theory is that: "It is the belief that there is a democratic deficit that makes the citizens act in such a way." I had selected several points that I will summarize and precise in the context of social networks for the following analysis:

Lack of transparency Lack of transparency in the EU policy-making and representation of specific interests e.g: the EP shares content related to the 'Brussels bubble', the EP puts interests of close institutions first	**Respect of the citizens' opinions** There is no guarantee to check if the citizens' opinion is respected. There is no possibility to approve or disapprove with EU policy e.g: the EP does not take into account the citizens' opinions
Citizens' opinions are not shaped ideologically The citizens' opinion should be shaped ideologically by political competition (both in pro-EU and anti-EU positions) e.g: no opposition is represented in the debates	**European Demos** The focus of the campaign is on the national dimension. The possible European debate will be analysed in terms of interactions according to Hänska Max et al.'s model (see appendix 6) e.g: the EP does not promote dialogical content

4.2 Analysis

The content was mainly based on three transversal publications. The Juncker Commission's communication strategy aims at decreasing the democratic deficit. To achieve

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[334] Crystal, David. *A Dictionnary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. 6th ed. Blackwell. 2008. p.169-170. in Tunca, Daria. *Linguistique synchronique anglaise c: Critical Discourse Analysis*. Université de Liège. 2019. Class lecture.
[335] *Ibid.*

this objective, its main strategy is to have a greater "connection with the citizens" through sub-objectives such as[336]:

- Communication should emphasize the benefits provided by the EU to the citizens daily lives;
- Communication should emphasize the fact that their concerns are taken into account by policy-making.
- The citizens should be aware of the commission's priorities which are "growth, jobs and investment" and be aware of the EU as a whole, values and its work. Citizens know their rights.

The main message of the campaign was to show the EU relevance in a better future, a good reason for driving citizens to the polls by providing with a sense of empowerment and control with a prospect for change.[337]

First, this message was especially put forward in the video "Choose your future"[338]. This video was published on the 25th of April 2019 and it was published several times later. Here is the script:*"Today I'm being born. Like thousands of children all across Europe. What will the world we grow up in look like? What awaits us? Most of us are planned... Some of us are a change of plans. And We've all made an impact on the world even before we were born. Happiness. Love. And fear. An overwhelming anxiety, almost unbearable. Maybe because the world around us feels more uncertain than ever. And life has a way to make us feel fragile and alone, when we know change is coming and nothing will ever be the same again. Some say that we are born into this world alone. But we're not! From the second we came into this world, we're in it together. And the love in the world grows. For every child born, there is another reason to shape the changing world around us and make an even better future. The challenges we face are global, but together in Europe, we can lead the way... and Reduce climate change. Make the borders safe. Fight terrorism. Together we can promote rights, equality and democracy. Each of us can leave a mark. But together we can make a real*

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336 European Commission. "Strategic Plan 2016-2020 DG Communication". 2016. Part I. p.4-13.
337 *Ibid*. p.5.
338 European Parliament.
Facebook.https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/videos/416115432521831/

difference. That's why we vote. Today I'm being born. Choose the Europe you want me to grow up in."

When it comes to the mode, the audiovisual form is adapted to the general audience in the 24 European languages as well as in sign language. It is not promoting debate but it is "giving the citizens reasons to vote". The script is the discourse of a newborn child, talking in its name "I" and in the name of Europeans "we", and therefore personalising and adding emotion (happiness, love, fear) to "political communication". In this way, in terms of the field, the video does not look like a traditional political video which calls to vote for the political group but it gets closer to an advertisement for a specific brand developing a narration including sensation and identification. This again shows the ambivalence between publicity and neutrality EP officers meet (see 3.1.2.1) with the civil servant challenge, and which may be controversial.

Within the narration, the metaphor of the newborn child may have effects on the spectator. In this context, the newborn child embodies innocence and vulnerability. The discourse plays with the idea that the world is uncertain and that it gets citizens anxious as presumed in *"Overwhelming anxiety, almost unbearable. Maybe because the world around us feels more uncertain than ever."* The discourse clearly gives responsibility to the spectator: the newborn child must be taken care of as the future is unpredictable: "*Choose the future you want me to grow up in*". At the same time, it empowers the spectator intending to make him/her vote for the best future.

The solution to this unpredictable world is suggested in the idea of "being together", interpreted as a positive idea. The idea of being together may be associated with the EU in opposition to being alone may be associated with "national countries". It, thus, aims at showing that the future will be even more uncertain without being together (without EU). Then, it clearly promotes the EU as a leader with the use of the verb "lead": "*the challenges we face are global, but together in Europe, we can lead the way... ".* It tackles issues that are "popular" in the public debate: "*Reduce climate change. Make the borders safe. Fight terrorism. Together we can promote rights, equality and democracy."* These issues are presuming that there is climate change, that the borders are unsafe, that there is terrorism and that we are at war with it (*fight*). EU positions also itself as a leader in the promotion of

rights, equality and democracy. Eventually, it gives reasons to vote as a possible change: *"Each of us can leave a mark. But together we can make a real difference. That's why we vote."*

In relation to the democratic deficit, two dimensions of the methodology are implied. First, when it comes to the respect of the citizens' opinions, the video may drive people to vote in the European elections and increase the voter's turnout and thus, by convention, increase citizens' participation. This would mean a decrease in the democratic deficit in theory. At the same time, it also impacts the debate with no political competition as it clearly establishes a vision of the EU which is imposed and which may not fit everyone's convenience, not taking into account critical views which, for instance, would like to take decisions at the national level.

The next main content is the *Spitzenkandidaten* debate, which was promoted in several publications beforehand. On the 15th of May, the debate was streamed live on Facebook and Twitter and is still visible on Youtube[339]. The debate was also streamed on various national TV channels. According to the social network hub, it had accumulated 5.000 views on Youtube, 28.000 on Facebook and 7.000 on Twitter.

The #TellEurope associated with the debate was also in Twitter trends for Belgium, German, Ireland, France and Finland. With the hashtag, people could address politicians that were candidates for the presidency of the commission. The debate was mainly streamed in English (70%) but also in German (9%), Spanish (5%), Catalan (4%), Italian (3%), French (2%), Dutch (2%) and undetermined languages. The main debate on Twitter came from Germany, which is probably linked to the important role of Germany in the EU and to the fact that there are two *Spitzenkandidaten* from the country and one of the journalists. Most tweets were addressed in English. According to EUvisions, the debate was dominated by the environmental topic.[340]

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[339] European Parliament. "Debate of the candidates for the presidency of the Commission -EU elections 2019". *Youtube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=He1srJG18T4.
[340] Castelli, Fransesco. "European elections 2019: the Spitzenkandidaten debates as seen from Twitter". *Euvisions*. June 2019.

It is important to mention that the group "Identity and Democracy" did not choose any *Spitzenkandidat* nor participated in any debate with other political groups. In this way, they never gained visibility on the European Parliament's social networks. Yet, they created an important engagement on social networks.

