Stalemate in the Democratic Reform Debate of the European Union?

A Dynamic Discourse Network Analysis of Actors and their Commitment to Reform Options

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Abstract

Although the EU's democratic qualities have constantly improved since the 1950s, not least through the direct election and increased legislative powers of the European Parliament, recent shocks have highlighted that the EU needs further and, perhaps, different democratic reform. Notwithstanding broad consensus on the issue's importance, reforms aimed at improving the EU's democratic performance have not come very far since 2009, when the Treaty of Lisbon was ratified. While the failure of separate reform ideas directed at the improvement of the EU's democratic qualities has received attention in academic debate, there has been no attempt to look at the lack of democratic reform in a comprehensive manner. By investigating the architecture of the EU's democratic reform debate, this thesis contributes to a more systemic understanding of the EU's democratic reform stalemate.

This research builds on the premise that seeing discourse as a space within which actors fight over the dominance of their ideas and, at the same time, collectively construct ideas, can bring insight into the dynamics and direction of democratic reform. Applying an innovative method of discourse network analysis – combining content analysis and network analysis – this thesis studies the behaviour of actors towards ideas and the architecture of the debate resulting from this behaviour. The research draws on debates that have taken place in EU-level media between 2014 and 2019, a period that includes events such as the Brexit vote and the Syrian refugee crisis. These events induced a new wave of debate over the EU's democratic qualities and the need for reform.

The analysis demonstrates that resistance to ideas (including non-engagement) and multiple disagreements on lower-level beliefs concerning specific institutional reforms, such as the Spitzenkandidaten process, transnational lists and the 'green card' procedure, may have played an important role in the lack of progress in the EU's democratic reform in the period between 2014 and 2019. At the same time, the analysis has also identified elements of convergence between key actors on matters of core beliefs on the merits and modes of European integration, which leaves some tentative hope for progress in democratic reform in the future.

The contribution made by this thesis is threefold. Firstly, the research offers a new perspective on EU democratic reform dynamics, emphasising the importance of multiple disagreements on beliefs for reform success, particularly the role of disagreement on lower-level instrumental ideas. Secondly, by introducing a concept of commitment to ideas, this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the ideational literature. Commitment is theorised as one of the determinants of success of both actors and ideas and as a resource that, when used in the debate, empowers both actors and ideas. Finally, this thesis makes a methodological contribution. It introduces a measure of commitment to ideas applicable to discourse networks. This measure is then employed in the analysis of the relationship between actors and ideas in the EU's democratic reform debate to explore disagreements on the level of separate actors and to identify ideas of continued importance, the ones that constitute the backbone of the discourse.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Criticism that the European Union (the EU) is not democratic enough has been ongoing throughout its history (Bracher 1964; Hix 2008; Majone 2014). Claims to 'taking back control' expressed during the Brexit campaign and persistent trends of Euroscepticism (Treib 2020) have provided strong indications that such criticism remains widely shared. Yet, reforms aimed at improving the EU's democratic performance have not come very far since 2009, when the Treaty of Lisbon was ratified. What explains this lack of progress?

Drawing on the assumption that discourse shapes political outcomes and can bring insight into the direction of future reforms, this research examines recent debates on democratic reform in the EU. It aims to explore the discursive responses of key political actors to the ongoing and extant problems with input legitimacy in order to explain the difficulties the EU experienced in pursuing democratic reform in the period between 2014 and 2019. Beyond attempting to explain reform dynamics, this thesis aims to inform our understanding of the direction reform may take in the future.

To do so, I suggest looking at discourse through an analytical lens that combines elements of different but interrelated approaches from policy studies, institutional, and ideational research. This lens focuses on the connection between the success of ideas and discourse, understood both as a system of interlinked elements and an interactive process. To analyse discourse, the research employs discourse network analysis (DNA), a mixed-method that combines content analysis and social network analysis. The benefits of DNA include its relational perspective and holistic approach to discourse that enables one to investigate and integrate different dimensions of discourse.

The research focuses on two main aspects of discourse: its structural characteristics and the behaviour of actors towards ideas. To study the latter, the thesis introduces the concept of commitment to ideas as a valuable analytical category that can help describe discourse and explain the development of debate and policies over time. Moreover, the thesis makes a significant methodological contribution by introducing a novel measure of commitment applicable to discourse networks. The value of this measure lies in incorporating a critical

component of commitment that is often overlooked in the analysis of textual data, the stability of relations between an actor and an idea.

The introductory chapter will present the research context and objectives and outline the research design. The structure of the thesis will also be laid out.

Research context: the EU's quest for democracy and lack of reform

Democratic reforms are changes directed at improving the democratic qualities of a political system, helping it to achieve the required standards. The issue of democratic reform is a challenge for the EU because of its unusual and complex nature. The EU is neither a state nor an international organisation but incorporates elements of both. Moreover, there is no consensus on what kind of political system the EU should be in the future. This leads to a lack of agreement on what kind of democracy it should deliver.

At the same time, the issue of democratic reform is of great importance for the EU because of its link to the union's legitimacy – 'the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are…proper ones for the society' (Lipset 1959, 86). It has been acknowledged that legitimacy is an essential attribute of any political system due to its ability to guarantee recognition, voluntary acceptance, and popular support.

The cornerstone of a political system's legitimacy is its justifiability (Beetham 1991). Democracy makes the system justifiable and acceptable because its results stem from citizens' demands. However, the relationship between legitimacy and democracy is not straightforward. In some political systems, efficiency becomes the primary source of legitimacy (Scharpf 1999).

Understanding the role democracy plays in the EU's legitimacy and what kind of democratic reform is needed has been changing with the development of the EU as a political system. In the 1950s, the advocates of European integration presented the European Communities (predecessor of the EU) and the system of institutions created to govern it as an essential and indispensable mechanism aimed at serving the common interest, but one that did not require any pro-active participation of citizens (Sternberg 2013). The latter was explained by the limited and narrow sphere of EC competences. However, the role of democracy in the

EU's (de)legitimising discourse increased with expanding the scope of its competences. It became especially prominent when the union evolved into a political system with a considerable number of 'state-like features' (Majone 2014, 1216).

Although the EU's democratic qualities have been constantly improved since the 1950s, not least through the direct election and legislative empowerment of the European Parliament, recent shocks have highlighted that the EU needs further democratic reform. Thus, the rise of Euroscepticism and Brexit showed that citizens were not satisfied with the EU. Moreover, the recent 'decade of crises'(Matthijs 2020) demonstrated that the democratic deficit of the EU is not only a matter of lack of popular sovereignty but also a problem of loss of national sovereignty.

Although the legitimacy of a political system can be achieved through 'meeting the needs and values of citizens' (Lord and Beetham 2001, 444), there is an agreement that relying solely on one source of legitimacy is not a good long-term strategy for the EU. As Richard Youngs (2013, 5) puts it: '[F]ailure to address the EU's democracy challenge raises questions about the long-term health and sustainability of European integration'.

Notwithstanding broad consensus on the need to re-establish the EU as a project and strengthen its democratic qualities, not much has been done in recent years. If one were to compare the EU's democratic credentials – institutions, procedures, and principles – by looking at it at two separate points in time only, in 2013 and 2019, it would seem that the EU did not change or that the change was so little that it could be barely noticed. This raises the question of why there was no considerable progress despite the agreement on the need to address the issue of the EU's democratic qualities? And if further progress is possible?

The lack of major democratic reform by Treaty is not entirely surprising. On the one hand, democratic reform had to be de-prioritised by the EU leaders because they had to concentrate on urgent issues that demanded immediate attention, such as the reform of the Eurozone and addressing the migration crisis. On the other hand, after a few decades of considerable and continuous transformations culminating in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the overall process of the EU reform decelerated. One of the possible reasons for that

is reform fatigue (Cesluk-Grajewski and Tumbrägel 2015), a lack of willingness to support new or pursue further transformations. The problem is that reforms come with costs, which 'arise immediately, [while] benefits may take longer to materialise' (Dolls et al. 2019, 43). Moreover, reforms by Treaty require a complex process that involves receiving the agreement of all member state governments and ratification by the citizens of each member state.

What may be more surprising is that the EU did not succeed in reforming itself without Treaty changes. The EU is well-known for incremental changes based on reinterpretation rather than a complete revision of existing rules (Hix 2002). However, important democratic innovations that were attempted without resorting to Treaty amendment failed to take root in this period: the Spitzenkandidat reform was reversed, and the 'green card' for national parliaments did not take hold. But it is interesting not only why a few attempted reforms did not take hold but also why there were certain reform attempts and no others? There was no shortage of ideas for EU democratisation to take a different direction, including demands for more unmediated political processes coming from the critique of representative democracy in general and party democracy in particular (Bickerton and Accetti 2017; Urbinati 2006; Papadopoulos 2013). Nonetheless, the only partially successful democratic reforms attempted by the EU were directed at strengthening the parliamentary institutions.

Drawing on Schmidt's (2006, 248) idea that 'discourse is a key component for understanding democratic politics, and central to the explanation of the dynamics of change as well as continuity in democratic polities', this thesis suggests that the debate on EU's democratic reform can shed light on the limited progress in and the possible directions of EU's democratic transformations.

The idea central to this thesis is that the EU has been experiencing difficulties in re-defining itself and that this may be one of the critical reasons for the lack of reform. This thesis focuses on two major obstacles suggested by the ideational literature.

First, the lack of alternative ideas can cause a lack of change even if the status quo has been deemed undesirable (Legro 2000). However, not only the presence of ideas is important, but also the strength of the challenging discourse (Williams 2020). This includes the idea's viability and the sufficiency of support it

receives. Although, as mentioned above, criticism and demand for reform in different directions were present, it is still possible that EU democratic reform was impeded by the lack of elaborated empirical ideas or sufficient engagement of actors with these ideas.

Second, the reform could be impeded by disagreement (Legro 2000). In the case of the EU democratic reform, this could be disagreement on what kind of democracy the EU should deliver and the desired nature of the EU as a polity. In practice, there are various forms of democratic government with different institutional, procedural, and normative characteristics. Moreover, there are no agreed standards for democracies beyond nation-states. At the same time, there has also been a lack of consensus on whether the EU actually needs to develop into a fully-fledged democracy or rather limit/reverse its competences to lower the democratic standards applied to it (see Majone 2014). Thus, it is possible to assume that the limited character of the EU's democratic reform can stem from the lack of agreement on its future.

The economic literature describes the state of a 'gridlock equilibrium'. In this state, no reform happens because actors disagree 'about appropriate reform plans' (Binswanger and Oechslin 2015, 853). The larger the disagreement, the more chances there are for gridlock. The idea of gridlock equilibrium presupposes that actors are reluctant to accept reform options because they fear that it would be difficult to reverse the decisions; hence, actors do not experiment and do not learn (Binswanger and Oechslin 2015). While the initial success of Spitzenkandidat – an initiative largely marked by continuity with previous democratisation strategy – demonstrated that the EU was progressing and trying to move in the same direction in a habitual incremental fashion, what does the overturn of this innovation in 2019 mean? Has the EU decided to change the direction of its democratic transformation? Or has it been decided to get back to the inherent status quo?

To explain the most recent reform dynamics and learn more about the direction towards which the EU might be heading in terms of its democratic transformation, this thesis will look at the debate on the EU's democratic reform.

Research objectives, contribution, and design

While the failure of separate reform ideas directed at improvement of the EU's democratic qualities has received (limited) attention in academic debate (e.g. de Wilde 2020; Donatelli 2015), to the best of my knowledge, there was no attempt to explain the overall character of EU's democratic reform. This thesis aims to fill this gap by studying the debate on the EU's democratic reform as a system of interrelations between actors and ideas.

The approach adopted in this research looks at the lack of reform through the prism of success and failure of ideas (and actors advocating for them). Since every reform is at first just an idea of a reform, the limited scope of change can be considered as a lack of successful reform ideas – the reform ideas that were adopted. From this perspective, studying debate as a forum where the construction of ideas and the battle between actors over their ideas' primacy (Schmidt 2002) take place could inform our understanding of what happens with ideas on their journey to adoption.

To address the link between the dynamics of the reform and discourse, this thesis suggests focusing on two main factors that can explain the success and failure of ideas in their journey to being adopted: support and resistance of actors to ideas and disagreements on ideas. These factors are investigated through the prism of structural characteristics and the behaviour of actors towards ideas. By structural characteristics, I understand how units that constitute the discourse – actors and ideas – are arranged and related to each other. This includes the nature of the networks between actors and between ideas, the grouping of actors in coalitions, and the conflict lines present in the debate. By actors' behaviour towards ideas, I understand the usage of ideas in the debate.

To study the debate systemically, the research employs the method of discourse network analysis (DNA), which has not been applied to the EU democratic reform debate previously. DNA uses analysis of text data to establish the links between actors and ideas through statements made by actors (Leifeld 2017). This thesis uses the resulting affiliation networks in two main ways. First, affiliation networks are employed to analyse the quality of support an idea receives from an actor. Second, transformed into one-mode co-occurrence networks, affiliation networks establish the relationship between actors, based on

the similarity or difference of their support to ideas, and between ideas, based on co-support or co-rejection of these ideas by different actors. Using DNA in this thesis, therefore, I operationalise and formally measure different theoretical constructs used to describe structural characteristics of the debate (such as advocacy or discourse coalitions, paradigms, and ideologies) as well as important properties of the elements of the discourse (such as commitment to ideas).

Applying the method of DNA to studying the EU reform debate, this research contributes to the existing knowledge about the EU in a few ways. Firstly, it provides a more comprehensive picture of the debate. The empirical study of the actual political debate on the EU's democratic reform is scarce and fragmented. Existing research focuses on separate actors (Sternberg 2013; Biegoń 2016; Schmidt 2015), specific ideas such as an idea of demoicracy (Beetz 2015) or differentiated integration (Kyriazi 2021; Heinikoski 2020; Badulescu 2021), and separate institutional reforms (Granat 2018; de Wilde 2020; Donatelli 2015). DNA makes it possible to encompass different aspects of discourse in a unified framework and, thus, create a unified picture of the debate.

Secondly, the approach adopted in this thesis allows not only the creation of a more comprehensive picture of the debate but also offers a new perspective on EU reform dynamics. Measuring the debate through networks, this thesis identified resistance to ideas (including non-engagement) and multiple disagreements on beliefs that may have played a critical role in the lack of progress in the EU's democratic reform in the period between 2014 and 2019. At the same time, it has also identified elements of convergence between key actors on the matters of core beliefs and instrumental ideas, which leaves some tentative hope for progress in democratic reform in the future.

The second major driver for this research was a desire to better understand how discourse affects the outcomes of the political process. To address this question, this thesis makes two main contributions. First, the research makes an empirical contribution to the ideational literature by providing insight into the role of lower-level ideas and their interaction with higher-level ideas in coalition formation and success of ideas, and, therefore, stability and change in political outcomes. It does so by considering the debate in its complexity as a system constituted of a few sub-debates, covering different aspects of EU democratic reform and ideas of different levels.

In policy studies, one of the key levels of analysis is a policy sub-system which is 'the interaction of actors from different institutions interested in the policy area' (Sabatier 1988, 131) or, as Rhinard (2010, 59-60) puts it, 'a social space in which actors…participate in policy deliberation, with the goal of affecting the content of legislation…associated with a general issue or sector'. The issue of the EU's democratic deficit and democratic reform is a complex one because there are different sources and interpretations of democratic deficit, and there are different visions of the desirable future for the EU (see Chapter 2). Therefore, the 'general issue' of the EU's democratic reform comprises several domains or sub-systems of actors and ideas analogous to policy sub-systems.

Each of the domains or sub-debate is populated by ideas usually divided into three analytical levels depending on their degree of generality. The most general – philosophical ideas or 'deep core' beliefs (Sabatier 1998) – operate across different areas and domains of policy-making (Schmidt 2008, 2010; Mehta 2011). These are very broad assumptions related to the actor's understanding of the complex reality and principles organising it. The next level is the level of programmatic ideas (Schmidt 2008) or 'policy core' beliefs (Sabatier 1998), constituted of ideas related to a specific field or area of policy-making. They define the problem to be solved and the objectives to be achieved. Finally, instrumental ideas or 'secondary beliefs' (Sabatier 1998) include 'means for achieving the desired outcomes in the policy core beliefs' (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, 191).

While ideas of all these levels receive attention from researchers, the main focus of academics trying to explain stability and change has been on programmatic or 'policy core' beliefs. This is because they are believed to be the 'glue' that 'the principal glue holding a coalition together' (Sabatier 1998, 105). However, attention to the role of lower-level ideas and the interaction between ideas of different levels has been increasing (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017). Following this trend and filling a still existing gap in understanding the role of 'secondary beliefs' and their interaction with higher-level ideas in producing stability and change, this research looks at both program and instrumental ideas and their interrelation.

This allows not only to create a comprehensive picture of the debate but also to establish that, similar to the case of Swiss agricultural policy described by

Metz et al. (2021), in the EU democratic reform debate, instrumental ideas split coalitions built around similar programmatic ideas. However, unlike the situation described by Metz et al. (2021), in the debate on the EU's future and democracy, intra-coalitional divisions on the level of instrumental ideas were not coupled by agreement between the coalitions and did not lead to the success of any of the ideas. While more disagreement on secondary beliefs goes in line with the hypothesis developed within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier 1998), the role of these disagreements in shaping political outcomes might have been underestimated. This thesis demonstrated that, although, as shown elsewhere, in some cases, the instrumental ideas may facilitate consensus-building (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017), they can also become a significant obstacle to the success of actors in transforming policies and institutions.

Second, this thesis also makes a theoretical contribution to the ideational literature by introducing the concept of commitment to ideas. Commitment is a bond between an actor and an idea that manifests itself in allocating resources towards the idea and maintaining the bond with it. Thus, the concept of commitment to ideas enables us to look at support and resistance to ideas from the agency perspective. However, commitment is more than support. It is continued support sustained over time. One of the key arguments developed in this thesis is that commitment to ideas (expressed in the discourse) could be linked to the concept of ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016), which is to say that commitment empowers both ideas and actors. This makes commitment one of the determinants of the success of both actors and ideas.

Finally, this thesis makes a methodological contribution. It introduces a measure of commitment to ideas applicable to discourse networks. This measure incorporates a critical component of the commitment construct – often overlooked in the analysis of textual data – the maintenance of the bond and non-switching. This means that along with the intensity, the temporal pattern of engagement is included in assessing the strength of the bond between an actor and an idea. In this research, the measure is used to study divergence in the debate on the level of separate actors and identify ideas of continued importance – ideas that are not only salient but also endure in the debate.

Overall, this research is guided by three main questions: i) What, in the structure of the debate and actor's behaviour towards ideas in the discourse, can

account for the EU's democratic reform dynamics? ii) What can (changes in) the structure of the debate and behaviour of actors towards ideas tell us about the possible direction of the EU's future democratic reform? iii) How does the link between actors and ideas in the discourse affect the outcomes, and what discursive mechanisms might stand behind these influences?

To answer these questions, the research draws on debates that have taken place in EU-level media between 2014 and 2019 as representative of the public discourse on EU democratic reform during that period of time. Resembling the nature of the EU, the debate on democratic reform is multi-level. There are two main reasons for choosing EU-level debate over national. First, the transnational debate provides a picture of the EU in all its complexity, allowing a unique unified perspective in which different elements from across the levels of government are present. Second, the transnational debate is where the EU and its development are central topics and where the key actors' interaction happens.

For the analysis of the EU's democratic reform debate, a novel dataset of news articles (N = 2832) published in two Brussels-based outlets – Euractiv and Politico Europe – from 2014 to 2019 was created. The rationale behind using (online) newspapers as data source for this research is that, unlike other text documents, they create a unique arena for an indirect interaction of actors. It is relatively open for actors engaged with the topic, which entails that newspaper materials include information on a broader range of actors and their ideas than other sources (Leifeld 2016).

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the academic debate on the EU's democratic deficit and democratic reform. It starts by defining what democracy is and establishing its link with the legitimacy of political systems – the quality allowing a political system to be acceptable. It then proceeds by identifying the place democracy has in the EU's legitimacy or, to put it differently, the extent to which legitimacy requires democracy in the EU. The chapter also outlines different interpretations of the democratic deficit reflecting the complexity of the issue of the EU's democratic credentials. It also outlines broad areas of democratic reform that are present in the academic debate,

including transformations of the EU as a polity and a system of integration, institutional changes, social reform, and reform directed at the establishment of common identity. Finally, the chapter presents the competing models of democracy discussed in the academic debate as applicable to the EU.

Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual framework – the lens through which the debate on the EU democratic reform will be studied. Since the variety of discursive approaches is great, the chapter starts by explaining how discourse is interpreted in this research. It proceeds with introducing each of the approaches and the main concepts that can be used to explain the reform dynamics and direction and the success and failure of ideas. Then, drawing largely on the policy literature, in its final section, the chapter develops an analytical lens that extends the framework suggested by Kingdon (2013) to explain the lack of reform or policy or institutional stability through the prism of success and failure of ideas.

Chapter 4 presents the method of discourse network analysis (Leifeld 2016) that has been employed to operationalise the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 3 and describes the analysis strategy. The remainder of the chapter sets out the data collection process. Here the main decisions regarding the research design and their limitations are discussed. This includes the choice of the level of analysis, newspapers as a source of data as well as particular news outlets (Politico and Euractiv), the timeframe, and the keywords used to retrieve relevant articles.

Chapter 5 is the first out of three chapters that present the empirical findings of the research. It is dedicated to the analysis of the overall network of the debate and the analysis of the programme level polity- and integration-related ideas. It draws out the structural explanations for the recent EU democratic reform dynamics focusing on the network characteristics and the existing cleavage lines. It also analyses the changes in discourse structures over time to draw tentative conclusions over possible future reform directions.

Chapter 6 proceeds with presenting empirical findings shifting the focus of attention to ideas on institutional reform. The chapter starts with the analysis of the structure of the institutional balance debate. Similar to the previous chapter, it shows the coalitions of actors and conflict lines that appeared at this lower level of ideas; however, it also takes a step further and zooms in to discuss the success

and failure of specific reform ideas such as empowerment of national parliaments, Spitzenkandidat, and transnational lists.

Chapter 7 suggests a new perspective on the analysis of the debate, focusing on relations between actors and ideas. The contribution of this chapter is three-fold: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. First, the chapter introduces the notion of commitment to ideas and emphasises the link between commitment and success. Second, methodologically the chapter contributes by introducing a measure that allows evaluating the levels of commitment through discourse networks. Finally, the chapter provides new insights into the debate on EU democratic reform, applying the new commitment measure to the overall debate to explain its dynamics and explore its direction.

Chapter 8 summarises the main findings, discusses the study's contribution to the literature, revises its limitations and suggests avenues for future research.

Chapter 2. The EU and democracy

Democracy is an established political ideal for contemporary Western societies and, thus, the most acceptable form of government. Even though the EU was not born as a democratic polity – the initial ideas justifying the European Communities (EC) were articulated almost exclusively in terms of its efficiency (Sternberg 2013) – it has been continuously improving its democratic qualities, not least by increasing the powers of the European Parliament. Nevertheless, the EU is still accused of a 'democratic deficit'– or even of being anti-democratic by both politicians and academics (Majone 2014; Scharpf 2015; Habermas 2015a).

This chapter reviews the academic debate on the EU's democratic deficit and democratic reform. The aim is to understand the scope of the debate and its constituent parts and identify existing cleavage lines. This is insightful because academic debate feeds into political debate. Moreover, it means that the analysis of the academic discussion would allow building a set of key themes and concepts to guide the data collection and further empirical analysis of the political debate. The main questions the chapter aims to address are what the democratic deficit is and what reforms can help the EU improve its democratic qualities, according to the academic literature on the topic.