About the *Spitzenkandidaten*, according to the typology of EU polity evaluation[341], Max Weber (EPP), Margarethe Verstrager (Renew Europe), Frans Timmermans (S&D), Ska Keller (Green) are affirmative europeans in their discourses. Nico Cué's discourse (European United Left) is in favour of EU integration and further integration but against EU polity. Then, he is said to be Alter-european. Jan Zahradil's discourse (European Conservative and Reformists Group) is in favour of EU integration but against further integration and EU polity. Then, he is said to be Eurocritical. It means all the parties are interested in European integration but with different visions.

The questions and assertions of the journalists/moderators are particularly interesting as they shape the debate. In the beginning, all the candidates make a presentation about themselves. Then, the social network hub selects and displays one opinion in relation to the next theme. First, it displays a Twitter user opinion on migration: "*Last week 70 people drowned, 240 have been illegally and forcibly returned to Libya on the behalf of Europe. Today #Seawatch3 could prevent another tragedy and rescued 65 people. #Tell Europe that those people are humans! When do you start treating them as such & where is our safe port?*"

About this theme, the journalist asks:*"this has been the topic most mentioned by many Europeans when surveyed about their concerns, but Europe has failed to find a common political solution for the problem, the ideas of resettlement are met with opposition and even for a few dozens of migrants arriving on ships like Seawatch or on the Aquarius, we see our governments fighting over who is going to take them. So our question to you is: given the fracture, the tensions we see about migrations, would you as a Commission president drop the efforts to find a common solution, and if not how do you solve the problem?"*. The question insists on the failure of the migration policies. In contrast with the citizen's opinion

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[341] de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. p. 548. See annexe 5.

that was displayed, it does not describe the social actors in a personalised way (people, human). It depicts them in a category according to their status (migrants) or even in an impersonalised way as a problem (utterance autonomization) which needs a solution. The question only leaves two solutions: abandoning the common policies or finding a new solution.

"*Our second question is on youth unemployment. If you look into the details you see there is a huge gap between countries in the North and East and those like Greece, Portugal, Italy or even France. Youth unemployment in Greece for instance is at 39%, but what is the explanation for that? Too much austerity like in Greece or Portugal? Or maybe not enough reforms like perhaps France or in Italy? Our question to the candidates: how would you try to bring more than 3.3 million of young Europeans back into jobs?*". Here, the question is already making suggestions to the candidates, which is clearly not objective and may influence the spectators' opinion and the candidates' discourses. It also presupposes (presupposition with the use of the wh-question "how") that all the political actors want to bring more than 3.3 million of young Europeans back into jobs.

Then, the journalists asked the audience: "*What are your reasons to vote in the European elections on 23-25 May?*" It presupposes that the person has reasons to vote, thus promoting involvement in the elections. The question suggests four answers. "*-Climate change -For a better Europe -To stop toxic nationalism -To keep democracy going*". The proposals enable statistics on the interests of the citizens. Yet, it reduces the set of answers and influences the answer. Indeed, with the alternative question, it presupposes that at least one of the answers is correct. The pre-set answers are also conveying ideologies. For instance, "For a better Europe" presupposes that Europe is not at its best but it also means voting makes Europe better. Another example, "*To stop toxic nationalism*" implies that there is toxic nationalism (presupposition triggered by the change of state verb "stop"). It is also a clear choice to dismiss ideas that are seen as "Eurosceptics", for example by suggesting that some people vote "to get national sovereignty back".

Now, new opinions on Twitter are displayed: "*Many EU citizens like #SeanBinder are being stopped from helping migrants with life-saving support, shelter, even food! This is an attack on our rights as citizens. What will you do to stop this & protect our right to help? We*

are a #WelcomingEurope! #TellEurope #HelpisNoCrime" Even though the question is displayed, this question will not be debated nor be asked to the candidates.

To make the transition to the next topic, the journalist displays a second opinion: *"The United Nations recently warned that there are only 11 years left to prevent irreversible damage from climate change. What will the presidential candidates do to fight climate change and prevent a climate breakdown? #TellEurope #EUelections2019"*. The question related to climate change is: "*Because we can move on on the next topic: environment and climate change. There are thousands of Europeans, young Europeans on the streets with Greta Thunberg with the Friday for Future movement. Every other week we receive a new scientific report urging politicians like you to act urge to act but still effective climate protection could prove very expensive jobs in the coal or car industry could be lost. Energy costs ordinary people more money. So our question to the candidate is do you think we have to make the sacrifices in order to protect the planet...our planet. What would you do more or what would you do less? Please name concrete proposals.*" The formulation gives credit to Greta Thunberg and her movement. This movement is a civil society movement that is introduced within the debate. It also emphasizes the importance of scientific reports about climate change but, on the other side, it shows the possible job losses and claims "*Energy costs ordinary people money*". The last point of the question associates environmental protection with losses in the lexical field (cost, sacrifices) The situation should not stay the same according to the question as the person should do more and should do less.

The next question is: "*It is a symbol of unfairness and injustice multinational corporations like Apple, Google or Nike are paying only marginal taxes less than 5% where we, as ordinary citizens, have to pay between 20 and 40%. Our question to the candidate is which countries in the EU are in your opinion tax aims and how do you change the behaviour to make sure that Amazon pays as much taxes as the booksellers next door.*" The first sentence polarises society between the "ordinary citizens" and multinationals, which pay less taxes. The use of the "we" implies that people in the audience are "ordinary citizens".

Again, the social network hub shows another user's opinion, which gets no direct answer: "*What do you plan on fixing the gender pay gap? In spite of all the talk it's still very much a reality in many countries*". Then, the journalist approaches a sensitive field:

Euroscepticism: *"and with the rise of eurosceptics and populist movements in several European countries, some of you have also expressed some general distrust towards the EU"*. These claims directly interpret Euroscepticism as a united movement completely against the EU integration while de Wilde's typology shows that there are different types of Euroscepticism and that diffuse Euroscepticism should not be dismissed as an irrational movement. Here, Euroscepticism is associated with populism, a term which is badly connoted and justifies the rejection of opinions, assuming that the problem does not come from the EU institution but from external movements. Moreover, instead of clearly assuming that some people are opposed to the EU, the term "distrust" means it is not a clear dissent opinion. This term is also associated with the democratic deficit. A user's tweet is also displayed: *"A main problem from the EU is that citizens don't understand it. Bad communication? Too complicated? I would rather say that there's a huge lack of information about the EU in our school education. How do you want to change that?"* The choice of the tweet is not left to chance. It clearly relates the first subject "Euroscepticism" to a misunderstanding, not a justified opinion, reproducing the idea that "people who are against the EU, should be more aware of the EU". It indirectly associates Euroscepticism not with political decision-making but attributing responsibility to external institutions: school and education, which are in the competencies of the State members. It would then indirectly question state members' educational systems.

The next topic which was approached was foreign affairs about which the journalist asks: *"The EU in a world dominated by the US and by China. More and more often, the EU finds itself in an armed twisting situation with those powers being on the Iran nuclear deal or to be on free trade. US president Donald Trump wants to impose new tariffs on European goods so this is a very broad topic but we would like to get a feeling of your stance on these questions. And our question to you as candidates for the European Commission. In order to strike a deal with Donald Trump, which will be probably one of your tasks as a Commission president and to avoid damage for the European Union economy are you willing to open the European market to American agricultural products including genetically modified ones as Trump apparently denounces."* It presupposes that the world is dominated by the US and by China, in opposition to the "Choose your future" video for instance. As explained in the

theory, Brussels-based journalists tend to use a conflict frame opposing the EU to an external power nation with the aim of promoting the sense of belonging to the EU.

The question of Euroscepticism is also raised by the following question: *"[there is the] increasing fear of many people that the EU doesn't function anymore. The British wanted to leave the Union. In Hungary, Victor Orban wins elections with the slogan 'Stop Brussels'. In Italy, Matteo Salvini clearly rides the same waves and European values are under threat. There are already full of procedures against Poland, Hungary with more to come and turnout for the election has steadily declined over the decades. So our question to the candidate is how do you explain the rise of Euroscepticism and what is your share of responsibility"*. Here the first expression is based on a sentiment, fear, as for instance people with views that are said to be "Eurosceptics" feel distrust. The idea would be that people experience feelings (negative or positive) towards the EU and not only opinions. "European values are under threat" indicates that countries leaving the EU is a threat to European values. The concept of "European values" is therefore directly associated with the European Union and not only to Europe. This idea is also predominantly present in EU discourse as it associates directly and systematically Europe with the European Union. This can be considered a pre-made expression. The expression "share of responsibility" presupposes that the *Spitzenkandidaten* are partly responsible for the situation. Overall, Euroscepticism is treated as a threat and as an irrational movement while this is also the opinion of some citizens, as it is mentioned in one of the last questions.

Eventually, for the final word, the last question of a Twitter user emphasizes the idea of EU citizenship related indirectly to Weiler's European Demos: *"I was born in Italy, studied in Germany, fell in love in France and now live in Belgium. Why should I feel represented by one of your national parties?"* The selection of this user's opinion directly suggests that nationalism is irrelevant, thus, the selection is not left to chance again.

Now, I will analyse the debate in terms of the democratic deficit. In terms of European demos, the *Spitzenkandidaten* debate seems to be the closest idea to a Europeanised debate thanks to its dialogical dimension, thus decreasing the democratic deficit. In addition, the debate enabled citizens to ask questions to politicians and in theory would increase vertical bottom-up Europeanisation. Yet, the candidates actually do not directly answer the

questions of the citizens. They answer prepared questions from the journalist. In this way, the user's opinion may be interpreted only as a way to ensure that citizens feel their voice is heard and is treated in a "superficial way" as it is not integrated directly within the real debate. The debate would also enable a horizontal approach to Europeanisation as people from various countries are discussing the EU issues through the social networks and on stage. Yet, when it comes to the respect of the citizen's opinions, the promotion of six candidates as commission presidents contradicts the fact that none of them became commission president. This idea clearly deepens the democratic deficit as it does not respect the democracy objective of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, not respecting its promise, which undermines the credibility of the Union. Also, the opinions of the users that are displayed are selected and fit a specific vision of the EU. For instance, no "conservative" opinion was displayed or taken into account. This idea of EU specific vision is also conveyed through journalists' questions which lack neutrality. Indeed, many of the questions already suggest an answer and the questions could have avoided ideological formulations as the precedent discursive analysis shows. The idea of opposition was rejected. The absence of Identity and Democracy also discredits the idea of a European debate.

The third main idea that was conveyed through the social networks is the project "What Europe does for me?" linking to the website what-europe-does-for-me, which is divided into three subcategories: in my region (the infrastructures that are funded by the EU), in my life (depending on one's profile: dependent to drugs, consumer, farmer, etc.) and in a global picture (on the question of migration, trade, human rights, etc).[342]

This idea was also published in the form of a video which is presented in a documentary (field) on the 26th of May[343]: "*With the EU elections finishing today, check out how the European Parliament's work over the past five years has helped improve your daily life*" Here is the script: "*European said goodbye to racking and expensive phone bills on Holiday after the Parliament abolished roaming charges across the EU. Roam like at home came into force in 2017 enabling Europeans to pay domestic prices while using their phones abroad. Parliament passed two major laws aiming to reduce plastic pollution. In the EU,*

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[342] European Parliament. *Facebook.*
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/videos/609562942857509
[343] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1132602418536026113

40% of plastic pollution is for packaging which is why in 2015, EU countries were required to ban free plastic bags for shoppers or reduce the number of bags Europeans use. Earlier this year, members of Parliament voted to ban single-use plastics like straws and cotton buds from 2021. The Eu revolutionized online shopping by banning unjustified geoblocking and discrimination in cross-border transactions within the EU. Now online traders can't discriminate against consumers from another EU country and must treat them like local customers. Can Europeans have it all - family and a career? The European Parliament wants to make sure they can with new rules that improve working conditions and work-life balance. New fathers should have at least 10 days of paternity leave and caregivers are entitled to five days of carer's leave a year. In the wake of several data-harvesting scandals a landmark shake-up of data privacy laws came into force in 2018. The EU made it mandatory for websites to seek consent before using people's personal data and companies that don't respect the rules can be hit with a heavy fine."

The idea of promoting what improves people's daily lives is inherently linked to the 1973 de Clerq report. The script of the video highlights 5 major laws that the DG Communication has selected in line with European values that the EU wants to convey and how the EU wants to present itself. The selection presents what the EU is "proud of". First, it highlights the end of roaming charges. To do so, it presents phone bills with negative features for the consumer in an entailment "*racking and expensive bills*" to justify new laws. The name of the program "*Roam like at home*" focuses on a national dimension as it presupposes that you are not at home and that, when you are out of your country (and thus have roaming charges), you are not at home. Therefore, it does not considerate the EU as a "home" for EU citizens but with several national "homes" with national citizens. Next, it emphasizes the ban on plastic pollution. The choice to expose this law is probably linked to the success of the environment in political subject saliency. The use of the passive formulation "*EU countries were required*" avoids asserting the EU's power on EU countries (as it was a critical point mentioned as a part of the democratic deficit) as explained in Theo Van Leeuwen's model. The active formulation would reveal an idea of imposition as, for instance, in "*the EU obliged EU countries to*". The term "*revolution*" shows the marketing-oriented strategy of the EU as "*revolution*" is not used in its first political term but as if the EU was to sell a product or convince the audience. Then, it connects the idea of injustice with geoblocking through an