To answer these questions, the chapter starts with defining what democracy is. It then explains why democracy is important for the EU and why the debate on the nature of the EU as a political system becomes an important part of the discussion on the EU's democratic reform. Finally, it discusses different interpretations of the EU's democratic deficit, outlines different domains of democratic reform, and presents competing models of democracy discussed in the academic debate as solutions to the EU's democratic deficit. The main conclusion this chapter brings us to is that the debate on the EU's democratic reform is a complex one, covering a few interrelated sub-systems of ideas. Moreover, it is full of different competing solutions to it.

Democracy and the power of the people

Democracy is a concept with a long history. It developed into a complex combination of various ideas in 'a relationship...both...of mutual necessity and...tension or antagonism' (Beetham 1992, 40-41).

The term 'democracy' originates from the Greek word *demokratia*, used to describe a unique political system established around the fifth century B.C.E. in ancient Greece (Urbinati 2006). This system developed in small city-based communities (polis), reaching its highest peak in Athens, where the word *demokratia* was coined. Its main characteristics were citizens' high level of involvement in public affairs and unprecedented egalitarianism when all free men were declared equal before the law and in their political rights (Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace 2007).

The essence of democracy in ancient Greece was the idea of people's (demos) rule (kratos) or collective self-government. The democracy of ancient Greece was a direct democracy with no division between those who ruled and those who were being ruled (Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace 2007). This made the notion of democracy strongly connected with the idea of unity and what would be later called popular sovereignty – 'the power of the demos as a whole' (Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace 2007, 174) to be the author of the rules that govern it.

Ever since its inception, democracy has been a matter of disagreement. On the one hand, it has been praised by political thinkers advocating for equality and non-domination. On the other hand, it has been criticised as a 'potentially greatly destructive' way of organising a political order associated with the establishment of a 'tyranny of the masses' (Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace 2007, 3-10).

Although democracy is an established political ideal, it is far from the initial democracy of ancient Greece. Contemporary democratic government is based on a 'constitutional conception of democracy, emphasising the importance of representation, individual rights and the balancing of powers and interests' (Abts and Rummens 2007, 405). Thus, it has changed in several important respects. Firstly, democracy that originated in small city-based communities (polis) changed its scale. Nowadays, while the democratic government is a standard form of government in a nation-state, elements of democratic control have been introduced into government on an international scale (Stein 2001). Secondly, the

democratic government transformed from government by the people into government on behalf of the people. Today's democracies are representative, which means that power is delegated and controlled by the people but is vested in different institutions performing the government functions (Olsen 2017).

Finally, democracy developed a strong connection with the idea of liberalism. From the liberal standpoint, an individual citizen becomes the focal point of the idea of autonomy and self-determination and the unit to be protected from 'arbitrary exercise of power' (Abts and Rummens 2007, 410; Held 1996, 81). Although the liberal conception of a perfect government retained the idea that the 'best interpreters of the collective interests are those who belong to the collectivity whose interest is at stake' (Bobbio 1989, 145), liberals wanted to create a political system that would constrain popular sovereignty (Abts and Rummens 2007).

In sum, modern democracy as a political ideal 'applies in the first instance to arrangements for making binding collective decisions' (Cohen and Sabel 1997, 317) and popular control over it (Lord 2004, 10). It is a political order that allows for collective self-government and self-determination. However, it entails both empowerment and limitation of power. In contemporary democracy, even though people are perceived as an ultimate source of authority, its political order is directed at providing an 'ongoing opportunity for influence over political decisions' (Kolodny 2014, 228) rather than an immediate execution of the people's will (Abts and Rummens 2007).

In practice, every contemporary democratic order combines two logics – of expert and popular decision-making (Mair 2000; Moravcsik 2002) To a large extent, contemporary democratic government is balancing between bringing people in the process of decision-making – to ensure that the outcomes of the political process are in line with popular demands – and keeping them out for the sake of reaching optimal policy outcomes (Sternberg 2013).

The following section will talk about the reasons why and the extent to which the issue of democracy is important for the EU.

Democracy – legitimacy nexus. Is there a need for democracy in the EU?

Democracy is of importance for political systems due to its link to the notion of legitimacy and, therefore, acceptability. However, the relationship between legitimacy and democracy is not straightforward.

There is no agreement on how much democracy the EU needs to be a legitimate political system. The answer to this question depends on how the EU as a political system is perceived. This section will discuss the democracy-legitimacy nexus and the role of popular control in the standards applied to the EU.

The link between democracy and legitimacy

Even though legitimacy is a complex and highly contested notion (Weber 1964; Lipset 1959; Beetham 1991; Habermas 1979), there is a consensus on its practical implications for political systems, including recognition, voluntary acceptance, and popular support. This makes legitimacy an essential attribute of any political system as it guarantees '[w]illingness to cooperate' by those who are subjected to a political power' (Beetham 1991).

Due to a range of different shocks experienced in the previous decade, the EU had to face a legitimacy crisis that threatened its very existence. In practice, it means a lack of support for the EU from its citizens and a desire for disintegration (leaving the organisation). There is no doubt that the EU needs legitimacy; however, how can legitimacy be achieved?

The cornerstone of a political system's legitimacy is its justifiability (Beetham 1991) – the existence of a reason or an explanation that makes people believe in the rightfulness of power exerted over them (Sternberg 2015). Theoretically, legitimacy can be granted to a political system due to its prolonged effectiveness (Lipset 1959; Beetham 1991). In this case, justification would rely on the capacity of a political system to efficiently 'solve problems requiring collective solutions' (Scharpf 1999, 11). Legitimacy based on this kind of justification is called an output legitimacy or government *for* the people. However, in addition to the effectiveness and the quality of outputs, systems can also rely on the input legitimacy or government *by* the people (Scharpf 1999).

While the output legitimacy relies on 'result-oriented arguments', the input legitimacy uses participation-based arguments justifying political choices as made by following the 'will of the people' (Sternberg 2013, 22).

Since democracy creates a political order that allows subordinates to become (indirect) authors of the rules they have to obey, it is an instrument that ensures the input legitimacy of a political system. Democracy makes the system justifiable and acceptable because its results stem from the demands the citizens make.

Although it has been acknowledged that neither input nor output legitimacy 'can durably do the job of building overall legitimacy on their own' (Sternberg 2015, 623), the relative importance of input and output elements of legitimacy differs depending on the type of political system. Notwithstanding democratic control increasingly becoming a feature of decision-making in international organisations (Stein 2001; Schimmelfennig et al. 2020), the established ideal of democracy pertains to the level of the nation-state. Moreover, even at the level of nation-states, key decisions of some governmental bodies, such as central banks, are purposely not subject to popular control (Moravcsik 2002).

The following subsection provides a summary of the role democracy plays in different conceptualisations of the EU.

Where does the EU's legitimacy come from? Different standards applied to the EU

The European Union is an unusual political system. Through the years of academic research, different conceptualizations of its nature developed – from the intergovernmental organisation (Moravcsik 1993; Catterall 2019) and the polity-in-the-making (Beetham and Lord 1998) to the regulatory state (Majone 1998) or 'web of governance practices' (Tsakatika 2007, 868). Most of these approaches perceive the EU and European integration as beneficial for all and requiring expertise and limited participation rather than a fully-fledged political process (Scharpf 1999; Majone 2017). Input legitimacy, therefore, is often set against the output legitimacy, and political involvement of citizens is considered harmful rather than beneficial and indispensable (Sternberg 2015).

According to the intergovernmental approach, the EU is an organisation where the member states voluntarily cooperate. The main reason for cooperation is the internal domestic demand for particular outcomes, which can be more efficiently delivered on the international level. Therefore, the EU is conceptualised as a mechanism the nation-states employ to further their interests. These interests are formulated and aggregated domestically and presented internationally by the government acting as delegates of their citizens (Moravcsik 1993).

For intergovernmentalists, the overall existence of the EU is justified because it allows for delivering the outcomes which would be impossible to obtain otherwise (Moravcsik 1995; Catterall 2019). Its common institutions provide more 'efficiency of negotiations' by decreasing transaction costs and strengthening the government's control over domestic affairs (Moravcsik 1993, 507). Moreover, the EU allows for sustaining the domestic pressure of the groups opposing cooperation by strengthening the government's position in their nation-state (Moravcsik 2002).

The regulatory state/ polity approach, developed by Majone (1998, 13), regards the EU as a system of strictly limited competences and its supranational bodies as guarantors of the 'rights created by the Treaties…against the short-term political interests of the member-states'. From this standpoint, the EU is not a nascent polity but rather a set of institutions with a dual structure – supranational and intergovernmental – performing particular functions. The main goal of the supranational institutions in this system is economic integration.

The arguments of the advocates of the regulatory state approach are generally in line with the intergovernmental vision. However, their primary stress is on the functions the EU and its institutions perform. Advocates of the regulatory state approach insist that superior efficiency in delivering the pursued outcomes justifies the independent nature of the non-elected supranational institutions (Majone 1998). On the one hand, they serve as the member-states agents, guaranteeing policy commitments' credibility (Majone 2000). On the other hand, the nature of the tasks they are dealing with requires specific knowledge and expertise (Majone 2014). Therefore, the involvement of the citizens in the work of these institutions is highly undesirable and even potentially harmful. However, Majone points out that 'doubts as to the legitimacy of non-majoritarian

institutions [. . .] increase in direct proportion to the expanding role of these institutions' (Majone 1996, 286).

The regulatory state perspective is a part of a broader governance paradigm, proponents of which hold a completely different view from intergovernmentalists on the role of the member states in 'mediation of domestic interest representation in international relations' (Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996, 341). The governance approach presents the EU as an arena for the interaction of different types of actors, 'public and private, operating at the subnational, national, transnational and supranational level, among which the state is but one player' (Tsakatika 2007, 868-869). These interactions form governance practices of diverse types, which imply horizontal coordination on different levels and horizontal control. Therefore, from this standpoint, the EU's decision-making is not exclusively controlled by the nation-states. In other words, the interests of the citizens are not aggregated at the national level and then translated by the governments in the inter-state bargaining, but rather dispersed and formulated in the massive web of interactions between various actors (Tsakatika 2007).

The governance approach also justifies the EU in output-related functional terms as it is presented as 'an innovative, more efficient system to deal with new challenges' such as, for instance, globalisation (Sternberg 2013, 141). However, from this perspective, the EU is a mechanism allowing for the inclusion of citizens in policy-making, but differently than in a parliamentary democracy. The logic of governance found its conceptual embodiment in a separate 'evaluative standard for EU's legitimacy' – throughput legitimacy – a government *with* people (Schmidt 2013, 5). Here, civil society organisations should operate as a new alternative (or even superior) to party representation links between the EU level and the citizens (Tsakatika 2007).

The EU's justification in governance terms was accepted and promoted by EU (particularly European Commission) officials (Schmidt 2013; Sternberg 2013). However, it has been widely criticised. Firstly, the actual existence and quality of the link between the EU and the people were questioned (Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013; Tsakatika 2007). Secondly, the fact that the Commission is selective as to which groups to include in the discussion of the policy calls into question the representativeness of the governance practices (Sternberg 2013).

Moving from primarily regulative to redistributive policy-making (Follesdal and Hix 2006), the EU has transformed into a political system that is closer to a state in its functions (Majone 2014). Thus, it has often been called polity in the making (Beetham and Lord 1998). Advocates of this approach to the nature of the EU argue that the standards of national state legitimacy are applicable to it. This means that the EU needs input legitimacy as well as output and thus democracy (and a fully-fledged political process) as a mechanism that would enable its' input legitimacy.

This summary of how the EU and its legitimacy are conceptualised in the academic literature demonstrates a clear dominance of output-related arguments in its justification. However, at the same time, there is a broad agreement on the EU's democratic deficit. Where does it come from?

Deficit of democracy and democratic reforms

The democratic deficit is defined as 'an insufficient level of democracy … in comparison with a theoretical ideal of a democratic government' (Letki 2016). Democratic reforms are changes directed at improving the democratic qualities of a political system, helping it to achieve the required standards. Since democracy is a complex notion, a lack of democracy or democratic deficit can mean different things and have different reasons. Depending on how the deficit of democracy is interpreted – democratic reform can cover a range of areas.

This section will cover different interpretations of the democratic deficit in general and in the EU in particular. The democratic deficit of the EU is not unique in the sense that it is similar to what all the representative democracies experience. However, it is also special because of the role integration plays in it – amplifying existing trends of hollowing the popular sovereignty while also adding the dimension of national sovereignty to the problem of the EU's democratic deficit. Hence, debate on democratic reform covers quite a few themes, from its future as a political system and the system of integration to its institutional design and the level of social equality in the EU.

Integration, democracy, and the future of the EU

The European Union is an integration project. Integration is a process 'of formation of new political systems out of…separate political systems' (Hodges 1972, 13) in which states 'forego the desire and ability to conduct…key policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs' (Lindberg 1963, 3).

Integration has been a challenge for democracy in the EU. On the one hand, integration amplified existing trends of hollowing popular sovereignty. However, on the other hand, it also added different – national sovereignty – dimensions to the problem of the EU's democratic deficit. This means that the democratic deficit became a problem of both inadequacy of democracy – as a mechanism for popular government – and integration – as a mechanism that threatens the autonomy of the EU's constituent parts.

The idea of integration questions the conventional understanding of national sovereignty as it presupposes sharing authority and even shifting it to another level (Beetz 2019; Lord 2021). Integration is also a challenge for states as separate polities due to their decreasing levels of authority over the laws they are subjected to and, therefore, a decrease in their autonomy (Lord 2021). Sovereignty and integration interrelations are, however, not straightforward. By pooling sovereignties, states become stronger actors in the international arena, which allows them to avoid the dominance of other powerful actors (Chopin 2017; Vila Maior 2019).

Initially, the EU was created as a technocratic project limited in scope (Sternberg 2015), which meant that the transfer of sovereignty was also restricted. Moreover, unanimous voting by member states was required to pass legislation. However, the gradual transformation of the European Communities and then the European Union with a significant increase in its competencies raised the scope of shared and transferred sovereignty. In addition to that, the number of policy areas that remained subject to unanimity diminished.

In parallel with the expansion of the sovereignty transfer, the EU gradually increased the powers of the European Parliament – a supranational parliamentary body – as the primary democracy-enhancing strategy (Schimmelfennig et al. 2020). However, building a democracy of a larger scale is not an indisputable option for

improving the EU's democratic credentials. The notion of democracy is linked with the idea of unity and bounded political community (demos) capable of collective self-government. There is a political and academic discourse presenting the EU as lacking a 'sense of social cohesion, shared destiny and collective self-identification' (Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995, 11) and, therefore, of a critical prerequisite of a democratic rule – a common identity. Since there is no common European demos and member states are the central constituent units of the community, their autonomy becomes crucial for the EU to be considered democratic.

In that sense, the very transformation of the EU into a system with 'many state-like characteristics' (Treib 2020, 9) can be considered as a source of democratic deficit. To tackle this issue and ensure the autonomy of member states, it is possible to either try to transform the decision-making system or reconsider its functions and *finalité* – desired end goal and desired model as a political system (Majone 2014). It means transforming the nature of the EU to change or lower the standards of democracy applied to it. This makes the debate on the future of the EU as a political system and a system of integration a part of the democratic reform debate.

Apart from the depth and scope of integration, what can also affect the democratic qualities of the EU in terms of the autonomy of its member states is the mode of integration.

Differentiated integration: a source of democratic deficit and an instrument for democratic reform

There is a consensus among academics that differentiation is a reality and an intrinsic feature of the EU (Schmidt 2019a; Verhelst 2013). This means that the EU is not a uniform political system and integration project. Having increased the number of its members from 6 to 28, the EU had to accommodate their differences in preferences and capacity. Allowing accelerated integration for those willing to deepen (or broaden) cooperation and opt-outs for those who were not, the EU managed to avoid gridlock (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014; Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022).

Therefore, differentiated integration (DI), has been a useful instrument that allowed for the development of the EU project despite internal contradictions. However, with time it became more than an instrument. Trying to accommodate the heterogeneity of its members, the EU developed into a 'system of differentiated integration' (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2013, 6), so that differentiation became a characteristic of the EU as a political system (Lepoivre and Verhelst 2013).

DI can be beneficial for and threaten the democratic qualities of a political system (Lord 2021; Bellamy, Kröger, and Lorimer 2022). On the one hand, if the system is already heterogenous, differentiation improves its democratic qualities. The notion of differentiated integration presupposes that member states retain the right to 'reorder the order' (Bohman 2005, 312) of integration for themselves, avoiding vertical (from the supranational level) or horizontal (peer) coercion. This flexibility of the union is saving their autonomy. That is why DI is advocated as the best way to 'govern together but not as one' (Nicolaïdis 2013, 351).

On the other hand, DI can also be a source of power asymmetries and domination, leading to unequal and exclusive governance systems (Heermann and Leuffen 2020; Lord 2021). Not only can the DI accommodate heterogeneity, but it can also stimulate and aggravate it. This is a matter of the shape of integration and its management. Thus, for instance, in the case of a hard-core Europe, with a division between a group of avant-garde countries moving forward and the rest, DI may induce an imbalance in power between the core and periphery of the integration project, which may threaten the autonomy of the less integrated members (Jensen and Slapin 2012). The softcore EU with multiple overlapping core groups of member states and no centre-periphery division is less dangerous in this respect. However, the democratic qualities of the differentiated polity are also a matter of a proper institutional design (Schmidt 2019a).

The potential problem with institutions and decision-making in DI systems is that they may cause a disbalance in representation (Heermann and Leuffen 2020). If not all the members have the same stakes in the issue, leaving all members with the right to vote on it threatens the integrity of the democratic process. In other words, members may end up being subject to the rules that were not created by themselves. However, the situation of complete exclusion of the members who are not directly involved in integration in one policy area is also

problematic from a democratic perspective (Bellamy, Kröger, and Lorimer 2022). Despite differences in capacity and preferences, member states being a part of an integration project and a globalised economy remain highly interdependent (Heermann and Leuffen 2020). Thus, externalities of decisions made in one area can potentially affect members that are not directly engaged in it. It means that to be fair, the system needs to consider all the parties (Bellamy, Kröger, and Lorimer 2022). One possible solution is deliberation for all and voting rights for those directly involved (Schmidt 2019a).

Democracy in need of democratisation

The debate over the deficit of democracy – or the need for democratisation – is not unique to the EU. Nowadays, well-established democracies suffer from a 'widespread degradation of democratic quality' (Papadopoulos 2013, 19), and there are widespread calls for democratisation of democracy (Santos 2005). The debate on making the government more democratic includes two main areas of discussion.

The first one is a discussion on the lack of popular control. As mentioned in the previous section, contemporary democracy is a system of representative government where citizens' involvement in political affairs is very limited (Held 1989). In this government on behalf of the people, '[C]itizens are neither the initial authors of laws and budgets nor the designers of the political order under which they live' (Olsen 2017, ch. 1). Institutions (such as the parliament and the government) play critical roles because the authority for making, executing, and controlling political decisions is vested in them.

In principle, the fact that people are not directly involved in decision-making does not mean that they are left powerless (Olsen 2017). Contemporary democracy does not only provide mechanisms for making binding collective decisions on behalf of the people, but it also ensures that there are mechanisms for control over this process. In other words, the distinctive feature of a democratic process, in which people are not directly and continuously involved in the political process, is a constant popular control over it (Lord 2004, 10). Or as (Strøm 2000, 267) puts it, in democracy, the 'chain of delegation is mirrored by a corresponding chain of accountability that runs in the reverse direction'.

The critics of the current state of democracy call into question the effectiveness and quality of public control over the process of making binding political decisions. Firstly, they claim the loss of the link between the represented citizens and their representatives (Urbinati 2006). Secondly, they warn of executive dominance – a 'phenomenon of the migration of executive power towards types of decision-making that eschew forms of electoral accountability and popular democratic control' (Curtin 2014, 3; Mair 2006). As a result, citizens lack the opportunity to influence the decision-making and the rules by which they are governed.

The lack of popular control is the main line of critique of the European Union. Thus, according to the official EU definition, democratic deficit 'is a term used by people who argue that the EU institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity' (EUR-Lex 2017).

The effectiveness of party democracy in providing a sufficient level of public control over the decision-making process had been called into question by the second half of the 20th century. Parties have been criticised for becoming less responsive to citizens' demands, while parliament was accused of losing the substance of its function as the centre of a decision-making process (Bracher 1964; Bickerton and Accetti 2017). The problem stems from what Papadopoulos (2013, 19) conceptualises as 'the divorce between the spheres of 'politics and 'policy-making' (see also Schmidt 2015), characterised by the hollowing of the power struggle. It stems from the fact that policies emanate from the government and evade public contestation.

In the case of the EU, the process of fragmentation of democratic politics becomes more evident as it is split between the domestic level of 'politics without policy' and the EU level of 'policy without politics' (Schmidt 2015). Put another way, 'more and more policies are removed from the national arena', while the number of binding decisions imposed on the citizens from the EU level increases, which leaves the national-level political debate without substance (Schmidt 2015, 21; Papadopoulos 2013).

Furthermore, with the transition from unanimity to qualified majority voting, it became difficult for national parliaments to hold governments

accountable for the EU-level decision-making (Crum 2005). This left domestic parliaments without sufficient control over the process of decision-making and altered the power balance on the national level in favour of the executive power even more (Follesdal and Hix 2006). At the same time, having put the parliamentary democracy on the national level into question, the EU has not created a credible system of control on the EU level (Katz 2001). Thus, although the European Parliament exercises certain control over the main executive body – the non-elected Commission – it has close to no ability to control the second executive – the Council.

In essence, since democratic control remains to a great extent on the national level, the change of domestic government does not guarantee a policy change due to the commitments the member-states impose on themselves when the policy is adopted on the EU level. This leaves the citizens feeling a loss of overall control over the power system, making them opt for the Eurosceptic parties.

The second area of the debate on the deficit of democracy is the scope of the social agenda of the democratic government. From this perspective, the democratic deficit is caused by the lack of political equality, understood as the equality of power (Busschaert 2016), which is impossible without social equality. This critique is based on the idea that social superiority or material wealth can be a source of political inequalities and relations of domination and subordination in a political system (Held 1996). Thus, the 'formal equality of political rights is of only limited value' because it does not mean identical opportunities for real political influence (Beetham 1992, 43; Kolodny 2014).

The EU has been the target of this kind of critique, demanding a 'thicker' version of democratic government, which cannot be realized in full without social equality as its essential prerequisite. From the social democratic perspective, the EU is a mechanism which destroys the democracy of a nation-state, something that continues to be the focal point of the citizen's democratic queries in as far as it is responsible for maintaining social equality, while providing nothing in return. The EU is perceived as an agent of globalisation, which destroys the 'capacity of democratic politics to deal with challenges of global capitalism' (Scharpf 2015, 385; Bickerton 2012)

The deficit of democracy: what kind of democracy?

This section briefly presents conflicting solutions to the EU's problem of democratic deficit and outlines three main cleavage lines that exist in the debate over the EU's democracy and possible directions for its future reform described in the academic literature.

Nation-state, supranational, or transnational democracy?

Although, as some researchers claim, the 'national state is no longer the central focus of democracy' (Schmidt 2015, 54), democracy as a political ideal and a desired form of government has a strong link to the idea of a national state where the nation, a relatively stable body with a particular identity, is supposed to govern itself.

'No-demos thesis' is one of the most common arguments of the advocates of the EU democratic deficit. From this standpoint, democracy is inextricably linked to the idea of demos as a sort of homogenous entity with a 'sense of social cohesion, shared destiny and collective self-identification' (Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995, 11). Thus, the EU as a polity lacking a vital prerequisite of the democratic process – a united demos with a thick common identity – cannot be perceived as democratic and capable of making political decisions that are binding for all member states. While some argue that the European demos has not yet been created, and there is a need to cultivate a common identity, others claim that its formation is normatively undesirable (Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995); therefore, there should not be European democracy.