entailment. The use of the idea of "*injustice*" is linked to the selection of the word "*discrimination*" and thus, the creation of a lexical field conveying a specific view on the topic. The injustice justifies specific actions but the term "*discrimination*" tends to be used politically in the protection of minorities, not specifically in relation with one's location. Yet, to claim that this is a discrimination justifies the liberalisation of the online market as an extension of the free market. The clause "*must treat them like local customers*" presupposes that the consumers of the EU countries are not local customers. As a consequence, it emphasizes the differences between the different customers. More importantly, it does not treat people from the EU as citizens but as consumers or customers. The fourth idea is a minimum paternal leave. "*Can Europeans have it all - family and a career?*" clearly asserts the idea that "have it all" means having a family and a career. Here, the emphasis is clearly again on the economy (although it is also linked to social rights). Eventually, data privacy laws are the last point. These laws are justified by "*the data-harvesting scandals*". Overall, the video is mostly focused on economic achievements and environmental strategies (which again are applied on the market production). The EU positions itself as a regulator of phone bills, of plastic pollution, of the online market, of paternal leave and of data privacy with neo-liberal perspectives for the EU (liberalisation of the phone bills and of the online market). In regard to the democratic deficit perspective, the content especially counters the "Brussel bubble" content as it focuses on the impact of laws on daily life, which enables the citizens to understand in a clear way what was achieved in a transparent way. At the same time, the content itself tends to adopt a national perspective as explained above. As explained in the precedent theory, this type of content may also oversimplify laws.

Apart from these three main messages, another transversal message was conveyed through Twitter and Facebook, which is called "stop scrolling"[344]. This message was explicitly targeting young people as it was part of the communication strategy. The content is particularly visual with flashing lights, electronic music and fragmented audiovisual content. It depicts young people scrolling down to their phones. This content differentiates itself from other contents of the campaign because of these specific features. The video is based on commonplace features attributed to young people such as the attribution of attention-grabbing

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[344] European Parliament. *Facebook*.
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/posts/10162000415565107

features (flashing lights, electronic music) and the dependence of the youth on technology. The discourse that the people hear on the news is presented in a fragmented way on the video. These are bits of political discourse youth people hear in their daily life. Here is the script: "*Are you going to vote in the next European elections? This time will be different. Migration, Brexit and social networks, have radically changed the public debate of what Europe can, should and must do. "Can we unfriend fake news and give a new like to facts?" The European Parliament has voted on a complete ban on single-use plastics. I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Stop scrolling. Choose your future. european elections 23-26 may 2019.*" In the comments, the EP encourages citizens to get involved in the thistimeimvoting campaign. The main achievements and topics related to the EU are put forward indirectly through the voices of the media, that are instrumentalized as reasons for voting: migration, social networks, Brexit, fake news and environment. It is associated with a call to action that encourages to "go to vote instead of scrolling". The bits of discourse come from different political actors the EU takes into account in its discourse (intertextuality): "*This time will be different [...]*" is part of a Euronews discourse; "*Can we unfriend fake news and give a new like to facts?*" is a question asked by a journalist on France 24 and "*I want you to act as if the house was on fire*" was claimed by Greta Thunberg. In terms of democratic deficit, this publication aims at calling to vote, especially for the youth. The message is completely in rupture with traditional political promotion.

Thereafter, there is also content that can be analysed through various ideas. First, the EU uses the children as reasons to vote both on Facebook and Twitter with the idea that the older generations (and thus, citizens) are responsible for the issues of the world for the next generation, and thus should vote. This idea of children and babies would embody innocence and vulnerability to the world's issues. The message is also linked to the "Choose your future" message with the claim "*Choose the future you want me to grow up in*". To illustrate this idea, I selected two publications. On the 26th May on Twitter[345]: "*When you really want to vote, but everyone says you are too young for that*" with a photo of a little girl in the polling station. This could also be interpreted as the fact that you should vote for the children, who cannot vote. This idea is also repeated on Facebook: "*What will the world she grows up in look like? Decide you future and say #thistimeimvoting in the European elections on 23-26*

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[345] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1132664969860997121

May-> www.thistimeimvoting.eu" with a GIF of a little girl in the European Parliament. [346] Again the main purpose was to call to vote.

Second, the campaign was particularly using the GIF tool or features that are specific to the "internet language". The EU asked to the citizens on Facebook and on Twitter to create their own GIF with a competition that began on the 5th of May 2019: *"Don't take democracy for granted: get involved in #EUelections2019! A fun way to do it is by creating your own GIF and sending it to the GIF ME YOUR BEST competition*"[347]. The sentences would mean that creating one GIF means getting involved in democracy. Thereafter, some GIFs were exposed on social networks. For instance, a GIF with a man showing its European Union T-shirt was published on the 25th of May: "*Me when I'm being asked what superpower I believe in...*" with a GIF with a man showing its European Union T-shirt. The structure of the sentence "Me when I'm being asked" is typically found in a meme[348] from internet "language patterns", assuming that European Union is a superpower, which clearly stands for a pro-EU view. Several GIFs were published all along the campaign. The use of this language pattern shows the wish to target the youth, EU's main target. In this way, the citizens can also express themselves and may participate in a vertical bottom-up expression. Yet, the content is about EU publicity and the citizens may not, for instance, really participate in a debate as the content should promote the EU as a brand. As in the thistimeimvoting, the citizens are not asked to take part in a debate but to stand for the EU. Even though, according to Hänska's typology it is a vertical bottom-up interaction, in terms of democratic deficit, the EP encourages citizens to participate in the election campaign content but with the aim of promoting the European Union, which means no place is given for critical points of views contributing to the EU legitimization.

A third main idea is a focus on the voting process depicting how the European parliament voting process is going on. In May 2019, for instance, two publications were published on this topic. The first one is: *"From Finland to Portugal from France to Bulgaria and from Lithuania to Cyprus millions of Europeans are flocking to the polling stations. Be*

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[346] European Parliament. *Facebook*.
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/posts/10162009089315107
[347] European Parliament. *Facebook*.
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/posts/10161950584325107
[348] a cultural item in the form of an image, video, phrase, etc., that is spread via the Internet and often altered in a creative or humorous way" *Dictionary.com*

one of them"[349]. The mention of the countries from different geographic zones of the EU aims at being inclusive and showing the importance of the voting movement, which is underlined by the verb "flock", which at the same time has the connotation of a massive group of animals. Because of its connotations, the exact choice of this verb is not the most adequate to fit the EU's objectives of high voter turnout. Indeed, the formulation may lead people to feel reluctant about voting as the connotation of the verb reminds the narrative of massive groups of animals going to the slaughterhouse. The claim "*Be one of them*" is used as a call to action to vote. The pictures that go along with the text are depicting a wide range of people from younger to older generations from a citizen's point of view. This may soften the original use of the word "flock". Again, the purpose of the publication is to encourage people to vote from a "citizen's perspective", with the purpose of enhancing EU legitimacy. A second example of this type of publication is: "*Tweet with #EUelections2019 or #Thistimeimvoting and be featured in our daily posts with people across the EU casting their votes*"[350] Like the GIF campaign, the aim was to involve Europeans in the elections, but not especially in the form of a contribution to the debate but rather as a promoter of the EU. In the same way as a brand would encourage its users to publish photos with their products. This again shows the marketing/branding orientation of EU communication.