Advocates of a conception of 'demoicracy' perceive the EU as a unique transnational multilevel and multicentered polity which does not need either a single demos or any radical transformation in order to be democratically legitimate (Nicolaïdis 2013; Schimmelfennig 2010; Cheneval, Lavenex, and Schimmelfennig 2015; Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). In a demoicracy, 'citizens…govern together but not as one' (Nicolaïdis 2013, 351), which means that the focus of democracy remains on the national level. Instead of self-government demoicracy suggest the idea of shared government and shared sovereignty (Beetz 2019).

There is also an alternative idea of a transnational democracy based on divided (Habermas 2015a; Fabbrini 2021) rather than shared sovereignty. As Fabbrini (2021, 11) puts it: '[D]ivided sovereignty distinguishes the policies which are subject to the control of national democracies and those subject to the governance of supranational democracy'. This idea presupposes the transformation of the EU into a federal union balanced between the two focal points of democracy in its government – national and supranational.

Representative versus participatory democracy

According to Article 10 of the Lisbon Treaty, representative democracy serves as a foundation for the functioning of the European Union. However, there is an extensive debate on a crisis and decline of representative democracy induced by the rise of the populist parties and increase in demand for an unmediated political process (Bickerton and Accetti 2017; Schmidt 2015; Urbinati 2006; Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). The critique of the representative democracy addresses both the idea of representation and its institutional embodiment – parties and assembly where the main political discussions and decisions are supposed to take place.

Before the Maastricht treaty was signed in 1992, the European Communities had relied on the European Parliament as the main link connecting it with citizens. This main channel of representation was directly supplemented by regional representation through the Committee of Regions and functional through the European Economic and Social Committee. Empowerment of the Parliament and introduction of the direct elections have been the main demands made by political scientists since the inception of the European Communities (Magnette 2001; Bracher 1964). While the Parliament was conceived as a potentially central part of the political system of the communities, direct elections were supposed to become a powerful mechanism for gathering the EU-related preferences of the citizenry (Magnette 2001). However, despite the gradual extension of its powers and the establishment of the direct elections in 1979, the European Parliament failed to become a credible representative body for the EU citizens as a whole. This happened mainly because 'MEPs depend[ed] less on their own performance than on the domestic political cycle' because of the 'split-level' party system (Lord 2004, 196; Schmidt 2015)

Since the 1990s, the EU has put emphasis on the development of a complex network of alternative representation channels, including NGOs, interest groups, and stakeholders, in the process of policy-making. However, this did not make the EU more democratic in terms of equal access to the process of decision-making because these substitute models of representation rely on 'the inclusion of particular interests'(Papadopoulos 2013, 13). Furthermore, the credibility of the link of non-elected representative organisations with the citizens is doubtful as these organisations are loosely accountable to those who they claim to represent (Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013; Sternberg 2013). Moreover, these alternative representation channels allow only for fragmented representation (Tsakatika 2007). In sum, this means exclusiveness of political process, lack of egalitarianism and, therefore, lack of democracy exists in this alternative system of representation.

As regards the improvement of the link between the citizens and the EU, advocates of parliamentarism insist on the development of the parliamentary system as a keystone of the democratic order of the EU with alternative representation channels complementing rather than substituting it (e.g Eriksen 2009; Lord and Beetham 2001; Magnette 2001). From this perspective, notwithstanding all its weaknesses, parliament as an institution performs two indispensable functions. Firstly, it works as an arena for a political process that provides 'contact and conjunction between the various areas of expertise, interests and politics' (Bracher 1964, 195), which helps overcome its fragmentation and increase its general coherence. Secondly, parliament serves as a forum for public contestation, making the political process open.

However, there is still no agreement on whether a complex representation system (including partisan, functional, and territorial representation) can truly democratise the EU. On one level, critics claim that the channels of representation in the EU are incoherent and loosely connected (Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). On the other more abstract level, the very idea of representation as it works today is called under question. The primary critique of representation is directed at its static nature, which does not imply constant communication between citizens and those who represent them and, thus, prevents more active engagement in decision-making (Urbinati 2006; Beetham 1992).

Direct citizens' involvement and rejection of any mediation have been advocated as another alternative solution to the EU's democratic deficit. In essence, this means the development and usage of participatory instruments which would enable unmediated citizens' involvement in a decision-making process at the EU level. Although 'participatory ideal is too demanding, and, for normative reasons, maybe also inappropriate for citizens in modern societies' (Hüller 2010, 88), the introduction of some elements of unmediated democratic government is justified by political theorists as it improves the civic skills of the people as well as the overall quality of political decision-making (Hilmer 2010).

The European Commission introduced several participatory initiatives in the 2000s, which were 'identified as one of the Commission's means of fostering EU democratisation' (Hüller 2010, 100). However, the biggest part of the initiatives was focused on shaping 'citizens' views, rather than giving them a decisive say' (Boussaguet and Dehousse 2009, 782). As a result, referendum remains the only practical means that allows citizens to influence EU decision-making. Referenda, however, are criticised by commentators as providing a 'constrained choice' that has been 'structured by others' (Lord 2004, 85). Moreover, being national in their nature, referenda do not serve as solutions to the complex democratic problem of the EU; they only 'allow voters to express their views about isolated and mainly constitutional issues' (Hix 2008, 79).

The Lisbon treaty introduced an innovative instrument enabling citizens to influence the EU's agenda – the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). This instrument 'allows citizens to suggest concrete legal changes in any field where the European Commission has the power to propose legislation' (European Union n.d.). In order to be considered by the Commission, the proposed initiative must be initiated by citizens from at least seven different member-states and get the support of at least 1 million people. Considered a breakthrough as an idea, in practice, the ECI did not have any considerable success due to its very limited impact on politics or policy. The problem is that even when considered by the European Commission, the initiative does not necessarily become a legislative proposal.

To sum up, it seems unlikely that the EU could rely exclusively upon participatory instruments in its struggle with a long-standing deficit of democracy. It would still need to develop a web of working mechanisms for agenda control, public debate, and decision-making on a transnational level. However, further

elaboration of participatory mechanisms supplementary (rather than alternative) to representative democratic channels are being debated and considered feasible.

Consensus versus majoritarian democracy

Although representative democracy is specified in the Treaty on European Union as one of its organising principles, '[T]he shape of representative democracy at European level is not fixed' (Shackleton 2017, 193). In other words, particular rules, practices, and institutions regulating the EU's political system change constantly.

In practice, there are various forms of democratic government with different combinations of institutions, procedures, and rules. Thus, even the EU member states differ in their models of democracy. However, using Lijphart (1999) typology, two main principles of organisation of a democratic government can be distinguished; these are majoritarian and consensus principles. The main difference between them lies in understanding the locus of power. In other words, the majoritarian model of democracy 'concentrate[s] political power in the hands of bare majority', whereas consensus democracies tend to 'share, disperse, and limit power in a variety of ways trying to 'maximise the size of these majorities' (Lijphart 1999, 2). Generally, the basic characteristics of these two polar types can be described as follows: consensus democracies are compromise-oriented, inclusive, and representative, whereas majoritarian democracies are more competitive, exclusive and accountable.

In the EU, a liberal consensus-oriented logic is dominant (Lord 2004). Therefore, its position on the continuum of majoritarian-consensus democracies is closer to the latter. However, whether the standard of the consensus democracy is preferable or feasible for the EU is the question dividing the commentators on the issue of its democratic deficit.

The attractiveness of the majoritarian model lies in its relatively simple structure providing clear mechanisms for control over the decision-making and guaranteeing that the will of the people will be put into effect. In a majoritarian democratic system, power is concentrated in the hands of the government, which is elected through a parliamentary vote. Citizens are provided with the possibility to change the government through elections if it fails to meet their

expectations/aspirations. At the same time, the government formed by the winning party receives a necessary political mandate for reform (Hix 2008).

The main argument of the advocates of the majoritarian avenue for the EU reform is that deliberate avoidance of an open contest is harmful to the EU as a political system. In essence, the idea is that the EU has become more redistributive in its nature, which means that its policy-making creates both winners and losers (Hix 2008; Majone 2014). However, without a mechanism responsible for 'public recognition of the winners' (Hix 2008, 104), the citizens who are unhappy with the results of this redistribution oppose the EU as a political system. From this standpoint, public contestation and the increase of the Europeans Parliament's 'impact on the direction of the EU policy-agenda' (Hix 2008, 140) will provide the EU citizens with a clear understanding of the possible alternatives and, hence, make them both 'understand and accept the EU' (Magnette 2001).

The main issue the EU needs to deal with in order to eliminate its democratic deficit, from the majoritarian democracy perspective, is the fragmentation of its political process conceived as, on the one hand, a lack of 'connection between emerging politics within each of the institutions' (Hix 2008, 137) and, on the other hand, a link between citizens' choices and actual policy-making by their representatives (Hix 2008; Lord 2006). Therefore, the most important reforms would be aimed at making the EU-level elections truly European aggregating voters' preferences on EU-related matters rather than national (Hix 2008; Lord 2004; Katz 2001). Secondly, they would transform the 'way of allocating policy-making power inside the European Parliament 'to provide EU elections with more impact on the EU policy agenda' (Hix 2008, 140). Thus, Hix (2008, 140) offers to save a proportional electoral system but allocate internal offices via what can be described as a 'winner-takes-more system', which implies more committee chairs allocated to the largest parties. Thirdly, the reforms should ensure a higher level of publicity of the legislative process in the Council, which is aimed at the creation of 'cross-institutional alliances' (Hix 2008, 155). Moreover, the European Parliament's powers with regard to the Commission's appointment and censuring should be extended according to this logic.

Notwithstanding the appeal of the majoritarian model of democracy, commentators agree that the EU's current political order committed to consensus

will not be changed dramatically any time soon (Scharpf 2015; Lord 2004; Magnette 2001). The EU is perceived as a compound union (Fabbrini 2015) where diverse interests are taken into account and balanced in the process of decision-making. Consensus democracy is advocated as more appropriate for such a non-homogenous and fragmented society in which a majority rule would be dangerous (Lijphart 1999). Thus, Christopher Lord (2004, 25), in his democratic audit of the EU, asserts that the actual 'cleavage on what would count as democratic EU is not between a majority or consensus democracy, but between two versions of the latter'.

From this perspective, the EU has to deal with its problems within the dominant logic of compromise and separation of powers. Therefore, to make the EU more accountable, it should rely on the logic of governance or horizontal accountability, on the one hand, and develop accountability of each element of the dispersed power, on the other hand (Lord 2004). Moreover, if it is hard to clearly understand who is responsible for a particular outcome due to the mix of different actors involved, they may be judged by the 'appropriateness of their inputs to decisions'(Lord 2004, 132). Regarding the improvement of the citizens' involvement in the decision-making process, the consensus model emphasises the balance of representative channels (partisan, territorial and sectoral) and avoidance of tyranny of the minority by over-representation of the small states. In essence, the main concern of the consensus democratic government is saving the autonomy of segments constituting it in taking decisions that are considered vital for them (Lord 2004).

Conclusion

To guide data collection and empirical analysis of the political debate, this chapter introduced different approaches to the problem of the EU's democratic deficit and reform in academic literature. The main goal was to identify key themes that constitute the debate and the disagreements that structure it.

The analysis of the academic debate showed that the issue of EU's democratic reform is a complex one – formed of several interrelated domains. Part of the EU's democratic reform debate addresses the loss of popular sovereignty. One of the sources of the democratic deficit of the EU is the crisis of

the model of democracy it relies on – representative democracy. As Mair (2006) puts it, the problem with contemporary democracies is that citizens have become 'non-sovereign', which is to say that democracies experience problems with the quality of representation and control citizens have over making binding political decisions. The reform debate on addressing this issue includes discussions on the transformation of existing or creation of new institutions and on a better model of society that would ensure political equality in its broader interpretation understood as equality of power that stems from social equality.

The unusual and complex nature of the EU adds the dimension of national sovereignty to the problem of its democratic deficit. This problem is not completely out of the ordinary; some democratic countries experience similar difficulties. However, the EU is an integration project and a polity with both international organisation and state features. Thus, in addition to the debate on the balance of power and constitution of the polity, the debate on the EU's democratic reform includes discussing the desirability of integration and its preferred form.

In terms of identifying disagreements, the chapter presented three major conflicting lines: representative vs participatory democracy, consensus vs majoritarian democracy, and national vs supranational democracy.

Chapter 3. Discourse and its link to reform dynamics and reform direction

Different theoretical approaches not only create models that help explain specific outcomes but also guide our attention, allowing us to understand what matters most. The main goal of this chapter is to present the analytical framework – the lens – through which the debate on EU democratic reform will be studied. It establishes what elements of discourse to focus on to understand the dynamics and direction of reform.

The chapter starts by discussing what discourse is and how it matters for a better understating of the reform dynamics and direction. It introduces different approaches to discourse and its functions: what insights it can give and how it can impact the outcomes of the political process. The key argument of this part of the chapter is that relations between different elements of the discourse (between actors and between ideas as well as between actors and ideas) are central to all interpretations of the discourse and its influence.

To understand what relations one should focus on, the chapter presents the analytical lens combining elements of different approaches, including multiple streams, advocacy coalitions, narrative policy frameworks, and issue networks, which will be employed in the analysis of the EU's democratic reform debate. Finally, it sets expectations regarding the characteristics of the debate that could help understand the limited scope of reforms and their possible direction.

What discourse is, and why it matters

Discourse has been widely acknowledged an important part of political and policy analysis. Thus, the most recent neo-institutional approach – discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008, 2010) – puts discourse at the centre of explaining institutional and policy dynamics.

Since the variety of discursive approaches is great, it is important to clarify that we consider discourse from two main perspectives in this research. First, discourse is a space where ideas and actors who mediate these ideas interact (Morin and Carta 2014). This environment is an arena for 'collective ideation' (Legro 2000) in which ideas are constantly defined and transformed within communication (Schmidt 2008). However, this co-creation of ideas happens not

only through intentional cooperation between actors but also through their conflict over the primacy of ideas (Hajer 1993). Second, discourse is a property of separate actors constitutive of a broader discursive environment.

In terms of its functions, discourse will be interpreted in three ways. Discourse forms structures that constrain and enable transformations – on the levels of both actors and ideas. In addition to that, ideas that constitute discourse also serve as a material through which the 'social reality is constructed' (Holzscheiter 2014, 144). Finally, discourse is also an instrument of transformation. In that sense, discourse is both a process in which actors use ideas and the result of this process (Schmidt 2008).

This means that discourse can help understand why certain reforms happen while others do not, but being a material from which institutions are constructed, it can also shed light on what reforms might happen in the future.

The following sections will discuss different elements of the discourse and their role in shaping outcomes and informing our understanding of reform dynamics and direction. It should be noted that although the political process, policy-making, and the process of institutional transformation are interconnected but separate analytical categories, in this research, these concepts will be used interchangeably. This is not done to equate these processes but rather to emphasise their shared discursive nature, meaning that social and political outcomes of all these processes are generated within communicative interaction between actors (Schmidt 2010).

Discourse as an environment: constraining and enabling

As mentioned, discourse is an environment in which the political process happens. It is an environment constituted of interacting ideas and actors. This section will talk about how the elements that constitute this environment and how they are organised affect the dynamics and outcomes of the political process by forming the 'climate' in which actors and ideas operate.

What is an idea?

Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of ideas for political and policy studies, there is, as Moschella (2015, 445) puts it, an 'outstanding issue[s] to be resolved, such as the exact meaning of the term *idea*'. Researchers rarely define this general term – with a notable exception of Carstensen (2011a, 600), who defines ideas as '*web[s] of interrelated elements of meaning*'.

Idea is a somewhat nebulous term also because, in the works of political and policy scholarship, it is used to refer to two distinct but interrelated phenomena. First, idea is a product of individual's cognitive and affective processes. It includes thoughts about and understandings of the world or its elements (including individuals themselves) resulting from individual mental activities. Second, ideas as products of communication – dynamic social entities that are never entirely 'finished' (Panizza and Miorelli 2013) and are constantly recreated (Carstensen 2011a, 2015).

Furthermore, the term idea can be employed to refer to the entities of different levels of complexity. Thus, it is used to describe both ideational structures such as paradigms – coherent sets of ideas that work as an 'interpretative framework' (Hall 1993) – as well as their elements.

In this research, ideas will be conceptualised as thoughts about and understandings (structures of meaning) of the world and its elements (including the thinker) that are (re)produced and disseminated by an individual or a group. This definition attempts to encompass the variety of structures and levels of complexity ideas may have.

It should also be noted that, in political science, three analytical levels of ideas are distinguished depending on their degree of generality. The most general – philosophical ideas or 'deep core' beliefs (Sabatier 1998) – operate across different areas and domains of policy-making (Schmidt 2008, 2010; Mehta 2011). These ideas include very broad assumptions related to the actor's understanding of the complex reality and principles organising it. Hall (1993) described this level of ideas as an 'interpretative framework' which serves not only for understanding the environment surrounding an actor but also the role they have in it. The next level of programmatic ideas (Schmidt 2008) or 'policy core' beliefs (Sabatier 1998) is constituted of ideas that relate to a specific field or area of policy-making. Their

role is to define the problem to be solved and the objectives to be achieved. Finally, instrumental ideas or 'secondary beliefs' (Sabatier 1998) include 'means for achieving the desired outcomes in the policy core beliefs' (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, 191). These are, for instance, specific policy solutions (Schmidt 2008; Mehta 2011)

While ideas of all these levels receive attention from researchers, the main focus of academics trying to explain stability and change has been on programmatic or 'policy core' beliefs. This is because they are believed to be 'the principal glue holding a coalition together' (Sabatier 1998, 105). However, attention to the role of lower-level ideas and the interaction between ideas of different levels has been increasing (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017).

Ideas and their influence

From what has been said so far, it is clear that ideas are dependent on actors who produce, codify, and spread them. However, the opposite is also true. Actors are dependent on ideas as structures that allow them to 'make sense' of the world (Swinkels 2020).

Ideas form a context – an environment in which actors operate (Kingdon 2013; Schmidt 2008). This environment affects both actors' cognition and communication. Researchers, however, disagree on the mechanism and extent of the impact ideas have on actors. Thus, through the lens of the rationalist approach, only cognitive ideas, which include assumptions that determine connections and 'specify cause and effect relationships' matter (Campbell 2002, 22). These ideas justify necessity and usefulness and serve as 'mechanisms for choosing among interests' (Schmidt 2010, 7). The nature of actors' preferences is multidimensional (Hall 2009; Schmidt 2008), which is to say that an actor having different social roles may have different and sometimes conflicting interests. It has the following important implication: under conditions of uncertainty, an actor has to rank his priorities (Hall 2009). Here the ideas come into play. In essence, cognitive ideas 'attach implicit weights' to each element in the system of the actor's preferences (Hall 2009, 212).

From sociological and constructivist perspectives, not only cognitive but normative ideas influence actors. Normative ideas 'attach values' by assessing

whether the ends and means are consistent with what is perceived as desirable and appropriate (Campbell 2002; Schmidt 2010; Sabatier 1988). Furthermore, ideas get a more prominent place in explaining institutional and policy dynamics – they do not just affect the order in the system of actor's preferences but also shape the substance of preferences (Blyth 2003).

In any case, pre-existing ideational structures on the level of the individual affect actors' perception of themselves and the context surrounding them. In other words, ideas serve as a lens through which actors see the world.

On the other hand, ideas embedded into 'the institutional setup of a polity or a policy area' as well as the macro-level structures of meaning such as cultural norms influence 'the ability of actors to promote their ideas' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 323). This happens because ideas as collectively shared structures restrict the spread of certain ideas and favour the dissemination and acceptance of others. To put it differently, even if an idea is 'thinkable', meaning that it can exist within an actor's individual ideational system, it may be unmentionable in a particular context due to its incompatibility with dominating ideational structures (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016).

The influence of ideas over actors and their ability to affect the policy outcomes through constraining and enabling has been conceptualised as *power in* ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). This power has been attributed to established background ideas and institutionalised ideas that are not actively debated but rather taken for granted. The foreground – actively debated – ideas have been mostly associated with transformative rather than constraining influence over actors. I suggest that actors' ideas present in the discourse and actively discussed by actors also have a constraining and enabling effect. The more ideas are present in the discourse – the more exposure actors have to these ideas and the less easy it is to ignore them. Even if actors do not accept these ideas, they often have to consider them when building their arguments.

Actors and their power over ideas

Actors have an essential role in the process of social and political development. Not only do they have a transformative capacity, meaning that they can initiate and implement decisions, actors also have a different kind of 'causal significance' (Lewis 2002, 18). Like ideas, actors in their interaction form structures that direct policy or institutional development.

The role of actor-networks

Actors as part of the ecosystem in which ideas exist and develop can exert influence as collections of interacting units – or networks. Of course, in some political systems and some cases, separate actors can control ideational space. However, as Fischer and Traber (2015, 120) point out: 'In modern democratic systems, usually no single collective actor is able to decisively influence political decision-making'. Therefore, to gain more influence and effectively reach their goals, actors have to interact. Even if an actor has the power to control ideational space, the complex issue of many policy questions would mean that finding a solution to problems would still be a collective endeavour. In short, decision-making, more often than not, is influenced by a group of actors.

However, what is interesting is that it is insightful to know not only the personalities and organisations that form the groups of actors but also the nature of their interrelations. While the knowledge of who the actors are and what ideas they share would allow explaining the substance or direction of transformations, the nature of the network gives insights into the dynamics of the policy development.

Networks create an environment where social and political decisions are made and actions are taken (Wasserman and Faust 1994). This environment is close to institutions in its influence over the political process – it is constraining and enabling; however, it is much more fluid (Ansell 2009). As Marsh and Rhodes (1992, 260) point out, networks of actors 'do not necessarily seek to frustrate any and all change, but rather to contain, constrain, redirect, and ride out such change, thereby materially affecting its speed and direction'.

Issue networks and advocacy coalition networks represent two poles on the continuum of possible structures of the networks of policy-makers. Advocacy coalition networks are relatively closed and stable network structures that have lasted over the years, while issue networks are dynamic and open. These networks are very different in the type of interrelations that structure them and, hence, their influence on both actors' agency and reaction to external perturbations. In particular, they differ in their capacity to absorb external shocks, implement decisions, and be open to new ideas (Smith 1993), which leads to different dynamics and the nature of policy outcomes.

Issue Networks

The issue network approach conceptualises Heclo (1978) research on the US Public administration. Heclo noticed that the process of policy-making was strikingly different from how it was described by the concepts of 'iron triangle' or 'subgovernment'. Instead of a relatively stable set of powerful and autonomous actors shaping the policy outcomes, the process involved many interconnected participants, none of whom was dominating the policy area. Heclo conceptualised these open webs of loosely connected actors influencing the process of policy-making as issue networks.

Issue networks have a few main characteristics:

1. An issue network does not cover a whole policy domain but a relatively narrow area of a specific problem or subject within a policy. Therefore, within this perspective, a policy is perceived as a number of overlapping 'clouds of issue networks' (Heclo 1978, 284).
2. Issue networks are fluid and open, which is to say that the actors' presence in these networks is inconstant, as are their relations with other actors. Heclo (1978, 102) emphasises that '[P]articipants move in and out of the network permanently' and that the boundaries of the webs of interactions are hard to establish.
3. An issue network is a network of shared information and knowledge, which implies that an opportunity to take part in it and, therefore, participate in

shaping the policy outcomes is a matter of the actor's knowledge about a specific issue.