A fourth idea that is repeated is the establishment of voters' profiles. The EU particularly targets young people as it represents young voters' profile. On Twitter and Facebook, a video of an 18-year-old woman, Barbora from Czech Republic, who celebrates her birthday by casting a vote was published in May 2019.. It is interesting to point out that this profile-based communication was mostly promoted on Facebook through a Youtube playlist compiling these videos with young people explaining from various countries explaining the reason why they vote. The initiative was connected to the campaign thistimeimvoting. This enables citizens to identify with the real profiles that are put forward that are identified with a proper name and which enables a personalised campaign. Again, as intended in the campaign strategy, the profiles only expose European affirmative discourses, which do not really represent the average citizen's opinion but which this time, enables citizens to speak in a vertical bottom-up approach of the debate.

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[349] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1132668813886066688
[350] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1131556697800171521

Apart from featuring young people, the EU also features stars and their reasons to vote particularly on Twitter and to a lesser extent on Facebook. Among the stars that are featured we find the Dardenne Brothers, Daniel Brühl, Monica Belluci, Rem Koolhas and Stephan Peterman, Kevin Trapp, Conchita Wurst and the Cannes Festival also showed support thanks to a manifesto to vote during the EP elections. While the culture that is presented in politics tends to be associated with the upper class, the culture that is represented here is diverse in terms of social class. In terms of countries' diversity, yet, it tends to misrepresent culture from European Eastern countries. This may reinforce for citizens from Eastern countries the sentiment of under-representation in the EU that was put forward for instance by the Spitzenkandidaten Jan Zahradil (European Conservative and Reformists Group). Again, these publications construct the EU as a brand which is promoted by stars.

Another particularly interesting is the difference of discourse between Facebook and Twitter. During the campaign, the role of the members of the European Parliament during the plenary session was explained in two different ways on the social networks. First, on Twitter, on the 19th of May a video was introduced[351]: "*Getting ready to elect your MEPs next week? Here's what they do during the plenary session*" Here is the script: "*Plenary sessions are the most important moments in the European Parliament's calendar. Over 30 hours of debates, discussions and votes take place in the hemicycle in the space of four days. But it's far from all. When not in the chamber, members go to one of the 160 meetings that are scheduled during the plenary. To ensure transparency, details of these meetings are listed on the European Parliament's website. It's 6pm on Tuesday: it's political groups' time. In the European People's Party group, MEPs are exchanging ideas with a Commissioner. The group has to decide which positions they will defend on the latest reports. At the same time a debate on Syria is going on in the plenary representing the socialists & democrats, this MEP is also due to get back to his group meeting. Each of the eight political groups will get together at least once during the week. And for some groups, this could even mean as many as 50 meetings in 4 days, as their national delegations meet separately. The plenary is also an occasion for some committees to carry out urgent work and during votes, attendance is checked. Members have other obligations like talking with diplomats and explaining policy decisions to visitors. Finally, MEPs have to speak to the media to keep everyone informed,*

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[351] European Parliament. Twitter. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1130069844727017472

which all makes for a very packed diary. The plenary chamber is only the visible part of what MEPs do. But their work goes far beyond the walls of meeting rooms. In or out of the chamber, the work continues." In the presentation, MEPs are presented as active with a great workload that is conveyed through the lexical field: "over 30 hours", "in the space of 4 days", "obligations", "their work goes far beyond", etc. probably as a response to critics of lack of severity for the MEP's jobs. It also emphasizes the concept of mediatised democracy (see p X).

On Facebook, the video was shorter and more visual. The introduction to the video was also different:[352] "*Ever wondered what members do during plenary sessions? It's not just votes and debate: there are also an average of 40 meetings a day to attend. Watch the video to find out more about their tasks*". "*[ringing] During plenary sessions, there are over 30 hours of debates and votes. There are also 160 meetings over the 4 days. Members cannot possibly attend all of them. The political groups meet to define their positions and debate upcoming issues. Members also meet with Commissioners to negotiate or be informed or argue a case. They speak to diplomats and visitors. Parliamentary committees also meet, usually to do some urgent work. And members are solicited by journalists to explain their work. The plenary chamber is only the most visible part of what MEPs do*". This version insists less on the obligation and on technical aspects but it still focuses on the importance of the work. The European Parliament is less technical and more simple as they would target people that are not especially interested in politics in comparison with Twitter as it was explained p.X. Also, as above explained, Twitter platform is based on news while Facebook platform is based on "close network" content. This shows the efforts of adaptation of the EP to both platforms. This type of content enables the citizens to understand the political system in an accessible way and participate in the demystification of the institution.

Other aspects are associated with Twitter. For instance, on the 26th May 2019, Twitter reminds the "older days" with the beginning of the creation of the EU with a TV spot from 1984: "*Europe. United in democracy. Make your voice heard. That was a message of a TV spot about European elections in 1984. And it's still good.*"[353] This type of publication aims at

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[352] European Parliament. *Facebook.*
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/posts/10161997129490107
[353] European Parliament. *Twitter.* https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1132660766488899589

showing the intemporality of the institution, which gives more legitimacy to the institution. It is also interesting to see that the same messages are still conveyed today (Make your voice heard, United in Democracy). It shows that the key messages of the EU do not change throughout time, and in our particular case, with the use of social networks.

On the European day, from the Schuman declaration's legacy, Twitter features Robert Schuman in a video with his discourse: "*69 years without war in the European Union. Because united, we are peaceful. #EuropeDay*". "*A united Europe was not achieved and we had war. Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan: It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.*" [354] The message makes a reference to the idea of integration by stealth. This traditional method of integration by increasing little by little EU integration increases the democratic deficit according to Majone as it does not rely on competition of political ideas. The message also may be interpreted that a United Europe should be achieved as it indirectly suggests thanks to an association that no united Europe is the cause of the war, a negative concept, which naturally leads the audience to think that to avoid war, there should be a united Europe. The concept of "United Europe" is interesting in the sense that it also serves political interests as, for instance, Eurofederalism and may delegitimize potential national demands. It again promotes a particular vision of the EU which does not help to shape the debate. On Facebook, the version was simplified with a GIF of the simplified quote of Schuman: "*It's Europe Day! The idea of cooperation between the European states was that it would reduce the risk of conflicts. It works. Don't forget to participate by voting in the European elections on 23-26 May -> thistimeimvoting.eu.*"[355]: "*Europe will not be made all at once, but through concrete achievements that create solidarity.*". The focus is more on the dynamic interaction with the citizen through the thistimeimvoting campaign. These types of publications contribute to the idea of an intemporal and specific EU.