Issue networks have been associated with subsystems where no one has control over the issue (Smith 1993). This makes issue networks relatively open for new ideas to be put on the agenda. However, at the same time, an issue network is a space where it is difficult to reach a consensus. As Heclo (1978, 103) puts it: '[I]ssue networks provide a way to process dissension'. They can be perceived as webs of never-ending debate – the networks that 'thrive by continuously weighing alternative courses of action not by accepting that something must be done' (Heclo 1978). This has important implications for the policy dynamics and outcomes.

Despite their great potential in generating ideas, issue networks activity does not necessarily lead to radical policy reforms or innovations or even any reform at all. On the one hand, issue networks can be more responsive to the changes in the environment because of their openness and fluidity, which makes them a favourable environment for transformations. On the other hand, the dispersed control over the issue and difficulty in reaching consensus often leads to policy inertia (Smith 1993). It should also be noted that sometimes the activity of issue networks induces only a 'symbolic reassurance' which, in essence, is a situation where a consensus on radical change is reached but implemented in a usual incremental policy-making way (Hoppe 2011, 136).

Advocacy coalitions

Although the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier 1998, 1988; Weible et al. 2020) draws on ideas developed by Heclo (1978), it presents a different perspective on the structure of interactions between actors and dynamics of the policy process. From this standpoint, each policy is modelled as a battleground for the competing advocacy coalitions contesting the primacy of dominating ideas, while ideas serve as 'coalition magnets' (Beland & Cox 2016), meaning that actors are aggregated into coalitions around shared ideas.

Unlike issue networks, the network of actors in ACF is not a network of kaleidoscopic interactions and constant creation of knowledge for the sake of dealing with uncertainty. Instead, each policy area is assumed to be populated by a diverse range of actors clustered into a number of competing groups (from one to four), each of which is bound by common policy core beliefs (Sabatier 1998). These advocacy coalitions commit themselves to promoting and realising their policy ideas. These groups stay stable over the years, and so do their core policy preferences.

The advocacy coalition networks are much more closed to both new actors and new ideas. Advocacy coalitions are the networks where actors are connected because of the consensus on their ideas (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994). In that sense, they are much less dynamic. Ideas that actors in advocacy coalitions share are more coherent and all-encompassing systems than ideas processed in issue networks. They are not just overlapping clouds but hierarchically structured belief systems (Sabatier 1988).

A belief system is an ideational structure that can be disaggregated into ideas of three different levels which vary in their degrees of generality and adjustability (Sabatier 1988; Leifeld 2016) – similar to the three levels of ideas discussed in the previous section. The most general ideas form a level of deep core beliefs (Ripberger et al. 2014) followed by policy core beliefs representing 'fundamental policy positions' (Sabatier 1998, 112) which are less rigid but still are rather firmly established. Finally, the most adaptable part of this ideational structure is a level of narrow instrumental secondary beliefs (Weible and Sabatier 2009).

This rigidity of belief systems and, therefore, the connection between actors makes advocacy coalitions more resistant to external fluctuations and new information – which means that the policy is not likely to change considerably while the coalition advocating this policy stays dominant in the subsystem (Sabatier 1998). Even if the new information appears, actors use this information instrumentally in a way that would allow them to confirm rather than adjust their key beliefs, unless this information is related to 'significant perturbations external to the subsystem' (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994, 184). Minor changes are possible due to the instrumental nature of the learning of coalition members; however, according to ACF, they do not lead to a reconsideration of the main

policy ideas – the policy core preferences. The mechanisms leading to change in the dominating coalition are the change in actors' beliefs and, therefore, their coalition affiliations and/or the institutional transformation that affect power configurations (Leifeld 2016).

To sum up, issue networks and advocacy coalition networks represent two poles on the continuum of possible structures of the networks of policy-makers. In contrast to advocacy coalitions preserving the stable structures over the years (Sabatier 1988; Weible and Sabatier 2009), issue networks are dynamic and open (Heclo 1978). They emerge and disappear, being much less controlled. Moreover, unlike advocacy coalition networks, issue networks cover only particular problems, not the whole policy. Within this perspective, ideas understood as knowledge is the main driver of policy dynamics, which is born from constant deliberation between knowledgeable actors. This has an important impact on the nature of policy development which may be an evolution driven by somewhat random changes (Hoppe 2011). The issue networks are also known for their inertia driven by lack of consensus and ultimate control of the issue by any actors (Smith 1993).

By contrast, the dynamic of the network of advocacy coalitions is determined by a rather stable set of beliefs held by the dominating coalition as well as by the struggle between coalitions over the dominance of their ideas (Sabatier 1998). Since advocacy coalitions are more closed – fewer actors have access to policy-making, and it is more difficult to put a new idea on the agenda (Howlett 2002). Therefore, the dynamic of the policy formed by advocacy coalitions is expected to be in line with the model of 'punctuated equilibrium' (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). This is to say that policy will have a lasting nature with some minor changes following the line of the main policy ideas, except for the rare occasions of dramatic shifts.

It should be noted that different policies have different structures of policy networks. Moreover, these structures change over time. Thus, Sabatier (1998) notes that the policy subsystems develop from *nascent* to *mature*. Furthermore, Marsh and Rhodes (1992, 255) point out that different types of networks 'are not mutually exclusive'. Thus, elements of both issue networks and more closed coalitions can co-exist (see Read 1992), with policy communities having core-periphery structures (Smith 1993).

Discourse as a flexible material

While the previous section described discourse as an environment constraining and facilitating actors' agency and external forces, this section suggests looking at discourse, particularly at its ideational level, as the material. This material is used to build the outcomes of the political process in the form of institutions and ideational structures.

The most recent ideational literature (Carstensen 2011a; Carstensen and Röper 2021; Jabko 2006), as well as the empirical evidence of the hybrid nature of the EU – one that is constantly transforming and incorporating different logics of development – allows us to state that ideas are a much more flexible material than was previously considered. This has important implications for our understanding of institutional and policy dynamics.

While previous ideational research explained stability of policies and institutions by stability of ideas and significant changes by the shift between ideas when actors change different lenses through which they perceive the problem (Sabatier 1998; Hall 1993), the most recent ideational scholarship claims that actors do much more than just switch between different options – they constantly recreate ideas – and by doing this they both maintain and transform institutions and ideas (Carstensen and Röper 2021). From this perspective, ideas are open; even those ideas that have been embedded into institutions – do not have a completely fixed meaning which allows them to adapt and be modified relatively easily.

However, this perspective requires a different vision, from what the theory of paradigms or ACF suggests, of both the nature of ideas and the actor's agency. Thus, in what follows, I discuss the relational approach to ideas, the mechanisms of change and actors' role in it. The relational perspective on ideas shifts our focus from the so-called core ideas and their stability to exploring the relationship between ideas and their development. It also entails that, unlike in the paradigm theory perspective, lower-order ideas, those responsible for minor changes, can be of significant importance for understanding the policy dynamics and outcomes.

The nature of ideas and the limits of actors' agency

Many influential approaches in policy studies, including the ACF (Sabatier 1988), assume that not all ideational transformations are equally important for understanding policy dynamics. Instead, their attention is focused on one specific level of ideas – policy core beliefs or programmatic ideas, and a specific kind of change, that of radical shift, where one set of ideas is swept away by another alternative set of ideas. This is due to a perception of ideas as coherent hierarchical structures with a stable core that cannot be changed or reconciled with the core ideas of rival perspectives, and actors as 'paradigm-men' (Carstensen 2011b).

From this perspective, ideas of 'higher/broader levels [are] constraining more specific beliefs' (Sabatier 1998, 103) and guide actors' behaviour. This implies that actors deduce solutions from existing ideational schemas (Carstensen 2011b). Both the creative agency of an actor and the possibilities to transform an idea is minimal. As Hall (1993, 279) puts it, the paradigm 'is influential precisely because so much of it is taken for granted and unamenable to scrutiny as a whole'. What actors sometimes do is adjust their periphery (secondary) beliefs in a way that allows for maintaining the core intact (Weible et al. 2020). The only way for ideas to change considerably is for actors to shift between paradigms due to the accumulation of anomalies that prove the core ideas constituting the paradigm wrong (Hall 1993). This vision gives an actor minimal creative potential. Essentially, actors can switch between pre-existing paradigms as different options on the menu.

There is, however, a different perspective on ideas as open relational entities. In this view, drawing on discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) and 'the interpretive' approach (Bevir and Rhodes 2003), ideas are seen as networks of different (ideational) elements (Carstensen 2011a; Freeden 2006).

One of the key ideas on which the approach is built is that no rigid core would determine the meaning of an idea (Carstensen 2010). Although ideas are seen as multi-level structures, none of the levels is dominant because it does not determine or constrain the other levels – the levels are mutually constitutive. Every element within the network and relationship between them contributes to the meaning (Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Carstensen 2015). Moreover, to understand

an idea, one should also look at the broader network of ideas that the idea under consideration is part of. However, not all elements are equally important. Some elements have more 'weight', and their place is more 'central to the meaning of the idea, while others take up a more marginal position' (Carstensen 2015, 290).

Another idea central to the relational approach is that the links between the elements constituting ideas are not rigid and are not given but built by actors. While in the original definition introduced by Hall '[p]aradigms were…presented as internally coherent, composed of logically connected elements' (Carstensen and Matthijs 2018, 432), the relational approach emphasises that actors build the links between ideational elements not according to the abstract universal logic but rather based on their perception of what is logical in current circumstances.

In that sense, the relational approach to ideas allows for a more creative agency for actors. As bricoleurs (Campbell 2004), they can not only switch between pre-existing ideational structures but actively alter them. Bricoleurs operate with ideas creatively to pursue their goal of 'solv[ing] problems and engineering compromises' (Schmidt 2016, 330). They do not deduce solutions; they are constrained only by the prior use of ideas and relative acceptability of a particular combination of ideational elements to other actors and the public (Carstensen 2011b). This allows for more heterogeneity of ideas. If ideas are not structured according to the abstract logic, it would not be impossible to see links between 'heterogeneous ideational elements that have no necessary logic relations among themselves and…not previously thought of as belonging together in a relational ensemble' (Panizza and Miorelli 2013, 305).

Mechanisms of change

While, as has been mentioned, approaches that share the view of ideas as stable and closed entities focus on dramatic shifts and interpret change as removal of one idea and establishment of another, the relational perspective on ideas allows for thinking about ideational change in terms of development of ideas (Carstensen 2011a). However, this change in perspective raises the question of how the gradual changes happen. We will start by looking at the mechanisms of incremental institutional changes and how this can be translated into the ideational realm, and, finally, the idea of discontinuous gradual changes.

Mahoney and Thelen (2009) proposed three models of incremental change. Two of them – conversion and layering – are based on internal transformations. Conversion happens when rules that constitute the institute stay the same but get reinterpreted by actors who exploit the inherent ambiguities to redirect the institution's development. These subtle differences may not be very visible but can potentially transform the institution's direction. Layering is a mechanism of change in which new elements (rules) are added on top of the existing ones. This means that the internal structure of the institution is slightly altered by the introduction of new elements. The third model of gradual change – drift – is based on the change in the environment external to the institution. In this case, the internal structure of an institution stays the same. However, the meaning the institution has in the overall system and its effect on the actors and institutions transforms due to the shift in the external environment.

Carstensen (2011a) applied a similar approach to ideas to develop models of incremental ideational change. The change in idea can be induced by three mechanisms that are similar but not identical to what was suggested in the theory of incremental institutional change.

The first one is the change in the hierarchy of elements of meaning so that one or more elements becomes more salient than they used to be. In other words, the content of the idea stays the same, but the 'weights' of the elements constituting it change. This kind of change, conceptualised as ideational recast (Carstensen 2015), is not dramatic. It is close to what Mahoney and Thelen (2009) describe as conversion. An example of that sort of change can be the dynamic balance between the elements constituting the idea of democracy. So contemporary democracy is a concept in which the idea of popular government and liberalism coexist in a certain tension (Abts and Rummens 2007). Through the course of its history, the relative weight of the elements changed, with the current rise of populism after decades of what was perceived as a complete win of liberal democracy as an example.

A more considerable transformation – the renewal of an idea – is associated with a change in the substantive part of the web of meaning. It happens when other elements of meaning replace one or a few elements in the idea. This mechanism is not the same but similar to the layering process described by Mahoney and Thelen (2009) because these types of transformation entail the

change in substance rather than reprioritisation. Thus, Hadden and Seybert (2016) demonstrate how the idea of sustainable development changed over the years, and the element of the green economy absent from the original definition gained prominence by 2012.

The final mechanism described by Carstensen (2015, 292) is when an idea is 'revolutionised, over time all the ideational elements are replaced with new elements'. This model is close to displacement and describes a radical rather than incremental change. The idea of drift – a change resulting from the radical transformation of the environment remains unspecified. Although the theory of incremental ideational change states that 'rival actors can change an idea's meaning by coupling it with other ideas' (Carstensen 2015, 291),the mechanism of transformation through changes in the links is not described in detail.

The idea of the importance of links between the elements and their role in the nature of change was developed by Morin and Carta (2014), who pointed out that separate non-linked webs of elements can constitute ideas. This means that an idea can have a few unrelated nuclei in its structure, which could potentially lead to gradual but discontinuous changes resulting from the parallel development of the ideational elements.

Discourse as an instrument of change

The notion of discourse as an instrument of change is based on the idea of actors as 'drivers' of change or sculptors that craft new institutions and ideas as instruments that they can use to produce change. If to change the reality (including policies and institutions), one needs to change the way they think of it, to produce change, actors need to change their ideas. From what has been seen in the previous section, it is clear that ideas can be changed through other ideas that either constitute or surround them.

However, what actors most often need to do is not only re-imagine the institutions or ideas themselves but also persuade others to accept their vision. Thus, it is also important how actors communicate the re-imagined ideas. In that sense, actors and ideas – understood as instruments – work in tandem in transformation efforts and can potentially empower each other. If we get back to the metaphors, the result of the craftsmanship – the success of an idea – depends

both on the craftsman's (actor's) skills and on the qualities of the instruments (ideas used).

In his seminal work, Kingdon (2013) argues that ideas need active and persistent entrepreneurs – committed actors – preferably with access to different resources to succeed. Similarly, Legro (2000) mentions that ideational change becomes possible when an alternative idea has a group of advocates supporting it. What actors that promote an idea do is trying to make other actors adopt the idea (Carstensen 2011a).

The ability of actors to successfully do these things depends largely on the quality of an idea itself. These qualities include, for instance, the ideas' valence – an emotional status ascribed to an idea, drawing on which actors evaluate and form their attitude towards it (Béland and Cox 2016; Cox and Béland 2013), semantic openness or 'the cognitive and normative arguments that can be mustered in its support' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 324). As Carstensen (2010, 850) points out, ideas are open to connections with 'some ideas more than others'. The potential computability of an idea with other ideas allows actors to fit it into ideational structures without compromising the internal coherence of these structures.

There are, however, situations when the quality of an idea may matter less – that is, when an actor is powerful to the extent that allows them to 'control and dominate the meaning of ideas' or, in other words, if they have power over ideational space (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 323).

In sum, the idea of discourse as an instrument brings us back to the importance of how an idea is structured – what elements constitute it and what links it has and can potentially have. It, however, also draws attention to actors' behaviour towards ideas. In other words, it is important to look at what actors do with ideas in their communication with other actors.

Reform dynamics and discourse. Discourse and success of ideas

Different approaches to studying transformations of policies and institutions, or a lack thereof, exist. Researchers often adopt case-study approaches employing different policy or institutional theories to explain why a particular reform happened. However, some studies seek to explore and explain the 'overall

patterns of change' (Princen 2013). This line of research looks at groups of reforms searching for regularities and causes for these regularities. It can be a study of reforms in one policy over time or different policies at one point in time.

This research aims to explain the character of the most recent EU democratic reform, including its degree, scope, and trajectory. The research will adopt a mixed approach that includes looking at the success and failure of particular ideas while also understanding their limited scope.

While the EU as a polity tends to transform through cumulative and gradual changes, it has also shown its ability to change itself considerably through crisis-driven reforms (Ferran 2012). In the case of democratic reform, however, despite its crisis of legitimacy, the shock of Brexit and rising Euroscepticism, the democratic reform of the EU seems quite modest. If one were to compare EU's democratic credentials – institutions, procedures, and principles – by looking at it at two separate points in time only, in 2013 and 2019, it would seem that the EU did not change or that the change was so little that it could barely be noticed. However, two potentially far-reaching reforms failed to consolidate within this period, and one reform failed to be adopted. Thus, the question is why there were certain reform attempts but no others. Moreover, why did those reform ideas that succeeded not consolidate?

To answer these questions, I suggest looking at discourse through the analytical lens combining elements of different but interrelated approaches, including multiple streams, advocacy coalition, narrative policy frameworks, and issue networks approach. This lens focuses on the connection between success and failure of ideas and discourse – as a system of interlinked elements and an interactive process. More than just communication between actors is meant by the interactive process. Discourse as an interactive process also includes the activity and influence of actors and ideas on each other, as well as the interaction between ideas.

What distinguishes the approach adopted in this research is that it extends the framework suggested by Kingdon (2013) to explain the lack of reform or policy or institutional stability through the prism of success and failure of ideas. On the one hand, it emphasises the importance of discourse as a space where the journey of an idea to implementation starts and where it has to succeed first to get

implemented. What is often understood by the success of an idea is its implementation or adoption. However, as shown by theoretical and empirical research, that is the final stage in the idea's journey. In order to get adopted, an idea has to go through a sort of a selection process in which interaction with actors and other ideas plays an important role (Kingdon 2013). On the other hand, the approach adopted in this research emphasises the importance of discursive actions at the decision-making stage.

Lack of reform and discourse

One of the things the research is interested in is explaining the amount of change or scope of democratic reform in the EU between 2014 and 2019. In Chapter 1, different reasons for the limited response of the EU to the problem of the democratic deficit were discussed. This section will focus on discourse and its explanatory power in terms of understanding the lack of reform. It will consider different characteristics of discourse that could help understand the lack of reforms. This includes attention, support, resistance to ideas, and divergence in discourse.

Attention and support to ideas and networks

As mentioned, ideas are dependent on actors who create and spread them. Thus, the first step for an idea is to be (re)invented by an actor or picked up from the pool of existing ideas. Then the idea needs to get attention and, eventually, support from the public. As Kingdon (2013, 130) puts it: 'To become a basis for action, an idea must…sweep a community and endure'. This requires effort from policy entrepreneurs – or idea advocates – who communicate and spread the idea they want to get implemented.

After these initial steps and the initial success in the selection process, when an idea gets a foothold in the discourse, it should be noticed and picked up by actors responsible for or involved in decision-making, for instance, governments or European institutions in case of the EU. This moves the idea closer to the possibility of adoption or implementation. However, it is not enough for an idea to get to a broader 'governmental agenda', which includes all items that

receive attention. It is necessary to get into a 'smaller set of items that are being decided upon' or a 'decision agenda' (Kingdon 2013, 166).

While Kingdon speaks about the success of ideas, his analytical perspective can also be used to understand nil or limited reform. When nil or a small number of reforms happen, one would expect that the ideas faced difficulties at one of the stages of their journey from the 'primeval soup' of ideas to decision-making. Thus, it could be the case that ideas are not picked up or not communicated by actors, so that there is not enough effort from policy entrepreneurs. Another possibility is that ideas may be present in discourse but not actively discussed because the public is not receptive to them. Finally, ideas may be stuck on the stage when they do not get noticed or supported by important actors involved in decision-making.

It is not enough for an idea to get through the selection process. In his work, Kingdon (2013) considers two different processes and types of ideas. His primary focus lies on the success of instrumental ideas – policy solutions (Béland 2016); however, he also highlights the importance of programmatic ideas – problems. These different types of ideas go through a similar process of selection; however, they need to link at some point. Thus, for a solution idea to succeed and get into the decision-making stage, it should connect to an idea of a higher level – the problem it is supposed to solve. The relationship between ideas of different levels is mutual in the sense that the success of the lower-level ideas depends on the link with higher-level ideas. For a problem to move closer to being decided upon, a well-elaborated solution addressing the problem is needed. It means that lack of reform can stem from no elaborated proposals available in the discourse or no program idea to link it to.

The question arises of how to trace these processes effectively. In that, network approaches could be of help. If discourse is a space and the process of interaction, it is possible to conceptualize it as a network in which two sets of nodes – actors and ideas – are connected to each other. By mapping all ideas and actors and their interrelations, one will be able to assess the amount of attention and support ideas get – whether many actors have picked up the ideas and if they are actively engaged with them. It is also possible to see the 'quality' of support, which means if the ideas have been advocated by important actors involved in decision-making.

Resistance to ideas and divisions in the discourse

As discussed in the previous section, support and spread of the idea are very important for its success, and that lack thereof can impede reform. However, it is not enough for actors to pick up and support an idea. It is also important to overcome the opposition to it. Thus, what is also of significance for the success and failure of ideas and further (lack of) reform is resistance to its ideas at different stages and divergence in discourse.

First, discourse can be monopolized and closed to either new ideas or new actors or both (Howlett 2002; Williams 2020). This resistance to novelty can serve as an impediment to reform. In network terms, discourse will be formed by a closed community of actors and/or ideas. According to Hope and Raudla (2012), this situation is characteristic of simple polities. In simple polities, 'governing authority is focused on the executive', while in compound polities, 'governing authority is more dispersed' (Schmidt 2010, 12).

Second, even if alternative ideas get a chance to penetrate discourse, they can face resistance before reaching a decision-making stage at the stage of alternatives specification. This resistance can be manifested either in open confrontation and rejection of the idea (Bloomfield 2016) or lack of engagement with it and development of alternatives. In his work, Kingdon (2013) emphasises the importance of consensus around the policy solution built on the level of policy experts to move it further to try to get political backing. Thus, it is possible to assume that if it is difficult to agree on reform alternatives – and no idea takes the lead – this would impede reforms. In network terms, the picture of the discourse can look like many issue networks with no dominant issue or confrontation of coalitions of actors.

Third, the idea can face resistance when it reaches important actors involved in decision-making. Thus, Princen (2013, 36) points out that '[A]ttempts to move an issue from the governmental to the decision agenda are likely to mobilize opposition'. In the case of a more complex political system with power dispersed across different bodies and levels, this opposition can cause difficulties for an idea to succeed both in moving to the decision-making stage and in further adoption (Hope and Raudla 2012). The economic literature describes the state of a so-called gridlock equilibrium when no reform happens because actors disagree

on beliefs – the larger the disagreement, the more chances there are for the gridlock (Binswanger and Oechslin 2015). In the terminology of the ACF, there would be a few competing coalitions with no one dominating the process of decision-making.

It should be noted that attention to conflict lines in ACF, which is one of the most widespread frameworks applied to study congruence and divisions in policy research, is focused on program-level ideas. This is because, according to the framework, coalitions are mainly built around policy core beliefs or programmatic ideas (Sabatier 1998). Recently, however, more research has been extending its focus to lower-level ideas and their role in policy outcomes.

It has been acknowledged that instruments and secondary beliefs have a 'potential to act as a consensus-building device' (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017, 725), because it is supposed to be easier for actors to adapt their secondary beliefs (Sabatier 1988). However, sometimes disagreements on instrumental ideas add conflict lines, cross-cutting coalitions found on the level of policy core beliefs (Metz et al. 2021). This can weaken a coalition's ability to shape policy outcomes.

These findings align with Kingdon (2013) attention to two levels of ideas and the importance of their interconnection for their success. Thus, it is possible to assume that lack of reform may emanate from actors linking their program-level idea to different lower-level instrumental ideas. Similarly, disagreement on program-level ideas does not automatically lead to a lack of reform. Actors can agree on instruments they want to use and link them to different program level ideas.

More subtle differences and divergence in actors' prioritisation of ideas can also impede reform. According to the NPF hypothesis on the quality of coalition glue, prioritisation of beliefs contributes through cohesion to the ability of the coalition to influence policy outcomes (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011). In essence, the main idea is that it is not enough for actors to share the same beliefs. It is also important to prioritise ideas similarly. Therefore, a lack of reform can stem from differences in prioritisation.

The level of disagreement in discourse can not only inform our understanding of why reform does not happen. It can also help explain the

dynamics and character of reform. According to Princen and ’t Hart (2014), radical shifts appear when discourse is populated by incompatible sets of ideas – when Hall’s (1993) incommensurability criterion for paradigms is met. Paradigms do not have to or do not always meet this criterion (Carstensen 2011a; Princen and van Esch 2016), and if they do not, according to Princen and ’t Hart (2014), ideas can change incrementally. It should be noted that incommensurability is not absolute but rather seeming – as perceived by actors.

Actors’ behaviour and success of ideas

From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that an idea needs to be noticed and supported first to be then translated into reality. Gaining support involves either incorporating an idea into an ideational system of actors or changing their attitude towards it. Although an idea itself – its substance – is an important factor in changing actors’ beliefs, the success of the idea in getting widespread support depends on its advocates’ actions in the discourse.

This section will talk about the aspects of actors’ agency and related discursive mechanisms, which allow them to change discourse, policies, and institutions effectively and, thus, bring ideas to success both in the discourse and overall. Princen and ’t Hart (2014), distinguish between two types of actions that actors undertake in discourse – advocacy and engineering. While the former is based on actors’ commitment – understood as active and prolonged support, the letter has to do with the ability of actors to re-create ideas.

I suggest that two discursive mechanisms linked to advocacy and engineering are at work in the process of influencing other actors’ beliefs – persuasion and pressure.

Persuasion largely depends on the qualities of an idea because it is about fitting an idea into existing ideational structures. For instance, to be persuasive, a solution should be linked to a problem (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). Since, as mentioned, ideas are dependent on actors who can reimagine them, persuasion is an engineering exercise in which an actor needs to change the qualities of an idea. When talking about qualities of an idea, I refer to its meaning – composition of the elements constituting it – and the ability to be linked to other ideas – or ‘semantic openness’ (Carstensen 2010). To fit an idea into the belief system of

other actors, it is important to connect it with other ideas in the ideational system of the targeted actor. In principle, an idea can be linked to any other idea. However, to make a persuasive argument, this connection should make sense, and the resulting ideation structure should be consistent (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016).

To successfully connect two ideas, their meanings should be – or better say, seem – compatible. If we conceptualise an idea as a group of interrelated nuclei – or 'elements of meaning' – embedded in a larger network of ideas (Carstensen 2011a), its meaning would be determined by the two main factors: first, the links the idea has – both internal (between the elements constituting it) and external (with other ideas) – and, second, the elements of meaning constituting it (and their relative weight).

To be persuasive, an idea needs to have elements that would allow to hook it to ideas already present in the ideational system of an actor; it also needs not to have external links with ideas that could compromise its fit into the targeted ideational system. For example, if I am advocating for idea 1, which is an instrument that has a strong connection to the idea of violence, it would be rather difficult to link it to idea 2, the main element of which is the prevention of violence.

Therefore, the main role of actors in persuasion is to re-engineer ideas by manipulating their links and elements.

While persuasion has received attention from researchers (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016), the mechanism of pressure has not. It should be noted that I am talking about the pressure created by the use of ideational elements. Thus, for instance, Kingdon (2013) emphasises the importance of ideas instead of political pressure and even gives the name 'Ideas not pressure' to one of the sections of his seminal book. However, what he describes as a 'softening up' process when policy entrepreneurs 'educate' actors and make them familiar with the idea (Kingdon 2013) is, to some extent, about exerting pressure, a distinct one – discursive pressure. This pressure does not come from or depend on political power per se; it stems from actors' commitment to ideas.

Discursive pressure results from discursive actions of committed actors who actively and continuously promote their idea. While persuasion means that policy

entrepreneurs convince the public 'through reasoning or argument' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 323), relying on the substance of the idea, the discursive pressure entails that support expressed by actors in the discourse to an idea creates a force that influences other actors and makes them change their beliefs.

Persuasion and discursive pressure can work in tandem and complement each other. If actors are committed to the idea in the discourse – talk a lot about it – this ensures a good exposure of the targeted actor or the overall public to this idea. Not only does repeated exposure increase awareness and stimulate the formation of preferences towards an idea (Ernst, Kühne, and Wirth 2017), other research showed that repetition increases the persuasiveness of the message and positively affects credibility perceptions (Patrick Rau et al. 2014).

Discursive pressure can also substitute persuasion. In that case, the actor's commitment expressed in their repeated and stable engagement with an idea creates a force that is closer to what Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) describe as power over ideas and power in ideas. By their activity in the discourse, actors affect the discursive environment by filling it with the idea they advocate for, so not only is a targeted actor exposed to the idea, but all other actors are. Therefore, affecting the general public, committed advocates of an idea can create social pressure that can force targeted actors to accept an idea.

Persuasion and discursive pressure are of importance at different stages of the policy-making process. In that sense, the commitment of actors to an idea in the discourse can affect both the discursive success of an idea as getting the support of a wide variety of actors and at the decision-making stage in situations when it is necessary to influence belief systems or issue stances of particular actors important for the decision-making process.

Reform direction and discourse

The research will explore the direction of reform through discourse. By direction, I mean the 'position towards which [the EU] moves' (Cambridge Dictionary 2021) or a path of its development. In essence, it entails understanding how actors perceive the desired model of the EU and its democracy. It shifts the focus to the substance of ideas communicated by actors in the EU's democratic reform debate.

It should be noted that this research is aimed at finding the direction actors set for the EU in the discourse – the democratic EU they collectively envision and discursively construct in public debate. Since what actors say is not always what they eventually do, discourse does not represent a perfect reflection of the future EU – especially because there is a practice of informal transformation of institutions and practices in the EU (Bressanelli, Koop, and Reh 2016). This, however, does not mean that there is no point in exploring the discourse and understanding how actors see the future EU and its democracy. As mentioned, discourse is a material that institutions are built from, and a lens through which actors perceive reality and having these functions discourse has a considerable influence on the outcomes. From a practical point of view, if one wants to reform the EU, it would be useful to know what is being discussed because the reform idea should be integrated into the existing system of ideas.

To understand the direction the EU as a democratic polity may be moving, the research will focus on the elements of meaning (ideas) and their interrelations. It will look at both stable elements of the discourse and changes in its configurations.

Firstly, the research will look at all ideas present in the discourse and interrelations between them to distinguish what (if any) coherent sets of ideas - are present in the discourse and how the relationship between ideas change if they do. This is important because, as Princen and ’t Hart (2014) point out, ideas that are not joined together into a paradigm have less influence on policy than the ones that are tight into a more or less coherent group.

Secondly, the research will identify dominant ideas that got the most attention from actors and were sustained in the discourse. In Chapter 7, I introduce the notion of ideas of continued importance – the ‘focal points’ (Legro 2000) of ideation – that are preserved in the discourse over time. These ideas constitute the backbone of the discourse. They are significant for understanding direction because of their power over actors. This power is similar to ‘power in ideas’ described by Carstensen and Schmidt (2016). Through their presence in the discourse, ideas of continued importance influence how actors think and communicate.

If ideas are '*web[s] of interrelated elements of meaning*' (Carstensen 2011a, 600), ideas of continued importance can be perceived as the elements of meaning with the most significant weight in the overall subsystem of ideas. To identify the weight of elements, I suggest using actors' commitment to ideas in the discourse. As discussed, actors can engineer ideas by manipulating their composition – the links and the elements that constitute it (Carstensen 2010, 2015). However, actors can (intentionally) and do (often unintentionally) affect not only what elements of meaning constitute the idea but also the weight of these elements. This happens through their engagement with these elements. In other words, actors empower ideas by communicating them and spending their discursive resources on them. The more commitment to an idea is expressed in the discourse, the stronger it is. In this case, it does not matter if actors support or reject an idea; they contribute to its weight in the discourse by simply engaging with it.

Finally, to better understand the direction of reforms, it may also be insightful to determine ideas with higher chances of success. Of course, as mentioned, the success of an idea depends on multiple factors. What I suggest to do is to incorporate the element of consistency of support or rejection into the assessment of an idea's weight. The actors' commitment in discourse can be interpreted through the prism of not shifting the attitude towards it. According to the Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011), agreement on attitude towards ideas they share could be an important factor in a coalition's ability to influence policy outcomes. Similarly, it is possible to assume that consistency in attitudes towards it would increase its chances for success.

Since ideas, as discussed, go through different stages, to fully assess the potential of an idea, it would be necessary to take into consideration at what stage the idea is. For example, if the idea is at the stage of decision-making, one would also need to take a closer look at which actors are engaged in the debate and if the idea has a backing of actors playing a significant role in the decision-making process. On the other hand, the opposition may be less active if the idea has not yet reached the decision-making stage. In that case, for a program-level idea, it may be helpful to look at whether or not it has a viable instrumental idea attached to it. While for a lower-level idea, one should investigate if it is linked

to higher-level programmatic ideas, it is supposed to be fulfilling or being a solution to.

Conclusion

The main goal of this chapter was to establish what elements of discourse one should focus their attention on to understand both the dynamics and direction of reform.

The chapter introduced what discourse is – a space populated by actors and ideas where communicative interaction happens (Morin and Carta 2014; Schmidt 2002). The purpose of this interaction is two-fold, actors fight for the primacy of their ideas (Hajer 1993), and at the same time, they (re)create them and form collective understanding (Legro 2000; Holzscheiter 2014). From a reform perspective, discourse is where the journey of an idea to implementation starts. To get adopted, ideas need to succeed in the discourse – overcome all other ideas. Therefore, debate, on the one hand, reflects what happens with ideas (how broad and strong the support is); on the other hand, it also affects what happens with ideas in two ways. First, the interaction of actors who exchange ideas produces enabling and constraining structures that are relatively fluent but still influential. These structures – formed of interrelated actors and interrelated ideas – create an environment with which any idea or actor has to interact in their attempts to succeed. Thus, characteristics of this environment and changes in its configuration can bring insight into why transformations (do not) happen.

Second, actors' actions in the discourse – usage of ideational elements – can also be the reason for (lack of) reform. Communication allows actors to change existing ideational structures, and how actors employ ideas as an instrument in communication is of great importance.

Drawing on these theoretical underpinnings, this thesis, in the following empirical analysis, will focus on the structural characteristics of the debate and the behaviour of actors towards ideas. In particular, it will measure support for ideas, establish divergence (and convergence) in the debate, and investigate the interaction between these characteristics in the debate on different levels.

Overall this chapter demonstrated the importance of the relational aspect in the discourse and that links and interaction between different elements of the debate will be the main focus of the following empirical analysis. The next chapter will introduce the method of discourse network analysis employed in this research to operationalise and measure all concepts discussed in this chapter and important for understanding the dynamics and direction of EU's democratic reform.

Chapter 4. Research design and methods

As Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier (2008, 4) point out, 'making good inferences depends entirely on adequate conceptualisation and measurement of the phenomena under study'. Thus, while the previous chapter outlined the analytical framework through which the debate on EU democratic reform was perceived, this chapter will explain how the debate was studied, including the tools and principles for data collection and analysis.

First, the chapter will introduce the method of discourse network analysis (Leifeld 2016), which allows for operationalising the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapter. Discourse network analysis (DNA) is a mixed method that combines content analysis and social network analysis. The benefits of DNA include its relational perspective and holistic approach to discourse that enables one to investigate different dimensions of discourse and bring them together.

DNA presents discourse as networks and provides an opportunity to employ social network instruments to measure its properties formally. The chapter will describe different stages of analysis and the types of networks analysed in the research. A new tool – a measure of commitment to ideas – developed in this research to expand the exploratory potential of the DNA will also be briefly introduced in light of the discussion on different strategies of analysis.

The second part of the chapter sets out the data collection process. Here the main decisions regarding the research design and their limitations will be discussed. This includes the choice of 1) the level of analysis, 2) newspapers as a source of data as well as of particular news outlets (Politico and Euractiv), 3) the timeframe, and 4) the keywords used to retrieve relevant articles. All these elements are important because they can be a source of potential biases.

Discourse network analysis: Discourse as a system of interrelations

Discourse is rarely studied in its entirety as a complex system. On the one hand, the existing literature adopting the discursive perspective tends to privilege either ideational research – on the substantive content of ideas and their structures – or research on actors and their configurations, so that the link between the two

dimensions is often disregarded (Leifeld 2016). On the other hand, when ideas are studied in connection with actors, researchers focus on one or a few actors and the ideas they employ, which does not allow to see discourse as a broad relational phenomenon – a system of interrelated elements that interact with each other.

This fragmentary perspective is characteristic of methodological approaches that address different dimensions of discourse but are incapable of encompassing them all in a unified framework (Leifeld 2016). Thus, despite great interest in discourse and its influence on the outcomes of political and policy processes, the field of discursive research remains methodologically underdeveloped (Swinkels 2020). There is still a lack of tools that would allow to formally study and measure different discourse characteristics and bring these characteristics together to explore and test the mechanisms behind the discursive transformations.

The innovative hybrid method of discourse network analysis (Leifeld 2016) employed in this research is an approach developed to fill the methodological gap by studying discourse in its complexity. It enables a researcher to study debate as a longitudinal and multi-level phenomenon taking into account both actors and ideas simultaneously. Furthermore, DNA integrates a relational perspective on discourse by combining content analysis and network analysis. Using the techniques of social network analysis, it becomes possible to operationalise and formally measure different theoretical constructs employed to describe structural characteristics of the debate (such as advocacy or discourse coalitions, paradigms, ideologies) (Leifeld 2013) and important properties of the elements of the discourse.

Discourse network analysis represents discourse as a three-dimensional space. The key dimension is the one where actors and ideas interact. DNA uses analysis of text data to establish the links between actors and ideas through statements perceived as manifestations of a relation between an actor and an idea (Leifeld 2017). The two remaining dimensions – interactions between actors and between ideas – are derivative of the relations between actors and ideas.

This three-dimensional perspective is important for two interrelated reasons. First, it provides an opportunity to grasp a broad picture of discourse – what structures are formed by the interaction of actors and links between ideas,

while at the same time allowing focusing on actors' relations to ideas. Second, since all the levels are interconnected and interdependent, one can investigate discourse as a system that simultaneously is shaped by the individual and collective behaviour of actors and the system that affects the behaviour.

Therefore, discourse network analysis allows us to explore the debate from different perspectives – as an environment, as a material, and as an instrument – and measure its different characteristics to investigate the mechanisms leading to the success and failure of ideas as well as the elements constituting the discourse.

DNA: stages and strategies of analysis

Discourse network analysis combines content analysis and social network analysis. To explore the discourse using network analysis methods, the researcher first needs to analyse the text data containing actors' ideas on different issues. The main goal of this first step is to identify statements made by actors in support or rejection of the ideas of interest and annotate them. This is important because a statement is the basic unit of analysis in the DNA (Leifeld 2017). The assumption is that relations between actors and ideas, which cannot be directly observed, manifest themselves in statements (Leifeld 2016, 63). Therefore, a coder establishes this unobservable link between an actor and an idea by annotating the statement.

To annotate a statement, a coder needs to put in four main pieces of information (Leifeld 2017). Firstly, it is necessary to identify an actor who is making the statement. Both individual and organisational level analysis is possible. Thus, what is needed is to indicate either the person's name or organisational affiliation or both. In the case of the EU democratic reform debate analysis, it was quite common that statements in the media did not have any individual attached to them – only organisations/ institutions/parties.

Secondly, every statement is assigned a category or a concept to which an actor is referring in his statement. Since what interests a researcher employing DNA is a relationship between actors and ideas rather than specific formulations of ideas, each statement receives a tag with a concept it represents. In essence, a concept or category is a group of statements that are similar in their meaning.

Thirdly, an agreement qualifier is assigned to each statement, which captures actor's attitude towards a concept and distinguishes between its support and rejection. This information is critical for identifying coalitions because it helps 'to move beyond establishing similarity by joint topic affiliation' (Leifeld 2017, 305) to establishing actors' connections based on shared preferences.

The final constituting part of the data that should be encoded is time. When every statement or engagement of an actor with a certain concept is time-bound temporal analysis becomes possible. In other words, the time variable allows one to see the development of the relations over time in further analysis.

The number of variables can be changed, but only these four were used in this research.

Network analysis of discourse

Once the text data has been structured, several types of networks can be generated to represent the discourse. This allows to visualise discursive connection and, thus, map a topology of a debate. It also enables a researcher to use network analysis techniques to measure structural characteristics of discourse described in theoretical models to make inferences and prove hypotheses.

In this research, two main types of discourse networks were used in the analysis of the structured data – affiliation networks and congruence networks of actors and concepts. However, the variety of discourse networks is greater (for an overview, see Leifeld 2016, 2017).

As mentioned, statements allow establishing the links between actors and ideas. Thus, in network terms, the primary source of information about discourse in DNA is a signed affiliation network representing relations between actors and concepts. Affiliation networks are two-mode networks composed of two distinct subsets of nodes – one representing actors and the other representing 'events' in which they participate (Table 1 (a)). In social network analysis, the term 'event' covers a wide range of possible variables (Wasserman and Faust 1994). In DNA, the 'event' is a concept and an affiliation network, therefore, contains information on actors' engagement with different concepts.

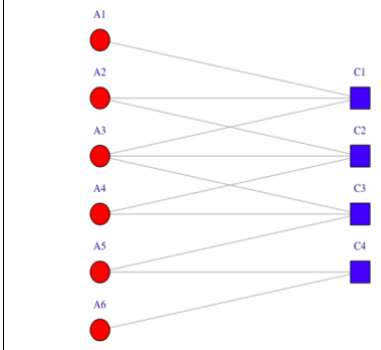
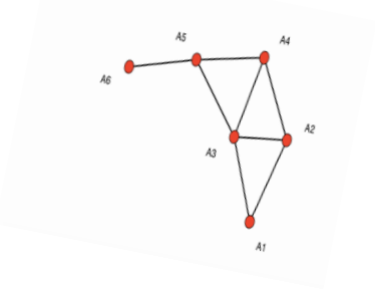
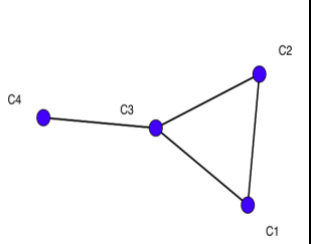
		
a. Affiliation network. Simplified illustration without agreement relation	**b.** Illustration of the actor congruence network	**c.** Illustration of the concept congruence network

Table 1. Simplified illustrations of the affiliation (a), actor congruence (b), and concept congruence(c) network.

Notes: Red nodes represent actors; blue nodes represent concepts. Adapted from (Leifeld 2016)

However, what is noteworthy is that one of the key characteristics of affiliation networks is that it is 'relational in three ways' (Wasserman and Faust 1994, 295). This means that one affiliation network provides three different perspectives on a system of units that comprise the networks and their relations. Firstly, it allows for seeing and measuring connections between distinct subsets of nodes such as actors and, in the case of DNA, ideas. Secondly, affiliation networks can be used to establish links between the units within the subsets. In essence, affiliation networks can be transformed into two one-mode co-occurrence networks. In the case of DNA, these can be either actor networks (Table 1(b)) or concept networks (Table 1 (c)).

The assumption is that a discursive connection between actors manifests itself in shared affiliations to concepts which means their engagement with them. In actor congruence, network links between actors are established based on what ideas actors co-support and co-reject. Similarly, the engagement of one actor with different ideas creates a connection between ideas in concept congruence networks (Leifeld 2017).

Real-life affiliation networks are often complex and difficult to distinguish structural characteristics from. On the other hand, one-mode networks provide an opportunity to visualise theoretical constructs such as coalitions and frames more easily and measure the degree of congruence between different actors or concepts (Leifeld 2016, 64). This leads to the situation in which one-mode congruence networks derived from the affiliation networks are more widely employed in visualisation and analysis when DNA is used than affiliation networks per se. However, if the focus of the research is not on the structural characteristics of actors or ideas level, affiliation networks can be used to get valuable information on relations between actors and ideas.

These two main strategies of analysis applied in this research – the analysis of one-mode congruence networks and time-varied affiliation networks – will be described in more detail in the following sections.

One-mode networks: links and their weight

As mentioned, one-mode networks include only one subset of nodes and are very helpful in identifying the patterns of interrelations between them. This makes them an important part of the debate analysis because, in DNA, coalitions and paradigms are operationalised as cohesive subgroups or subsets of tightly interrelated nodes (Leifeld 2016).

In valued networks, where each link has a weight, the cohesive subgroups are 'subsets of actors [or ideas]…among whom there are relatively strong…ties' (Wasserman and Faust 1994, 249). It means that the weight of a link between different nodes is important for the structural characteristics of the network (Fan et al. 2007) because it signifies the proximity of nodes in networks or the strength of their connection.

It should be noted that, in DNA, there are two main approaches to assessing the strength of the connection between the nodes based on the ideational overlap and the discursive proximity. While the latter considers the levels of actors' involvement in the debate, the former is based only on the number of concepts the actors share.

DNA software and rDNA allow exporting discourse network data, including or excluding duplicate statements (Leifeld, Gruber, and Bossner 2018). The duplicate statements are the statements that refer to the same concept. When duplicates are completely excluded from the network data, the link's weight is proportional only to a number of individual concepts the pair of actors both agree or disagree with. In other words, the edge weight demonstrates the degree of actors' ideational overlap – the degree to which their understanding of a problem or solutions to the problem coincides. When the duplicates are not excluded from the data completely, the edge weight is also affected by the frequency of the statements made by these actors. This means that the more actively actors co-reject or co-support ideas – the stronger the tie between them and 'the more likely they belong to the same discourse coalition or advocacy coalition' (Leifeld 2016, 64).

Both approaches – taking the discursive activity into account or not – are defensible. For example, suppose that actors *a* and *b* share membership in three clubs, but both don't attend the events very often. Whereas actor *a* and actor *c* share membership only in one club, both are actively engaged members of this club. It is difficult to say what represents the strength of the actors' relationships – the breadth of the overlap of actors' interests or the overlap in the intensity of their engagement.

In this research, the discursive similarity will be investigated since it combines both elements: the ideological proximity element, which considers the breadth of ideational overlap and the discursive behaviour element, allowing taking into account the intensity of engagement.

This approach has a theoretical underpinning. According to the ACF, shared beliefs are the basis for building a coalition (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994). However, it is not the only element that defines the advocacy coalition. Actors in coalitions act jointly or advocate (Weible et al. 2020; Sabatier 1998). In that sense, it seems reasonable to incorporate the discursive behaviour element in assessing the strength of relations because it would allow considering cooperation (at least on a discursive level) when identifying the coalitions.

According to the idea of discursive proximity, to calculate the weight of the link between two actors in an actor congruence network, one needs to know the

number of statements made to co-support or co-reject concepts. In DNA, the following equation is used:

$$y_{ii\prime}^{congruence} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \sum_{k} x_{ijk} x_{i\prime jk}$$

This equation and the equations below are cited and summarized from Leifeld, Gruber, and Bossner (2018). Here x_{ijk} is a 'count value' representing a group of statements united by a concept (*j*). The first index (i) denotes an actor who made the statement, while the third index (*k)* signifies actor's attitude – whether or not an actor is supportive of the concept.