In addition, only the EP's twitter published content on the Sibiu declaration on the 9th May "*The Eu's strategic agenda or 2019-2024 will be discussed at the Sibiu Summit today. Find out what EU heads of state had to say about the future of Europe during debates at the*

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[354] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1126447219899396096
[355] European Parliament. *Facebook*.
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/posts/10161975113970107

European parliament"[356]. The summit was supposed to redefine the idea of democracy, solidarity and cooperation of the member States but the elections were too close to make this moment a challenging moment between countries. It reaffirms pro-EU principles in a vague manner.[357] The Sibiu declaration was considered as failed which may be the reason why there is little visibility on the social networks but also the technical idea of the summit may not be suitable for the Facebook audience. This publication appears more technical in its terms and is published only on Twitter. The information is addressed to a more knowledgeable audience than simplified and illustrated content.

Some publications also only targeted Facebook audience. On the 23rd of May, interesting content was shared: "*Bolt, Lime and Flixbus make it easier for you to go to vote! This time getting to your polling station won't be a problem! Check their apps for details.*" This publication emphasizes the corporate interest in the EU. Indeed, the content takes the form of an advertisement for the companies. Several reactions in the comments were criticizing it, to which the EP answered that the promotion was due to the fact that their products were free on the polling days. It helps everyone to get to the polling stations, and, thus, make voting accessible. Yet, the fact that 3 specific multinationals were selected gives the latter considerable advantages such as high visibility and further cooperation and easier access to lobbying. The selection of these specific companies may also be the result of a lobbying process and does not favour smaller companies, with less means. As a result, it clearly strengthens the perception of a democratic deficit through the representation of specific interests.

The promotion of the Open days was also most prominent on Facebook. On Twitter, the event was covered by the European Commission, the political groups and the institutions close to the EU. On Facebook, the content was targeting the citizens thanks to a live.[358] The live was especially focused on elections with informal explanations, experiencing a visit as an "ordinary visitor" and promoting the EU in various ways. The staff is asking for questions from the users in the comment but it is not clear how they treat these questions. Overall, the

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[356] European Parliament. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Europarl_EN/status/1126387073332568064
[357] European council. "The Sibiu declaration".
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/09/the-sibiu-declaration/
[358] European Parliament. *Facebook*.
https://www.facebook.com/europeanparliament/videos/439831733230042

content was explaining simply and with no pretension the backstage of the European Parliament, which had probably a positive impact on the citizen's understanding and democratic perception of the EU.

4.3 Results

In conclusion to this practical analysis, the EU is constructed as a brand. While Facebook exposes a personalised, simplified strategy targeting the youth, Twitter will provide more precise information about political information. The branding idea conveys specific values that the citizen should associate with the EU. The message of the campaign can be understood as: "To face some issues (the issues that are repeated are: consumer rights, technology, migration and climate change), we should be together (a united Europe) in the future". This confirms the idea of Aneta Podkalicka and Cris Shore that the "branding" method does not give credit to people with skeptical views and consider that people should be more "aware" of the benefits the EU provides. (see 3.2.4.5)

In terms of democratic deficit, the EP's main purpose is to bring the citizens to the polls but also to make them contribute to the EP campaign, especially the youth which are "attracted" with innovative political campaign tools (use of GIFs, promotion of "voting" by stars, stop scrolling). Yet, this kind of participation is "superficial". Indeed, the participation is limited to pro-European affirmative views which limits the debate. Any opposition is rejected by being associated with Euroscepticism, which is described as a "distrust". In this way, the debate that occurs within the EP's space is predominantly in favour of the EU and thus is impoverished. As it was emphasised by the theory, the dialogue with the citizens is treated in a superficial way, as a means of persuasion of the legitimacy of the institution.

In addition, this practical part shows that social media can also reproduce former patterns, often controversial in the European political communication as, for instance, the promotion of three specific transport multinationals to the polls, and, thus, the promotion of specific corporate interests.

The analysis, however, nuances the idea of elitist content or at least in this specific context of election on the proper accounts of the European Parliament. No major "Brussel bubble content" was shared on the EP's social networks except maybe for the content on the

"sibiu declaration". The idea of multipliers was also found for "ordinary citizens" with the campaign "thistimeimvoting", although the participation is limited. Of course, this does not mean that this elitist aspect was not found on political groups or MEPs' accounts.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we cannot have a definitive answer to the research question "Does the use of social networks by the European Parliament during the 2019 election campaign decrease the democratic deficit?" as theories are rich and various or even opposed in their ideas. When, at first glance, my hypothesis was that communication on social networks could enhance democracy and reduce the EU democratic deficit, this piece of work tends to qualify this hypothesis.

The use the European Parliament makes of the social networks is determining in the possible effect it has on democracy. The analysis shows that social media can actually reproduce former patterns, often controversial in the European political communication and linked to the EU communication legacy.[359] Therefore, the use of social networks by the European Parliament in the 2019 elections is not as beneficial for democracy as expected or as generally presumed.

One of the first flaws that is mentioned in the theoretical framework about the democratic deficit is the lack of transparency in the EU policy-making decisions. Even though the European Parliament is directly elected, the EP may not represent the interests of the citizens but specific interests. The communication on social networks conveys this idea as MEPs privilege interaction with interlocutors from elitist background over interaction with "ordinary" citizens. Indeed, the MEPs tend to share content relative to the "Brussels bubble", promoting the EU as a remote institution. In the practical analysis, this elitist bias was limited but corporate interests were promoted on the EP's Facebook page, which presented this image to the citizens.

Second, there would be a lack of initiative from the EU to shape the citizens' opinion. Follesdal and Hix argue that political competition should help to create public opinion. When

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[359] Krzyzanowski, Michal. "Social media in/and the politics of the European Union." *Journal of Language and Politics*. 2018. Vol.17. N°2. p.282.

it comes to the structure of the EP, the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaign is interesting as it helps to shape the structure of the EP, transnationalising and personalising the debate. However, the *Spitzenkandidaten* process was not as successful as in 2014. Even more as there were controversies on the process and eventually, Ursula von der Leyen became president of the Commission showing a failure to hold account of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, converting it into a "false promise".

When it comes to the creation of political competition, a Europeanised debate may happen more easily in the social networks than in the traditional media, especially as it enables diffuse Euroscepticism and mediatized democracy, meaning that the EU is more and more constrained to take into account the comments which criticize the political system. Yet, there are limitations to this debate. While Twitter is better for spreading information to a general transnationalised audience and to create "external" engagement (in comparison with Facebook), it leaves out a significant share of the population. The audience of Twitter tends to be more elitist. Fewer EU citizens adopted this social network. Also, the debate may find itself more easily polarised on social networks. While some scholars fear the debate would not occur as people with different views would not "meet" each other and avoid cross-cutting news, creating "echo chambers", other scholars observe that cross-cutting news is present and engagement is based on negative reactions. As a result, a possible Europeanised debate on social networks might turn out polarised and non constructive.

Furthermore, the EP does not encourage this form of debate as the content published lacks unsuperficial dialogical content, that would shape the debate. Indeed, the participation of the citizens is a tool for enhancing legitimacy but is not treated with the aim of having an impact on the debate. It dismisses the arguments against EU integration or polity, restraining the potential democratic evolution of the political system. Even more as the communication only targets groups that are already pro-European—the youth, the students, the opinion makers. This is a failure to reach a wider public which also has the right to participate in politics. In 2019, communication was made less neutral and more pro-EU on purpose. Yet, the debate and communication still deny opposition, treating Euroscepticism as an irrational phenomenon, showing a lack of openness to their ideas and critical points. Nevertheless, Euroscepticism has proved in this work its possibilities to enhance democracy.

The possibility for MEPs and political groups to enhance democracy and discuss policies on the social platforms is also a relative failure. The major part of MEPs do have a Twitter account (more less 75 per cent) but they are only active during the election period, which means they cannot hold account of the policy-making, which is an obligation for the EP. In addition, they prefer broadcasting content to using a two-way communication feature of social networks. They also tend to focus on elitist interactions.

Eventually, the theoretical framework claims that the various flaws are strengthened by the complex communication challenges: the fact that there is no common EU language and impoverished media outlets. As a result, communication is mainly perceived through a national dimension, with national journalists who tend to see themselves as watchdogs for EU policies, showing predominantly the negative sides of the institutions. To this end, social networks may be seen by the European Parliament as an alternative mass media, transcending boundaries with one Lingua Franca (English) and showing some signs of horizontal Europeanised coverage in relation with specific events. The institution should promote a two-sided identity with political discourses at both levels in various national languages with the same content for equal dissemination. The EU parties, as well as the EU Parliament, should be more active in their communication to challenge the national views and to enable the citizens to check the democracy mechanisms that are implemented.

Globally, therefore, some former patterns of EU political communication keep nurturing the perception/sentiment of a democratic deficit. If the EP wants to reduce the perceived "democratic deficit" in its communication, the EP still needs to rethink these patterns and use social networks at its fullest potential.

What we also see is that the EP does not have the full responsibility for these flaws. As above mentioned, the MEPs have the responsibility to hold account of their views and of the policy-making process in a more personalised point of view. Besides, national governments and national media outlets tend to promote national identities. If they had a discourse promoting a two-sided citizenship or an open citizenship, the citizen's perspective would probably change, even more as the television keeps being the first source of news consumption.

Although the use of social networks by the EP in the 2019 election campaign turned out to be unsatisfying, it would be a mistake to deny the EU's efforts in promoting mediatization, in trying to improve its communication basing itself on scholars' recommendations throughout the years. While the political crisis happens at all levels, state members are usually not that involved in mediatization. Few national parliaments are officially involved in social networks, for instance.

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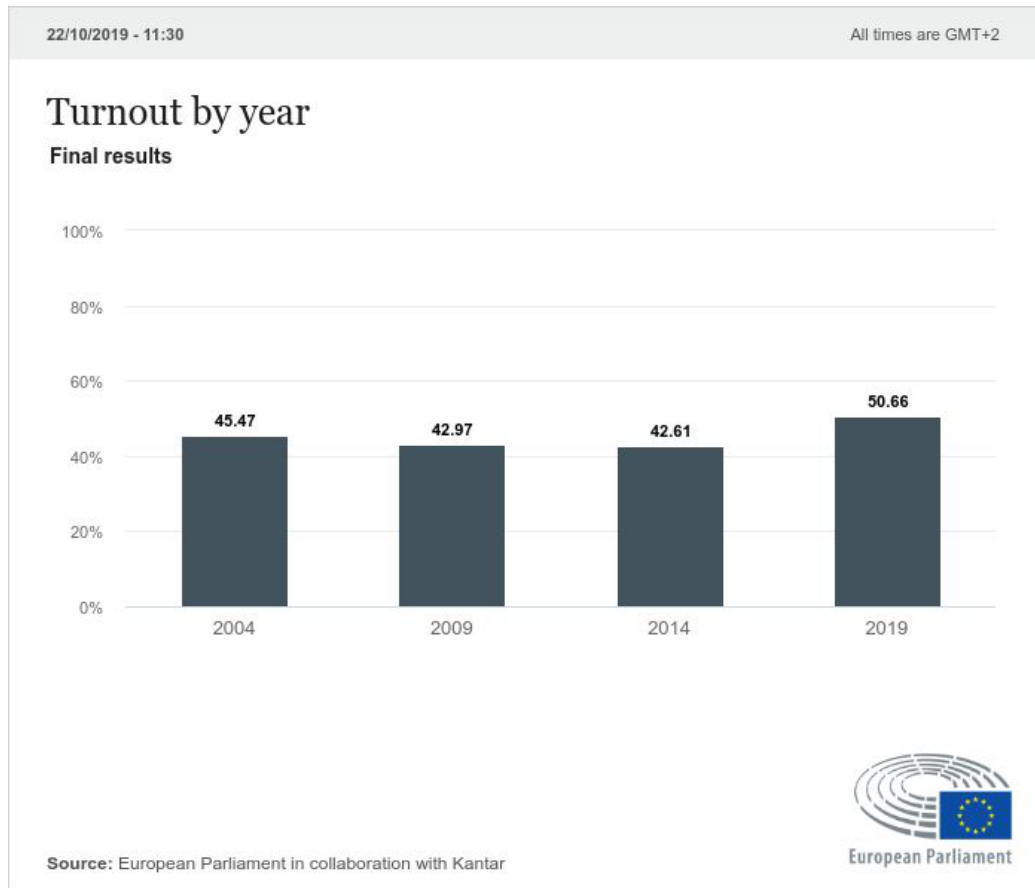
7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Parlemeter 2019
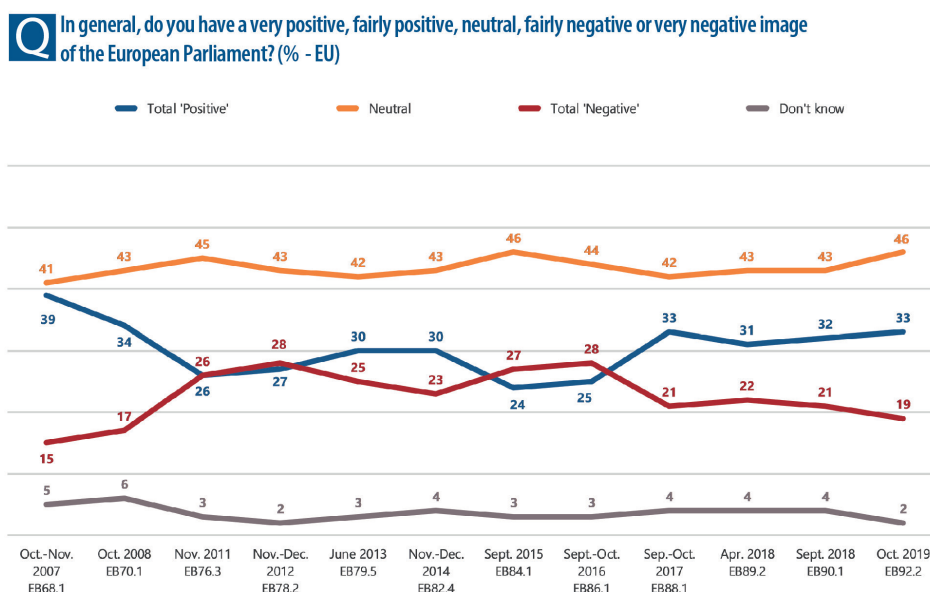
Source: Parlemeter 2019 (92.2), QB3