For simplicity, let us first consider the situation when the *k* qualifier is equal to 1 – actors only make support statements, and there is one concept that actors share *n*=1. Thus, to calculate the edge weight, one would need to multiply the number of statements made by an actor (i) by the number of statements made by an actor (i') about this concept. When actors share only one idea, this would be the overall weight. However, when actors co-refer to multiple ideas, this operation should be repeated for each concept, and then the sum of these 'subweights' should be calculated to get the overall edge weight.

Real-life relations are often much more complex, with actors not always agreeing on their attitudes to ideas. To account for mutual (dis)agreement, one needs to divide all statements into two groups – the support statements (*k*=1) and the rejection statements (*k*=0). Then what can be called the 'agreement' and the 'disagreement weights' needs to be calculated first by multiplying the statements made by two actors within the two subgroups – the rejection and the support subgroups. After that, an 'agreement weight' is added to a 'disagreement weight' to find out the overall weight of the connection between two actors. If the number of shared concepts is equal to one, this procedure can be described by the following equation:

$$\sum_{k=0}^{1} x_{ijk}\, x_{i'jk} = x_{ijo} * x_{i\prime j0} + x_{ij1} * x_{i'j1}$$

When actors co-refer to multiple concepts, this operation is repeated the number of times equal to the overall number of concepts (*n*). After that the sum of all 'subweights' is quantified.

$$\sum_{j=1}^{n}\sum_{k} x_{ijk}x_{i'jk} = (x_{i10} * x_{i'10} + x_{i11} * x_{i'11}) + (x_{i20} * x_{i'20} + x_{i21} * x_{i'21}) + \cdots + (x_{in0} * x_{i'n0} + x_{in1} * x_{i'n1})$$

For clarity let us consider an illustrative example with two actors and four concepts. Table 2 shows the number of statements made by actor 1 and actor 2 in support (+) or rejection (-) of each concept. Using this information and the equation discussed above one can calculate the weight of the link between these two actors.

	Concept 1		***Concept 2***		***Concept 3***		***Concept 4***	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Actor 1	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
Actor 2	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	0

Table 2. Agreement and disagreement to concepts by Actor 1 and Actor 2

$$y_{a_1a_2}^{congruence} = \underbrace{(1 * 1 + 0 * 0)}_{\text{Concept 1}} + \underbrace{(0 * 0 + 2 * 3)}_{\text{Concept 2}} + \underbrace{(0 * 1 + 1 * 0)}_{\text{Concept 3}} + \underbrace{(1 * 1 + 0 * 0)}_{\text{Concept 4}}$$

$$y_{a_1a_2}^{congruence} = 8$$

Thus, actors agree on three concepts and disagree on one. The 'subweight' for the first and the fourth concept is equal to 1, while the 'subweight' for concept 2 is equal to 6. Because actors disagreed on concept 3, it did not contribute to the overall edge weight. Thus, if we solve the equation, the overall weight of the link between actors 1 and 2 would be equal to 8.

Normalisation

Most congruence networks would require normalisation. The reason is that actors who actively engage in the debate can create a certain distortion. Firstly, '[T]heir activity and diversity causes these actors to have agreement ties to most other actors in the network at some point' (Leifeld 2017, 310). Secondly, because the edge weight is dependent on the number of statements actors make, all the edges attached to the nodes representing active actors would be high so that the strength of some relations would be exaggerated.

Link	Statements A1	Statements A2	Weight	Norm weight
Pair 1 A1 – A2	40	2	80	2,58
	Statements A1	Statements A3	Weight	Norm weight
Pair 2 A1 – A3	20	20	400	10
	Statements A4	Statements A5	Weight	Norm weight
Pair 3 A4 – A5	3	2	6	2,4

Table 3. Edge weights and normalisation. Illustrative example

Imagine three pairs of actors, each of which shared only one concept but made a different number of statements in its support. For simplicity, we will exclude the rejection statements (k=0). Thus, actor A1 made 40 statements supporting a concept it shares with actor A2, while actor A2 made only two statements. To calculate the weight of the tie between these actors, we need to multiply the number of statements made by actors in support of the concept (since no statements were made to disagree with the concept). It means that the overall edge weight for pair 1 would be equal to 80. If we calculate the edge weights for other pairs, we will see that the link between nodes in pair one is considerably

stronger than in pair 3, even though actors A2 (from pair 1) and A5 (from pair 3) made an equal number of statements (Table 2).

Therefore, the question arises: whether the activity of actor A1 should make the weight of its link with actor A2 almost 15 times higher than the weight of the link between the nodes in pair 3?

This ability of active actors to increase the weight of all the links they have has a broader effect on the overall network structure, making it more difficult to extract information on cohesive subgroups. Actors who participate actively will be central to the network, while less active actors will end up on the periphery and might end up being excluded from the relevant coalitions (Leifeld 2016).

Normalisation allows 'cancelling out the effect of activity or popularity of nodes' (Leifeld, Gruber, and Bossner 2018, 8) on the weight of the link and corrects the biases created by mediagenic actors.

There are a few different approaches to normalisation in DNA (Leifeld 2016). However, the most widely used (and applied in this thesis) type of normalisation is average activity normalisation, when the edge weight is divided by the mean of the overall number of statements made by two actors:

$$n^{avg}(y_{ii\prime}) = \frac{y_{ii\prime}}{\frac{1}{2}(\sum_{j=1}^{n}\sum_{k} x_{ijk} + \sum_{j=1}^{n}\sum_{k} x_{i\prime jk})}$$

If normalisation is applied to the edge weights calculated in the illustrative example, the weights become more comparable with each other (see Table 3). Pair 2 still holds the lead with the highest weight of the link because both actors were heavily engaged in the debate. At the same time, the difference between pairs 1 and 3 becomes much less dramatic.

Properties of actors and ideas through the lens of affiliation networks

Besides analysing network properties (such as cohesive subgroups, density, etc.), network analysis also allows one to investigate characteristics of individual nodes – actors and concepts 'arising out of structural and relational processes' (Wasserman and Faust 1994, 7-8). One of the most widely measured characteristics is centrality (Freeman 1978; Bavelas 1948) of nodes in one-mode networks. It allows for finding key actors that hold important positions in the

network. They often and significantly affect the policy process (Resh, Siddiki, and McConnell 2014).

In this section, however, we would like to focus on the opportunities that analysis of affiliation networks brings to understanding discourse. I suggest that it can enrich the potential of DNA, allowing operationalisation not only of concepts related to exploring network structure but also of the constructs employed by actor-centred approaches to the discourse.

Connections between actors and ideas are not only informative as an intermediate step in creating one-mode networks. Some of the characteristics of actors and ideas can be measured through their relations with each other.

As mentioned, the primary source of information in DNA is an affiliation network constituted by two sets of nodes – actors and ideas. An affiliation network is a network of involvement (Freeman and White 1993). It 'contains information on collection of actors that are larger than pairs' (Wasserman and Faust 1994, 294). Through an affiliation network, all actors linked by one concept (event), or all concepts employed by one actor can be identified and, thus, knowing the number of links the node in the affiliation network has, one can calculate the rates of engagement – the number of concepts the actor engages with or the number of actors employing the concept (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

In addition to that, in the last empirical chapter of the thesis, I suggest a tool that operationalises and measures actors' levels of commitment to ideas. Commitment plays an important role in theoretical models explaining the success and failure of coalitions and ideas (Kingdon 2013; Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011). The measure is based on the assessment of the weight of the affiliation link between an actor and a concept, which is equal to the number of engagements. However, it integrates the temporal aspect into the analysis of the strength of the link. The strength of the link is measured through both the intensity and stability of engagement of an actor with a concept. It is then interpreted as the level of commitment of an actor to an idea. Moreover, because the edge between two nodes is a property of both nodes (Wasserman and Faust 1994), the strength of the relations can also be interpreted as an indicator of the weight of an idea in an actor's repertoire of ideas or belief system. In other words, through actor-ideas relations, it is possible to measure the weight of different elements in the overall

set of actor's ideas. This information can be used to analyse individual belief systems as well as collective ideational structures.

The structural analysis of the debate through one-mode congruence networks and the analysis of time-varying affiliation networks were employed to explore the debate on EU democratic reform. The following sections will describe the data and how it was collected.

Data

To investigate the political reform debate in the EU, the novel data set of news articles (N = 2832) published in two Brussels-based outlets – Euractiv and Politico Europe – from 2014 to 2019 was created. The data set includes 8882 statements made by 1061 individual actors belonging to 581 organisations regarding 441 concepts overall.

This section will explain why the EU-level debate was chosen as a representation of the discourse on EU democratic reform. It will also explain the choice of the period under consideration, the data sources, and the keywords employed to derive the relevant articles, as well as the decisions made during the coding process.

Timeframe

This research is longitudinal. The data for six consecutive years from 2014 to 2019 was collected to see the debate on the EU democratic reform from a dynamic perspective.

Considering the goals of the research, the period between 2014 and 2019 – which was transformative for the EU overall and the democratic debate in particular – was chosen.

This period was full of general reflections on the nature and future of the EU as a democratic polity and intense institutional reform debate with successes and failures. Thus, on the one hand, the period between 2014 and 2019 encompasses a range of events, such as the Brexit vote and migration crisis, that induced a new wave of debate over the EU's democratic qualities and the need

for reform. On the other hand, this period coincides with the Eighth European Parliamentary term, which began with the success of a Spitzenkandidat reform of electing the Commission President and finished with the failure to consolidate it. Some academics evaluated Spitzenkandidat as a major change in the democratic design of the EU after the adoption of a Lisbon treaty in 2007 and a transformation with 'profound implications for the debate about the character of representative government at EU level' (Shackleton 2017, 191).

Focusing on pan-European debate

Public debate in the EU resembles the nature of the polity itself – it is fragmented and multilevel (Hepp et al. 2016, 71-107). This means that a topic can be simultaneously debated on different levels, in different countries, and the overall picture of the debate would incorporate all these segments.

This thesis focuses on pan-European public discourse. There are two reasons for choosing the EU-level debate over national in the particular case of the EU and its democratic reform debate. First, it is an arena where different perspectives are present. One will not be able to see all the nuances of the local debate through the lens of transnational debate. However, since the key actors of the national debate are usually present in the EU-level discussions, it can serve as a proxy for EU-wide debate. In that sense, the transnational debate provides a picture of the EU in all its complexity, allowing a unique unified perspective in which different elements from across the levels of government are present.

Second, the transnational debate is where the EU and its development are central topics and where the key actors' interaction happens.

Using newspapers for data collection – advantages and limitations

The main reason for choosing newspapers as the source of data for this research is that, unlike other text documents, they create a unique arena for an indirect interaction of actors. This arena is relatively open for actors engaged with the topic and 'allow[s] relevant political actors to disseminate their issue stances at low cost' (Leifeld 2016, 129). It entails that newspaper materials include information on a wider range of actors and their ideas than other sources. This is

especially relevant in the case when discourse is studied as an environment populated by interacting actors and ideas and when a broader perspective is required.

In addition to that, since 'newspapers are published regularly and frequently, they can generate a reliable base for systematic empirical investigations over time' (Markard, Rinscheid, and Widdel 2021, 318)

While newspapers are undoubtfully helpful in providing a broader perspective on the debate, the question is also how suitable they are for more in-depth analysis of actors' relations with ideas – actors' belief systems or discursive commitments. The short answer would be that they are suitable; however, there are certain limitations.

One of the limitations is that not all actors that appear in the media are equally covered. This means that the amount of data across the range of actors can differ significantly. Hence for some actors, the picture of their relations with ideas would be quite comprehensive, while for others, it would be more fragmented. Therefore, meaningful analysis of actors' belief systems – relations with ideas – on a micro-level can be done for those actors who are active and appear in the news regularly.

Another limitation is that media not only provide information but also serve as a mediator, suggesting interpretations. Consequently, when studying belief systems of actors through newspaper articles, one can only see their reflection in the media discourse. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration that analysis of newspapers is more suitable for 'measuring media discourse as it is perceived by the actors' rather than for measuring 'actors' ideologies in the real world' (Leifeld 2016, 129). Even when the statements of actors are reported without distortion, the very selection of what and how intensively to cover can create biases. Journalists and editors may put more emphasis on particular events, actors, and ideas while ignoring or underrepresenting others. This means that some relationships between actors and ideas can be exaggerated, and some could be absent. In other words, what one can measure is the construct built by journalists. However, this construct is what actors see, and it is what they base their perception of reality on, especially if they do not have direct access to other actors engaged in the debate.

As Leifeld (2016, 133) points out, it is difficult to measure the degree of distortion created by media because we have 'no absolute reference point'; however, careful selection of sources is important to prevent biases.

Selecting news outlets

The analysis draws on data collected from two major pan-European Brussels-based news outlets – Politico Europe and Euractiv. Both specialize in the EU, that is, their coverage is focused on the EU and its affairs.

Euractiv is a pan-European media network founded in 1999. In addition to providing the 'Brussels perspective' on EU affairs and the Europe edition in the English language, Euractiv offers editions in 12 other European languages with localised news. It should be noted, though, that not all of the local editions are equally well-developed.

Politico Europe is a news outlet launched in April 2015 on the basis of the European Voice newspaper – which was part of the Economist group. It provides coverage of all major policy, political, and institutional developments predominantly in the English language. It should be noted that to cover the 2014 debate, the database of this research includes archive material of the European Voice – the news outlet on the basis of which Politico Europe was launched.

One of the key criteria for selecting newspapers as data sources for this research was their ability to present a balanced picture of the debate. The key dimension according to which the newspapers are usually measured is the left-right divide. In the case of the EU, the attitude towards EU integration is another dimension that should be taken into consideration. While both outlets claim to be neutral and present positions independent from the European institutions or any other sponsors, Euractiv can be considered slightly more pro-European than Politico Europe (and European voice in 2014-2015), which incorporates more critical perspectives.

Overall, although the newspapers do not considerably differ in their coverage of the discussion of the EU's democratic reform, however, they complement each other well, allowing a complete and more nuanced picture of the discussion on the EU democratic reform.

Since what is studied in this research is discourse as it is perceived by actors, it was also important to take into consideration the degree to which the newspapers can shape actors' perceptions. These would be newspapers that the relevant actors most often use to get information on the EU and its affairs. ComRes/Burson-Marsteller 2016 EU Media Poll (Savanta:ComRes 2016) showed that Politico, the BBC, and Euractiv were the top three most frequently read news outlets among the EU influencers, including MEPs, EU institutions staff, and 'Brussels opinion formers'. From these three, Politico and Euractiv were selected as EU-specialized news outlets.

Since the news outlets interact with the audience in different formats, it was also necessary to identify the formats that were most suitable for data collection.

As regards Politico, apart from being a digital news outlet with daily updates, it has a weekly printed edition and an online Politico Pro service with in-depth analysis of different policy areas. No material from Politico Pro was included because of its focus on policies rather than broader political questions such as the nature and future of the EU. When choosing between printed and online editions of Politico Europe, the latter was preferred as a data source because of its potential to cover more topics and incorporate more perspectives, as well as its ability to reach a wider audience due to the current levels of digitalisation and increasing online media consumption (Nossek, Adoni, and Nimrod 2015).

Euractiv does not have a printed version; however, it has multiple localised versions in different languages. The decision was made to focus on the European edition, which is published in the English language. Firstly, it is the central edition that is best developed. It was assumed that since many EU languages and countries were not yet covered and the existing localised editions were not equally well-developed, many actors would still be reading the European version of Euractiv. Secondly, and most impotently, political issues and the future of Europe have been mostly discussed in the European Edition. In addition to that, the key articles from local editions (especially French and German) are usually translated into English and published in the European edition.

To collect the data in a systematic way, an R script for downloading articles from newspapers' websites was written. Direct download from the newspaper's website has the advantage of avoiding incompleteness of a dataset which was noticed during the test searches in the LexisNexis database.

Keywords

The body of articles presented on the websites of both newspapers is extensive. To retrieve the most relevant articles, a group of keywords was identified. Keywords perform two main interrelated functions. First, they describe the substance of the concept under study. Second, they are used as search terms to identify relevant documents or web pages.

Keywords provide 'fast means of selecting newspaper articles for analysis' (Soothill and Grover 1997, 591) and, therefore, save time-resources. However, this comes with the price of the necessity to identify the right keywords that would describe the phenomena adequately and would effectively search the relevant documents.

The effectiveness of the keywords is defined by their ability to avoid both 'false negatives' and 'false positives' (Soothill and Grover 1997, 592). 'False positives' are items, in our case articles, included in the dataset as a result of the search despite being irrelevant to the phenomena under consideration. For instance, when 'democracy' is used as a keyword to retrieve articles on the EU democratic reform, it produces 'false positives'. Even though the selected newspapers are EU-specialized, they also cover national democratic issues of both member states and other countries. To correct this, one can make a combination of the keywords more restrictive. In our case, it is possible to add 'eu' as a keyword to narrow the search and include only articles containing references to both the EU (or European) and democracy. However, the combination of the search terms should not be too restrictive to avoid 'false negatives' – the articles that are not included in the dataset despite their relevance.

Deacon (2007, 8) points out that finding appropriate keywords may be more challenging when defining abstract concepts rather than 'identifying tangible 'things' (i.e. people, places, events and policies)'. Since democratic reform is an abstract concept, it was important not to be too restrictive and incorporate

different dimensions of the phenomenon under consideration. However, at the same time, it was necessary to ensure that the keywords covered the principal dimensions of the concept.

The first step in identifying the appropriate keywords is to distinguish the main components of the research topic. These components are the 'EU' and the 'democratic reform'. If we visualise it (Figure 1), the relevant articles would be expected to be located in the area of intersection of these two main components – area 3. However, pilot research of 1000 articles from 2014 and 2015 demonstrated that using the 'democratic reform' as a search term is too restrictive because actors often do not use this particular combination of words when they are talking about democratic reforms. For example, some of them discussed reforms that would have implications for the EU's democratic qualities without any reference to the democratic deficit. In contrast, others referred to democracy more generally, for example, to their desired models of democracy or changes in democratic order without using the word reform. In other words, relevant articles were found not only in the intersection of all three keywords – which is area 3 on the graph (Figure 1), but in areas 1 and 2 as well.

It was decided to split the 'democratic reform' combination into two separate keywords. It was also decided to add a few more words in the string to capture various dimensions of the EU democratic reform debate. Thus, the overall search string that was used to retrieve the articles from the newspapers' websites is the following – (eu* AND (democra* OR reform* OR institut* OR future OR legitim*)).

The first element – the 'eu*' keyword – ensures that the articles retrieved from the website are related to the EU. This particular spelling of the search term with * enables to account for variations of references to the EU, such as European and Europe. To put it simply, it includes all the words starting with 'eu'.

From the body of articles containing the 'eu*' keyword, only those containing either of the keywords that describe the phenomenon under consideration – the democratic reform – were chosen as relevant.

The realm of articles explicitly discussing democracy was covered by the keyword 'democra*'. The subgroup of articles derived by using the keyword 'reform*' combined with 'eu', on the one hand, produced quite a few 'false

positives' because it included articles that were not related to the democratic transformations. However, on the other hand, it enabled the inclusion of articles where ideas on EU transformation were not linked to democracy explicitly. For example, ideas on the development of the EU as a political system and the system of integration.

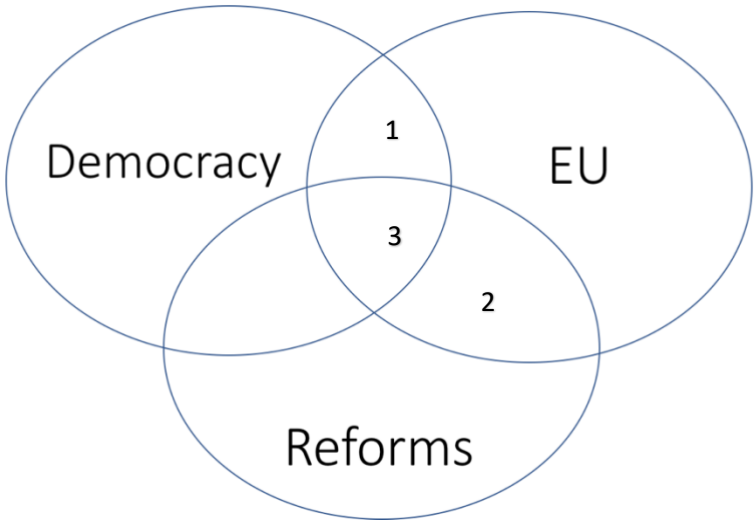


Figure 1. Identifying the keywords: components of the research topic.

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, standards of democracy applied to the EU stem from different conceptualisations of its nature. In other words, the debate on EU democratic reform is, to a great extent, a debate on how to structure the EU as a political system to make it more democratic. It includes discussions on the focal point(s) of power (national or supranational communitie(s)) as well as on the mode of integration.

The search term 'future' was added to the string for similar reasons as the keyword 'reform*' – to ensure that various integral parts of the democratic reform debate are taken into account. This keyword allows capturing the 'goals of democracy' sub-debate.

The keyword 'institut*' was added to the string to cover the dimension of institutional debate. The reason institutional debate received a separate keyword and became one of the main foci of attention is two-fold. On the one hand, a subsystem of ideas on institutions is central to any set of ideas on democracy and democratisation. Institutions embed the rules by which the political system is

structured and allow them to endure; at the same time, they also embed power to shape political outcomes (Olsen 2017). This means that institutions play a key role in maintaining a democratic order. Although it looks like, as Acar Kutay (2015, 818) puts it, that 'the democratisation of Europe has moved from a narrow understanding of democratisation of the EU institutions to establishing an encompassing democracy for Europe', the EU's institutions have always been democratic critique and the main focus of democratisation efforts for decades.

On the other hand, from the ideational research perspective, ideas on institutions belong to a different level of empirical ideas that articulate versions of how to realise more abstract ideas on polity development, integration, and social development. For instance, if the agreement is reached that the locus of power in the EU would be transferred at the EU level and the EU would become a supranational democracy – what institutions should embed this power? These empirical ideas sometimes are a matter of equal if not more disagreement than the higher-level ideas they are meant to interpret. Therefore, the focus on institutional debate allows covering a different level of ideas and getting a multi-dimensional perspective on the debate.

The word legitimacy and its derivatives were much less frequently used in the overall body of articles than all other keywords. However, due to its link to democracy that was discussed in the previous chapter (democracy helps achieve legitimacy) – sometimes, when the EU transformations were considered, they were discussed in the context of legitimacy deficit rather than democratic deficit per se. Thus, the keyword 'legit*' allowed to bring in the articles in which the democratic reform is mentioned without explicit reference to democracy or any other keyword.

Data coding: the main principles

The data coding was primarily inductive. The original set of concepts derived from the academic debate on the EU's democratic deficit was extended in the process of reading the articles to incorporate ideas that were not present or were not actively discussed in the literature. Only statements that were solutions to the EU's problem of democratic deficit or suggestions of democratic reform were included.

Since the analysis covers ideas of different levels, it was essential to categorise the statements as precisely as possible. In other words, if the statement could be attributed to a narrow category, it was attributed to it rather than to a broader one. Thus, for example, the European Citizens Initiative was coded as a separate solution concept and was not included in the category of participatory democracy.

One of the challenges for the coder was to distinguish between the statements relevant to the problem of the EU democratic reform and those not. Since one of the ideas of the research was to explore the empirical discourse to find out what ideas constituted the debate on the EU's future as a democratic polity, it was decided to code not only ideas about different arrangements for democratic governance and polity transformations but also ideas that constitute 'goals of democracy' (Parks 1968). This includes ideas on the direction in which society should develop and, on its goals, as well as on the 'democratic consequences' of the functioning of the EU polity (Bartl 2015). Thus, for instance, inclusive Europe, social justice, equality and similar ideas were coded. In addition, ideas on what groups should be empowered or better represented in the decision-making were also coded as democratic reform suggestions. These concepts were not included in the detailed structural analysis of the debate because there was no disagreement around them. However, they were included in the analysis of the concepts of continued importance and the analysis of actors' repertoires of ideas.