Appendix 2 - Voter turnout for the European Parliament elections

22/10/2019 - 11:30   All times are GMT+2

Turnout by year
Final results

Source: European Parliament in collaboration with Kantar

European Parliament

Appendix 3- Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections

European Parliament 2019 - 2024

Constitutive session
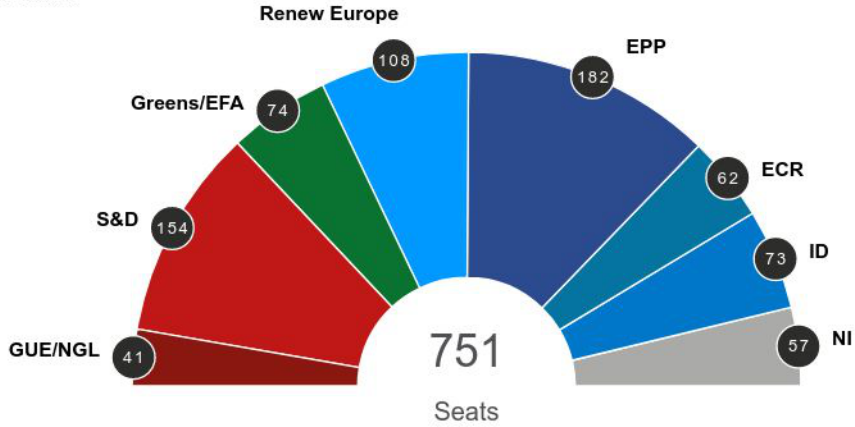
Political groups in the European Parliament

- ● **EPP -** Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
- ● **S&D -** Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
- ● **ECR -** European Conservatives and Reformists Group
- ● **Renew Europe -** Renew Europe group
- ● **GUE/NGL -** Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
- ● **Greens/EFA -** Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
- ● **ID -** Identity and Democracy
- ● **NI -** Non-attached Members

Since 2009, according to Parliament's rules of procedure, a political group shall consist of at least 25 Members elected in at least seven Member States.
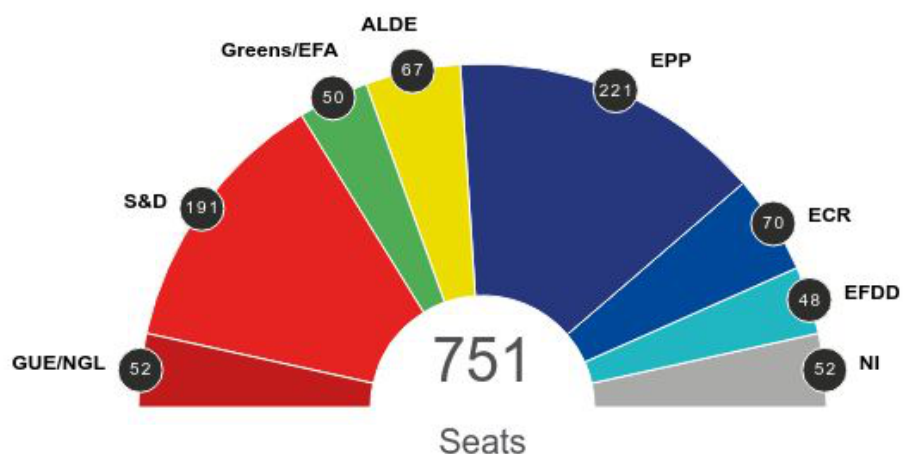
Source: European Parliament in collaboration with Kantar

European Parliament

Appendix 4 - Results of the 2014 European Parliament elections

European Parliament: 2014-2019

Constitutive session

Political groups in the European Parliament	Number of seats	% of seats
EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	**221** ●	**29.43%**
S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	**191** ●	**25.43%**
ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group	**70** ●	**9.32%**
ALDE - Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	**67** ●	**8.92%**
GUE/NGL - Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	**52** ●	**6.92%**
Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	**50** ●	**6.66%**
EFDD - Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group	**48** ●	**6.39%**
NI - Non-attached Members	**52** ●	**6.92%**

Since 2009, according to Parliament's rules of procedure, a political group shall consist of at least 25 Members elected in at least seven Member States.

European Parliament

113

Appendix 5-Typology of EU polity evaluation

Table 1. Typology of EU polity evaluation

		Principle of Integration			
		Positive		Negative	
		EU Polity			
		Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Project of Integration	Positive Negative	Affirmative European Status Quo	Alter-European Eurocritical	– Pragmatic	– Anti-European

Source: de Wilde, Pieter and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as a polity contestation". *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2012. Vol. 15. N°4. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1368431011432968. Accessed 5th May 2020. p. 548.

Appendix 6 - Dimensions of Europeanization on Twitter: How a European Online Public Sphere May Take Shape

Table 1. Dimensions of Europeanization on Twitter: How a European Online Public Sphere May Take Shape.

Vertical top-down	Horizontal-weak	Supranational
EU officials addressing national actors, e.g., EU actors using Twitter and being retweeted, quoted or replied to by users across the EU.	Attention on or reporting of issues in other EU country, e.g., discussion of the Greek bailout by Twitter users across the EU.	Attention on or reporting of EU actors or institutions, e.g., discussion of EU bailout negotiations by Twitter users across the EU.
Vertical bottom-up	**Horizontal-strong**	
National actors addressing EU actors; e.g., Twitter users addressing (criticizing) EU institutions or policy.	Direct communicative linkages between actors in two or more EU countries; e.g., cross-border retweets, replies, quotes, and @messages.	

EU: European Union.

Source: Hänska Max et al. "Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis". *Social Media + Society*. Vol. 5. N°3. July 2019. p. 2 . https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305119854686. Accessed 10th February 2020.

Appendix 7 - Digital architecture of Facebook and Twitter

	Facebook	Twitter
Network Topography	Reciprocal	Unidirectional
Algorithmic Filtering	Heavy (EdgeRank)	Light
Reach of Posts	Restricted (Friends of Friends)	Broad (Indexing through hashtags)
User-Demography	More Representative	News interested, politically motivated

Source: Bossetta, Michael et al. "Engaging with European Politics through Twitter and Facebook". In M. Barisione, & A. Michailidou (Eds.) *Social Media and European Politics: Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2017. p.11. (pre-print version). https://michaelbossetta.com/publications/. Accessed 10th June 2020.