Another challenge for the coder was to ensure consistency in coding actors' affiliations. One of the problems was that some actors had multiple affiliations indicated in the article. The principle was to prioritise European party affiliation over national and institutional over party affiliation. For instance, when Martin Schultz made a statement and was identified as both the president of the European Parliament and a member of S&D, his institutional affiliation was used to code the statement. However, it should be noted that sometimes actors with multiple affiliations made statements in different capacities. Thus, it was necessary to deprioritise institutional affiliation in some cases because an actor made a statement on behalf of the party. In other words, this general rule of prioritisation was applied, taking the context of each particular statement into account.

If no organisational affiliation was indicated, the individual's name and surname were used instead in the organisational level analysis. This was the case for some individual EU-level consultants, journalists, and academics.

Data coding reliability

The key source of potential reliability issues on the level of data coding was the subjectivity of human decision-making, as in the case of selection bias by journalists. Thus, during the content analysis phase, a coder is supposed to identify to what concepts the statements made by actors belong and if they are relevant to the construct of interest (in our case, the EU democratic reform). Thus, the researcher's perception of the material can affect the results and 'introduce errors and biases' to the dataset (Woolley 2000, 157).

One suggested solution is to use automated coding (Matthes and Kohring 2008). Automated coding is widespread in content analysis and is often associated with higher reliability and efficiency than manual coding, although it has its limitations, including, for instance, the inability to account for multiple meanings of different words (Graaf and Vossen 2013).

Despite all the benefits of automated coding, manual coding remains the best choice for the content analysis stage in DNA. The main reason is that while in traditional content analysis, co-reference is used to assess relations between concepts, in DNA, it is co-support and co-ejection that are used to operationalise the discourse. Thus, it is necessary to identify actors' attitudes to ideas and interpret each statement. With the advancement of machine learning, reliable automated coding for DNA seems more feasible; however, at the moment when the research was conducted, no suitable automated solutions were available.

Another strategy to enhance reliability is to examine the data coding for biases and errors. Often a few coders work with a data set, and their agreement in the assessment of the text is measured to evaluate reliability (O'Connor and Joffe 2020). However, since a single coder encoded the articles, due to the limited resources of a PhD project, intercoder reliability could not be assessed. Instead, other measures were taken to ensure the consistency of data coding and the quality of the final data set. Thus, the multi-pass coding technique was employed. It entails a revision of the codes and codebook in light of new information (Leifeld

2016). Put differently, new concepts were added to the codebook until no new concepts emerged from the data. When new concepts were added, the previous codes were revised. Moreover, to eliminate errors, the commitment measure function for switching behaviour was also applied as a post-coding test to identify self-contradictions. When self-contradictions were identified, each case was considered separately to distinguish between coding errors and purposeful switching behaviour of actors.

Conclusion

The main aim of the chapter was to introduce the method of discourse network analysis employed in this research and outline the research design and data collection process.

Discourse network analysis is a combination of content analysis and social network analysis. In DNA, links between actors and ideas are established through statements made by actors. This thesis uses the resulting affiliation networks in two main ways. First, affiliation networks are employed to analyse the quality of support an idea receives from an actor (for details, see Chapter 7). Second, transformed into one-mode co-occurrence networks, affiliation networks establish the relationship between actors and between ideas. This allows to formally measure different theoretical constructs used to describe structural characteristics of the debate (such as advocacy or discourse coalitions, paradigms, and ideologies) and important properties of the elements of the discourse (such as commitment to ideas).

After introducing the method, the chapter addressed the collection process and discussed the main decisions regarding the research design and its limitations. This includes the choice of newspapers and particular news outlets (Politico and Euractiv) as data sources, the European level of debate, the timeframe between 2014 and 2019, and the keywords used to retrieve relevant articles.

Chapter 5. Analysis of the overall debate and the higher-level polity ideas

This is the first of three chapters that present the empirical analysis of the political debate on the EU's democratic reform. The first part of the chapter focuses on the structural characteristics of the overall networks of actors and ideas. As mentioned, structural characteristics can help understand processes happening in the debate.

The chapter starts with a brief recap on how the structure of networks can bring insight into understanding a political process and its outcomes. It then discusses ideas and actors present in the debate and analyses the patterns of their interrelations. The main goals are to determine: i) the composition of the debate, what sub-systems of ideas constitute the debate, ii) structural characteristics that would help understand what happens to ideas in terms of support for and opposition to them, iii) the main conflict lines.

The analysis showed that the EU's democratic reform debate could be seen as a layered cake constituted of different interrelated sub-debates. Thus, there is a top layer of more abstract – programmatic ideas, including but not limited to ideas on the EU as a polity and different goals and models of democracy. This layer is followed by the layer of institutional debate, which, on the one hand, is a separate sub-system of ideas but, on the other hand, is a continuation of the debate on more abstract ideals because institutions are the instrument that allows more abstract ideas to be translated into reality.

The second part of the chapter focuses on two major conflict lines identified at the level of programmatic ideas. These are conflict lines formed along different polity ideas – ideas that cover the constitution of the EU as a political system and its future as a system of integration. It studies configurations of actors and ideas and identifies changes that happed over time. The part starts with a short introduction to the academic debate and proceeds with presenting the main findings.

The structural characteristics of the following layer of the debate on EU's democratic reform – the institutional reform debate – will be the focus of the next chapter (see Chapter 6), whereas the final empirical chapter will look at the debate from a different perspective emphasising the importance of behaviour of actors towards ideas (see Chapter 7).

Networks and dynamics of change

Literature on networks in policy-making points out that the structure of networks can bring insights into the policy dynamics and outcomes (Peterson 1995; Howlett 2002). The idea is that networks – understood as collections of interacting units – create an environment where social and political decisions are made, and actions are taken (Wasserman and Faust 1994). This environment is close to institutions in its influence over the political process; however, it is much more fluid (Ansell 2009). As Peterson (1995, 76) puts it:

> 'Networks emerge when specific policy tasks can only be achieved through the exchange of resources possessed by a range of actors. All members of a policy network will command some kind of resource that acts as their 'membership card' and allows them entry to the network. Those who lack valued resources are excluded.'

Two models applied for the analysis of policy-making will be discussed in this section – the Advocacy Coalitions Framework (Sabatier 1988; Weible and Sabatier 2009) and the issue networks approach (Heclo 1978). Both are actor-centred and focused on webs of interrelations between actors, either individual or organisational (Schneider 2015). What distinguishes these approaches from other relational perspectives on policy analysis, such as, for instance, a policy network analysis (Rhodes 2009), is their emphasis on ideas (understood as beliefs and knowledge) as one of the key explanatory variables for policy dynamics and the overall emergence of networks. The approaches are different, however, in their understanding of the mechanisms of the policy change and the structure of the network of interrelations between actors.

Issue networks and advocacy coalition networks represent two poles on the continuum of possible structures of the networks of policy-makers. In contrast to advocacy coalitions preserving stable structures over the years (Sabatier 1988; Weible and Sabatier 2009), issue networks are dynamic and open (Heclo 1978). They emerge and disappear, being much less controlled. Moreover, unlike advocacy coalition networks, issue networks cover only separate problems, not the whole policy. Within this perspective, ideas understood as knowledge is the main driver of policy dynamics, which is born from constant deliberation between knowledgeable actors. This has an important impact on the nature of policy

development which may be an evolution driven by somewhat random changes (Hoppe 2011). The issue networks are also known for their inertia, driven by a lack of consensus and ultimate control of the issue by any actors (Smith 1993).

By contrast, the dynamic of the network of advocacy coalitions is determined by a stable set of beliefs held by the dominating coalition as well as by the struggle between coalitions over the dominance of their ideas (Sabatier 1998). Since advocacy coalitions are more closed – fewer actors have access to policy-making, and it is more difficult to put a new idea on the agenda (Howlett 2002).The dynamic of the policy formed by advocacy coalitions, therefore, is expected to be in line with the model of 'punctuated equilibrium' (Baumgartner and Jones 1993) which is to say that policy is going to have a lasting nature with some minor changes following the line of the main policy ideas except the rare occasions of dramatic shifts.

Different policies have different structures of policy networks; moreover, these structures change over time (Sabatier 1998).

Networks in the European Union

Due to the multi-level structure of the EU involving a large number of actors, a network perspective is perceived as a useful approach allowing grasping the complexity of the EU's decision-making (Peterson 1995). Thus, according to the governance approach, the EU is an arena for the interaction between different types of actors, 'public and private, operating at the subnational, national, transnational and supranational level' (Tsakatika 2007, 868-869). These interactions form governance practices of diverse types, which imply horizontal coordination as well as horizontal control. Therefore, decisions resulting in actual institutional change do not merely reflect the member states' preferences or institutional actors. In this system, interests are dispersed and formulated in the huge webs of interactions between various actors (Tsakatika 2007). Therefore, understanding the interactions between different actors becomes crucial for understanding the EU decision-making process and institutional dynamics (Peterson 1995).

Although doubts have been cast on the applicability and usefulness of the network analysis for the study of the EU governance (see Kassim 1994), the

network approach has been extensively used in European studies providing additional insights into the EU decision-making process (for an overview see Rozbicka 2013).

Networks existing in the EU belong to different parts of the spectrum, from extremely fluid issue networks to networks with stable advocacy coalitions (Rozbicka 2013). Thus, evidence of the operation of long-term groups of like-minded actors has been found in a diverse range of industrial and environmental policy areas such as pharmaceutical policy (Brooks 2018), wind power sector (Szarka 2010), steel (Dudley and Richardson 1999) and chemicals (Pesendorfer 2006) policies. Although both the existence and importance of coalitions in the EU decision-making have been widely recognized by research, a number of studies show that the nature of the alliances appearing in some policy areas is different from what is described by the Advocacy Coalitions Framework. The coalitions emerging in the EU are often short-term, 'rather chaotic', and are not based on common belief systems (Rozbicka 2013). These ad-hoc coalitions are issue-specific and tend to disappear when the issue is resolved (Pijnenburg 1998).

Analysis of discourse networks has been employed in the study of the EU decision-making (Leifeld and Haunss 2012) to explain the success of one reform option over another. It was applied in the research on legitimacy of the capitalist economic regime and its stability after the financial crisis of 2008 (Haunss 2017). This study addressed the question of the lack of reforms and institutional transformations despite the intensification of the debate delegitimizing capitalism. Recently, DNA was applied to study institutional transformations of the Eurozone (Swinkels and van Esch 2022).

This research applies DNA to the new domain – reform of the EU as a polity and a system of integration, which will be covered in this chapter, and to the domain of institutional debate, which will be the focus of the next chapter. However, the analysis will start with characteristics of the overall debate on EU's democratic reform – a complex body of interrelated subsystems of actors and ideas.

Analysis of the debate

Ideas that constitute the debate

The debate on the EU's democratic reform was constituted of more than 400 ideas of different levels, from philosophical to instrumental. In terms of substance, ideas present in the debate could be divided into four main groups. However, it should be noted that this is a general classification by topic, which does not account for the interaction between ideas in discourse.

The first group includes ideas on the future of the EU as a political system and the system of integration. It is constituted of ideas on deepening and broadening the EU integration process and its differentiation. These subgroups also include ideas on the desired nature of the EU as a polity, such as the EU as an intergovernmental organisation or supranational state.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the issue of the EU's democratic qualities is a complex one. On the one hand, the EU democracy debate is a matter of deficit of popular control and just another incarnation of the representative democracy crisis. On the other hand, this debate on democracy in the EU is interlinked with the debate on the EU's nature as a political system. While there is broad agreement that the larger the scope of EU competences and the deeper its integration – the more EU is moving towards a state in its functions – the more democratic control is required (Majone 2014), there is no agreement on what kind of political system the EU should be.

This link between democracy, EU's functions and integration means that changes in the structure and nature of the EU as a political system and the level and method of integration can serve as instruments of democratisation. To put it simply, the possible way out of the democratic deficit is not only to reconsider how the EU is governed to make the level of democracy match the levels of integration. It is also possible to re-establish what the EU is and what kind of functions it performs. This would entail limiting the EU development (Majone 2014) or even reversing its evolution (Scharpf 2015; Bickerton 2012). This includes ideas such as returning certain power and competences to the level of nation-states or differentiating its development so that the nature of the polity would require lower/different levels of democratic control.

The second major group of concepts constituting the debate on EU's democratic reform is a community of ideas on democracy per se. It is a large group that can be divided into a few subgroups. The first subgroup includes ideas on sovereignty, the focus of democracy, and models of EU democracy, such as for instance, ideas of the EU as a multi-level or transnational democracy. The second subgroup comprises concepts that cover the preferred models of democracy discussed in Chapter 2 that can be used to improve the EU's democratic qualities, such as strengthening representative democracy or increasing public participation, consensus or majoritarian democracy for the EU.

The third subgroup includes ideas on the mechanisms or elements that constitute the democratic government, such as accountability, transparency, and representation. It should be noted that the idea of transparency was very prominent in the debate. Thus quite a few reform ideas directed at increasing transparency of the EU decision-making overall (for instance, indicating what institution requires more transparency) and in different areas (for instance, lobbying) were discussed.

Finally, there was a subgroup of ideas of 'thicker' democracy. This includes such ideas as social equality and inclusivity and ideas on what groups of citizens need empowerment (for example, young people, children, and the poor).

Another major group of ideas in the debate on EU's democracy is constituted of the ideas related to the balance of power and competences between different institutions and on reforms that separate institutions should undergo to become more democratic.

Finally, there is a group of reform ideas focused on solving the EU's communication deficit problem (Belluati 2021; van Noije 2010). Communication deficit is a two-fold problem. On the one hand, there is a lack of 'communicative discourse' of elites informing and justifying their decisions – the vertical dimension (Schmidt 2008). On the other hand, there is also a horizontal dimension (Koopmans and Erbe 2004), which is a lack of communication – little to none – between public spheres of different member states.

Actors

From 2014 to 2019, more than 500 organisational actors and around 1000 individuals made statements on EU democracy and reform. These actors can be classified into the following categories: 1) EU institutions and political actors (including European parties and groups); 2) national state and political actors (including governments of EU member states, member states' parties and parliaments); 3) regional and local authorities; 4) civil society organisations including NGOs, think tanks, and trade unions; 4) media actors; 5) academics, and 6) private companies.

In addition to the multi-level structure of the EU, the participation of such a diverse range of actors in the debate can be explained by the fact that the issue of democracy is a complex and politically sensitive one. The connection of democracy with sovereignty and balance of power makes it a matter of high importance for political actors across the levels of the EU political system. Apart from a sincere desire to improve the democratic qualities of the EU, some actors were interested in the debate because their power and authority were at stake. This includes member states' governments, European institutions, national parliaments, and regional and local authorities. Furthermore, the growing importance of the EU integration debate in domestic politics made national political parties active participants in the debate around EU democracy and reform. While some parties exploit the issue to gain voters' attention and support, others just have to respond.

Since the EU democratic reform debate is also part of a larger discussion on the overall crisis of democracy, it is not limited to the discussion of a balance of power between institutions and different levels of government. This debate covers broader issues of a better model of society and power system that would allow the representation of interests of different groups of its members. It makes civil society organisations promoting racial and social justice and equality active participants in the discussion on EU reform.

Not all actors and not all types of actors were equally engaged in the debate and participated consistently. With less than a third of the total number of actors engaged in the debate each year, the composition of the participants changed significantly over the years. Only 5% of the actors participated in the debate

throughout all six periods, while almost 70 % made statements just in one time period (Figure 2).

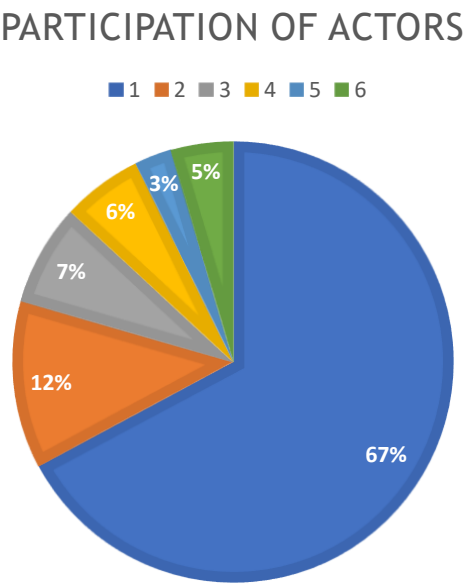


Figure 2. Share of actors that participated in the debate in one, two, three, four, five, and six out of six periods under consideration.

Regarding the stability of actors' participation, the debate shows a core-periphery structure. This characteristic should be distinguished from the core-periphery network structure based on the frequency of engagement with ideas since it is based only on the duration of participation and does not take into consideration the strength of the bond between actors based on the number of statements they used to co-support or co-reject ideas.

Unsurprisingly, the core of the debate was constituted predominantly by EU member states. It also included main EU institutions and European party groups as well as major governmental and oppositional nation-level parties such as German SPD and CDU/CSU, French Parti Socialiste and National Front, and Polish PiS. The least represented category of actors at the core of the network is the group of civil society organisations. Thus, only ENAR and ETUC appeared in the debate every year from 2014 to 2019, while European Youth Forum, Transparency International, Social Platform and CEO participated in the debate in five years out of six. The periphery consists of civil society organisations, individuals with no organisational affiliations, some national-level parties and academics.

This structure is not surprising. On the one hand, media works as a filter since it does not cover all the actors and geographic areas with similar intensity.

On the other hand, it does reflect the EU's structure as a polity and a decision-making system.

Networks of actors

Analysis of the debate on the EU's democratic reform showed an open and fluid network with many diverse actors. As has been mentioned in the previous section, configurations of participants changed considerably from year to year, which means that the boundaries of the debate were open.

As van Waarden (1992, 35) points out, open networks are often associated with 'chaotic patterns of interrelations and low intensity and symmetry of interrelations'. This is the case for the network of the EU democratic reform debate. The connections between actors in the debate were unstable. Thus, the average duration of interrelations was around 1.8 periods. The fact that participants discussed many concepts (more than 400 overall) did not lead to actors being linked by strong connections. On the contrary, more than 65% of all links in the overall aggregated network were based on sharing only one concept, which indicated that a lot of the ties were weak.

It should be noted, however, that fluidity of interrelations between actors differed depending on the level of ideas that were discussed. As has been mentioned, an analytical distinction is often made between programme, philosophic, and policy ideas. These ideas that form actors' belief systems differ in their scope as well as in their potential to resist transformations. This research focuses on program and instrumental ideas, which were the most discussed in the debate on the EU's democratic reform.

Around 70% of all actors engaged with ideas of programmatic level throughout the period under consideration. The debate was quite fluid, with many actors entering and leaving the network in a chaotic manner. However, at the same time, the core of more tightly interconnected actors with more consistent participation consolidated over time. In other words, in the course of the debate, the network takes on the features of a core-periphery structure in which there is a group of more stable participants that are interconnected with each other (core) and less stable and less connected actors (periphery). In terms of the core structure, although it was interconnected, as Figure 3 demonstrates, it did not

form a unitary coalition. The core constituted of member states' governments, European institutional bodies (such as the European Commission, the Council, the EP, and the EESC), European political groups, and some national parties in the network, is represented as quite a stretched entity. This entity comprises a few segments with more tight links between the actors. Although Figure 3 does not demonstrate conflict lines between actors, it is clear that actors located on the opposite ends of the core advocated for different ideas but were interconnected by actors with in-between positions. The further sections of this chapter will discuss the major cleavage lines.

More than 80% of all actors engaged with instrumental ideas such as institutional transformations. Although, as on the level of program ideas, a similar core of actors with more active and stable participation in the debate can be distinguished, it is less structured (Figure 4). The network of actors looks like clouds of overlapping discussions around different issues. The clouds were unstable and disappeared when attention to the topic decreased. However, a few ad-hoc short-term coalitions were identified in the debate around important institutional innovations – such as Spitzenkandidat and transnational lists. To a large extent, they mirror the confrontations on the higher level of the debate.

Networks of ideas

The landscape of ideas was less volatile than the landscape of actors. Thus, Figure 5 shows that around one-third of all concepts compared to more than two-thirds of actors appeared in the debate in one out of six years under consideration, while 13% of all concepts (compared to 5% of actors) stayed in the debate throughout the entire period from 2014 to 2019. Furthermore, more than 40% of concepts were present in the debate for at least three years, which is considerably higher than the per cent of actors involved in the debate for the same period of time (14%).

However, it should be noted that around 17% of concepts were mentioned by one actor only. This means that actors diverged considerably in terms of their attention to topics they communicated in the discourse. In essence, although the debate was open to new ideas, many of them did not get much attention and support from the general body of actors.

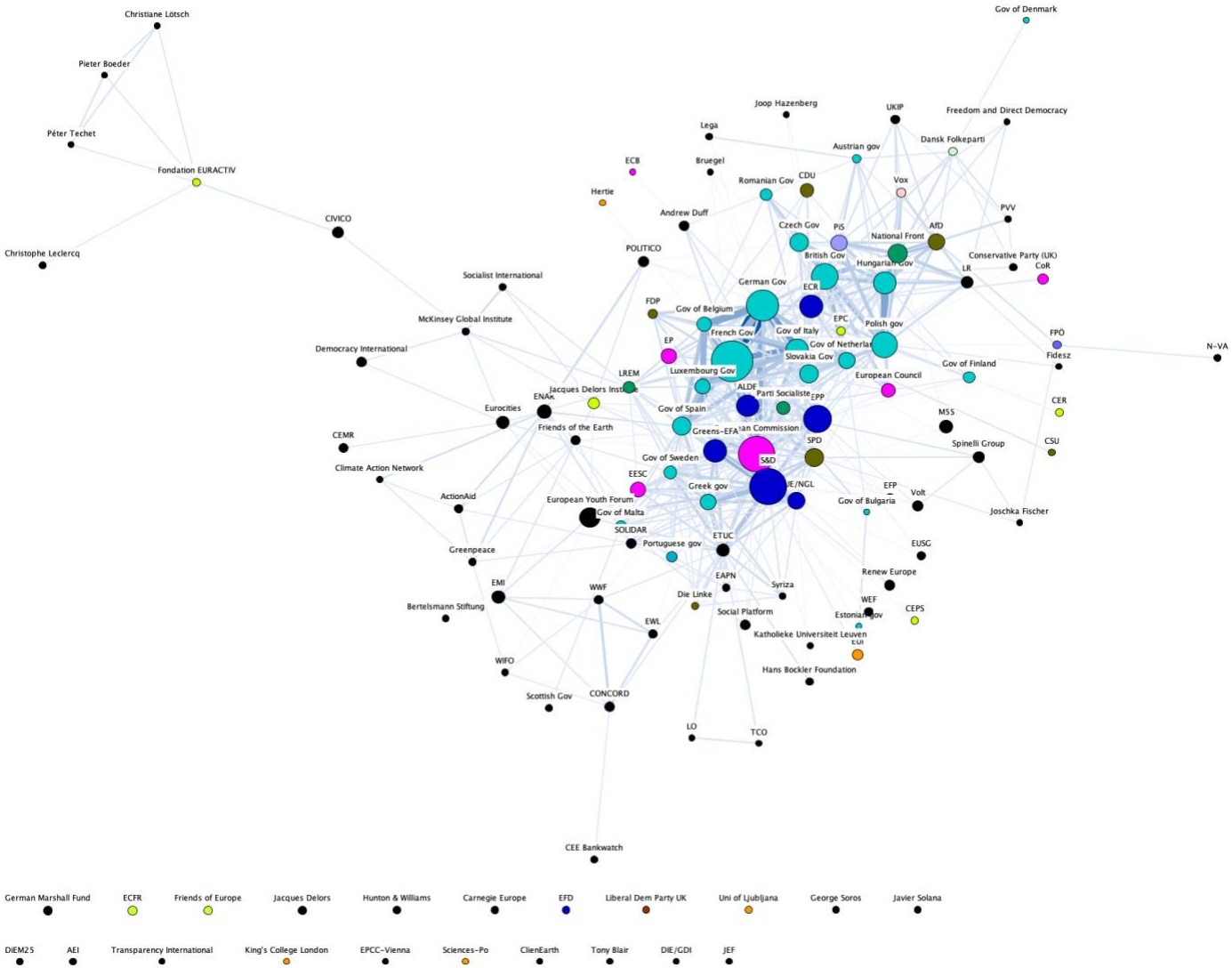


Figure 3. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the program-level ideas of the EU's democratic reform debate.

Notes: The network is normalised (w ≥ 0.27). The network includes actors who made more than four statements between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours are as follows: pink for institutions of the European Union, blue for European Party Groups and European Political Parties, red for UK political parties, orange for academic institutions, turquoise for governments of the EU member states, green for French political parties, dark green for German political parties, light blue for Polish political parties, light pink for Spanish political parties, purple for Slovak political parties, lime green for think tanks, black for NGO's and other organisational and individual actors. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

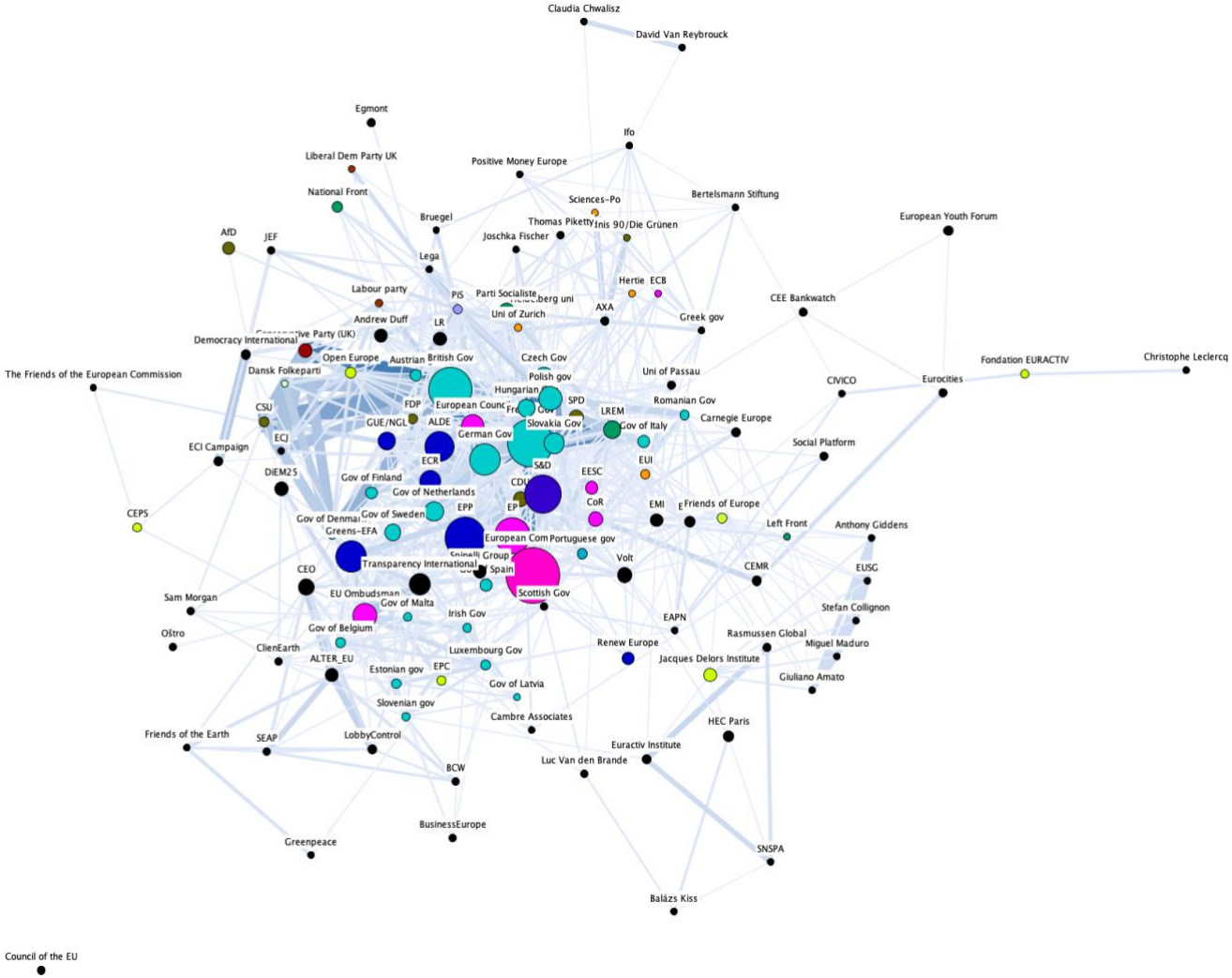


Figure 4. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the instrumental-level ideas of the EU's democratic reform debate.

Notes: The network is normalised ($w \geq 0.244$). It shows actors who made more than four statements between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

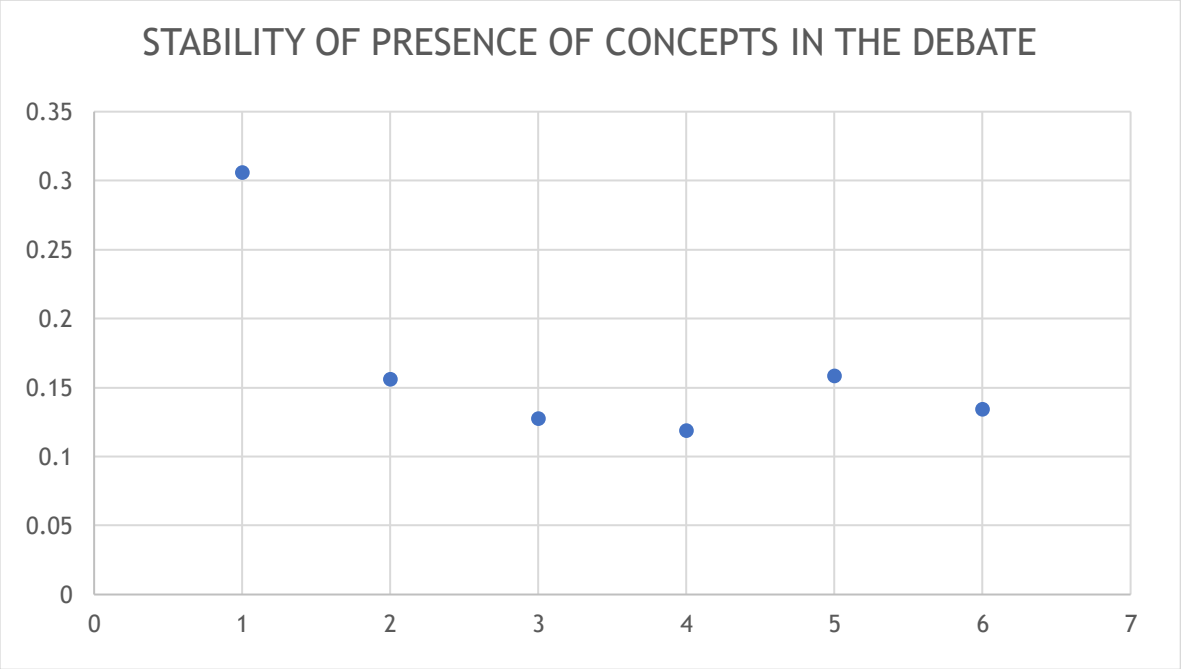


Figure 5. Share of concepts that were present in the debate in one, two, three, four, five, and six out of six periods under consideration.

As in the case of actor-networks, structural characteristics of the idea-networks differed depending on their level.

The analysis of the data showed that the network of concepts on the level of *programmatic* ideas included around 32% of the overall number of concepts. All the groups of ideas mentioned earlier were represented. The network was open; however, it was not extremely fluid. Thus, less than 10% of all the concepts appeared only once in the debate. There was a very small core of tightly interconnected concepts, while almost 50% of all the links between ideas had a weight equal to 1 (these ideas were shared only by one actor).

In terms of the structural characteristics, as Figure 6 demonstrates, the network of programmatic ideas was divided into two subgroups: pro-European and pro-'nation-state'. The pro-European subgroup of ideas was dominant in the debate. It included more concepts than the opposing group, and its concepts were more frequently used. The core of this subgroup was constituted of ideas of Social Europe, more transparency, deeper integration, and democratic accountability of European economic governance. These ideas were the most salient and tightly interrelated.

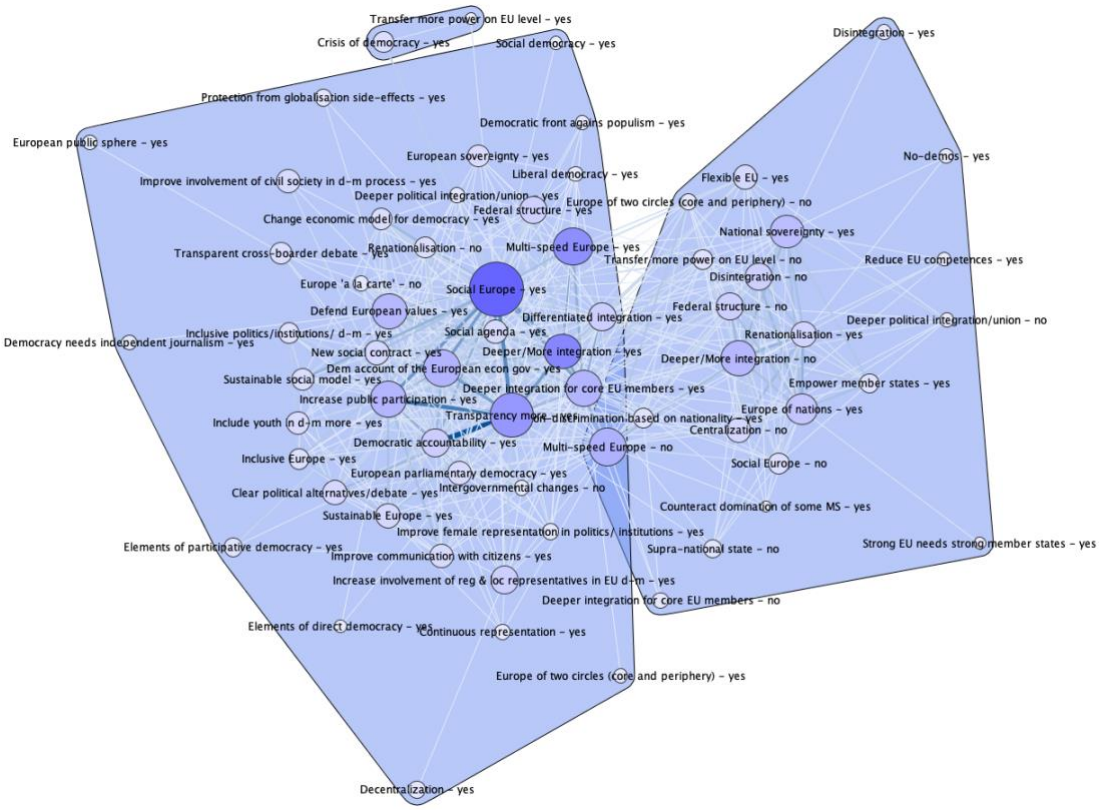


Figure 6. Aggregated congruence network of program-level ideas of the EU's democratic reform debate.

Notes: The network includes program-level ideas that appeared in the debate between 2014 and 2019. Ideas with less than seven statements made in their support were excluded. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

Remarkably, the pro-European group of concepts includes a lot of ideas on how to reorganise Europe and politics (decision-making) overall. In contrast, the opposing group had a much narrower focus on maintaining national sovereignty and competences at the national level. The latter is not surprising since supporters of less Europe want to keep the focus of democracy on the nation-state level; it is within this narrow political community they would define common goals.

Another thing worth noting is that the two groups of ideas were interrelated (even overlapping). This means that there were actors supporting ideas from both groups. As mentioned in Chapter 3, according to Princen and 't Hart (2014, 473), this can explain the incremental character of reforms because when ideas are not incommensurable, there is 'greater scope for…ideational bricolage'. On the one hand, this is in line with the previous dynamics of change. The EU has continuously

developed as a hybrid balancing between intergovernmental and supranational logic. But with the recent intensification of Euroscepticism, ideas could have become more polarised.

The level of instrumental ideas was populated with two times more concepts than the programmatic level. However, this larger and more open network was much more fragmented and fluid. More than 24% of ideas appeared only once in the debate. Although there was a continuation of the cleavage line present on the programmatic level in the institutional balance sub-debate, no coherent systems or subgroups of ideas can be identified at the overall network level. Remarkably, the degree of open confrontation was very low in the debate on instrumental ideas. These were the networks where ideas mainly were generated rather than openly debated, with the exception of Spitzenkandidat, transnational lists, and the governance of the Eurozone sub-debate.

In sum, many ideas were communicated on the EU democratic reform. The overall community of actors shaping the EU's democratic reform discourse was large and open to new actors and new ideas. It means that the lack of ideas was not the reason for limited reform. However, as mentioned, most ideas disappeared soon after they entered the debate without getting attention or an extensive support base. Moreover, the analysis showed competing sets of ideas in the debate on the level of programmatic ideas and some confrontations in the debate on instrumental ideas. In the following sections, I will discuss the major cleavage lines and their dynamics.

What is also of importance is that although there was a flow of actors and ideas in this subsystem, the debate was dominated by predominantly powerful actors with significant decision-making power. These actors have more power to initiate change and help ideas succeed. Chapter 7 will look in more detail at their behaviour in discourse to see what ideas they supported and rejected and whether their priorities aligned.

Main cleavage lines

Debate on the focus of democracy is about who should be the sovereign – the governing self in the EU. But it is also inextricably linked with discussions on integration and the nature of the EU as a polity.

Traditionally the idea of sovereign polity is associated with a bounded political community and a notion of a state. The people is sovereign within their polity as long as they have authority over the laws they are subjected to (Heermann and Leuffen 2020). At the same time, people agree to be bound by collective decisions because they consider themselves to be part of the governing self.

The idea of integration questions the conventional understanding of sovereignty as it presupposes sharing sovereignty and even shifting it to another level (Beetz 2019; Lord 2021). From a traditional perspective on sovereignty, the ultimate challenge for the EU members as separate polities is their decreasing authority over the laws they are subjected to and, therefore, their autonomy (Bickerton 2012). For the EU as a nascent polity, the main problem is a lack of common identity (Grimm 2009). This is to say that there is no pan-European political community that can create legitimate rules for itself.

The democratic deficit of the EU from this perspective, therefore, results from its hybrid nature, which is more than an international organisation, but not yet a state. So, the most obvious way to solve this problem is either to keep the focal point of democracy on the national level or to shift to the supranational level completely (Goebel 2013). The former means that national sovereignty should be fully restored or kept as intact as possible, while further integration should be limited. The latter entails the acceptance of the idea of European sovereignty, deepening of integration, and creating a fully-fledged European state.

It should be noted that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the idea of a sovereign state with one autonomous demos as an ultimate source of authority is not the only imaginable normative ideal. Two alternative visions of sovereign transnational polity exist (Beetz 2019). First, the idea of a polity with dual sovereignty (Habermas 2017) in which both national and European sovereignty coexist and citizens exercise them simultaneously. This means that EU citizens belong to their national demos and transnational European demos. The second alternative option is demoicracy (Nicolaïdis 2013; Bellamy and Kröger 2017; Bohman 2005), a polity where the sovereignty is shared by multiple peoples that ‘govern together, but not as one’ (Nicolaïdis 2013). This theoretical construct rejects the necessity of common European demos for democratic governance. In

sum, according to proponents of transnational democracy, democratic government can function beyond the state within the union of states (or people) willing to create this kind of shared government.

Sovereignty, (dis)integration, and centralisation of power

In this section, two interrelated sub-debates – on integration and the focal point of democracy – will be discussed. The analysis of the overall body of concepts across time showed that the focus of democracy conflict line was the most pronounced and the most persistent one on the level of programmatic ideas, with around 30% of all actors participating in the debate. The discussion of integration also took a prominent position in the overall debate on EU democratic reform.

Although ideas of integration and sovereignty are tightly interrelated, they will be discussed separately in this chapter – except for the network of ideas that will show the sub-debate together. The reason for that is two-fold. On the one hand, although support for integration has been linked with supranationalisation and the idea of transfer of sovereignty to the EU level, in reality, integration can be realised in different ways, some of which do not entail centralisation (Csehi 2017; Börzel 2005). On the other hand, the debate on integration was very intensive and polarised; it can mask the structures of actors in the discussion on sovereignty and the locus of power in the EU.

Thus, the section will start by introducing the concepts that constitute the sub-debate and analysing them separately. It will proceed with the analysis of the networks of ideas and finish with a discussion of the network of actors.

Ideas

The sub-debate on integration was constituted of four ideas presented in Figure 7: broadening and deepening the EU integration, deepening political integration, disintegration, and unity. This sub-debate was structured around the idea of broadening and deepening European integration. As Figure 7 shows, it was the most discussed and contested idea.

It is remarkable that although there was a clear disagreement on whether or not to proceed with the integration process, the scale of the presence of the

idea of disintegration was very small. It should be noted that the concept of disintegration included statements that suggested either leaving one or a few areas of integration (such as Eurozone or Schengen) or the EU overall or dismantling it. In other words, the idea of leaving the EU was very rarely mentioned in the debate. Moreover, as depicted in Figure 8, the ratio between positive and negative statements on disintegration changed dramatically over time.

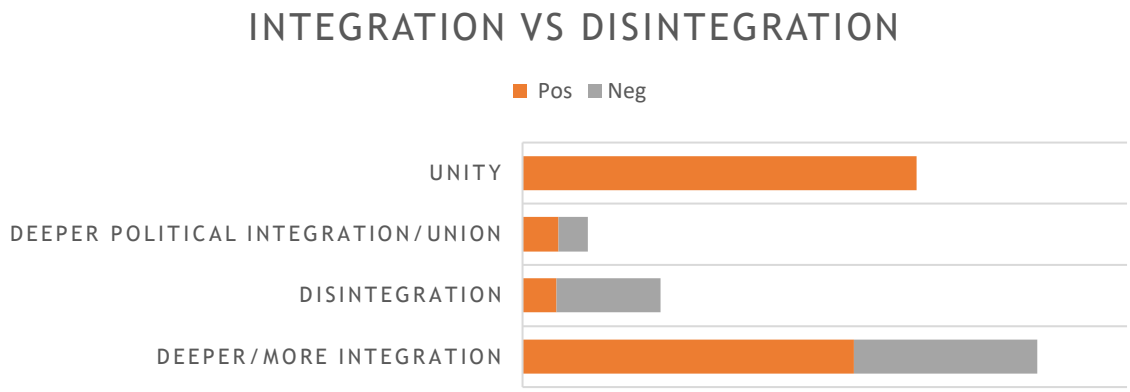


Figure 7. Statements made in support and rejection of ideas in the sub-debate on integration.

On the other hand, the concept of unity was very popular. As can be derived from Figure 7, it was the second most used concept, and no statements were made to reject it. Even more interesting is that support for unity linked advocates and opponents of the idea of further integration. Thus, Figure 9, which shows the aggregated congruence network of ideas for this sub-debate, demonstrates that the idea of unity has strong links with both 'Deeper integration – yes' and 'Deeper integration – no'. Due to the fluid and unstable nature of the debate, an aggregated network was created that includes all ideas and their interconnection simultaneously regardless of when in particular (within the time period under consideration) they appeared.

In sum, there was a consensus around the need to preserve the union. However, there was no consensus on the future of integration. As further analysis will show, there was also disagreement on how to organise the EU as a political system and where to keep the focus of democracy.

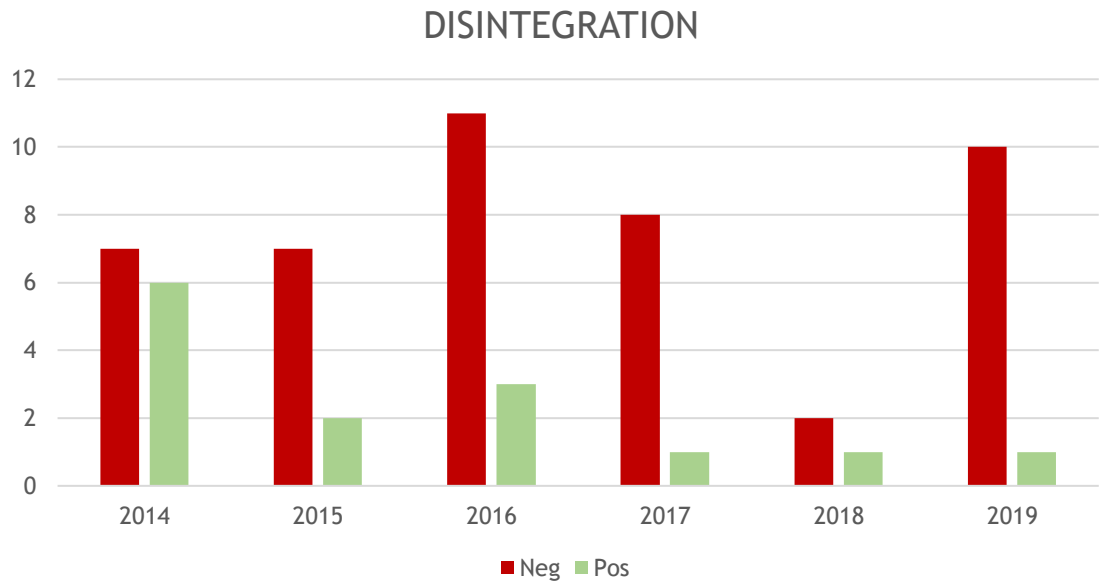


Figure 8. Number of statements made in support and rejection of the idea of disintegration per year.

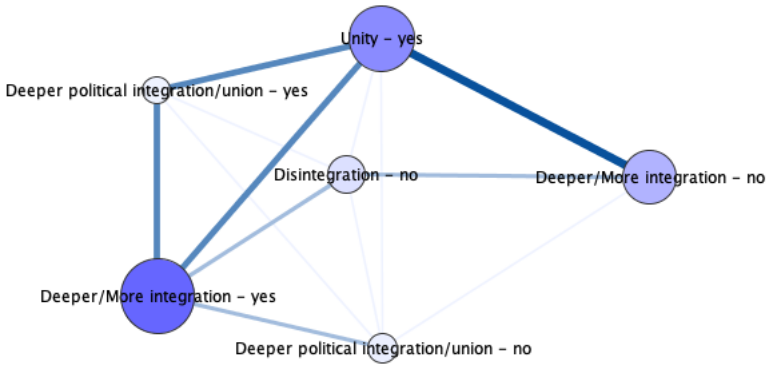


Figure 9. Aggregated congruence network of ideas for the integration sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows concepts that appeared in the debate between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the focal point of democracy is a complex issue. Concepts that constitute this sub-debate can be divided into three groups. The first group includes ideas that explicitly mention sovereignty – such as national sovereignty, European sovereignty, or shared sovereignty. They either define who the sovereign is (the focal point of democracy) or what the relationship between European and national sovereignty should be. The second group of concepts is constituted of ideas on the distribution of power and competences between different levels in the EU. These are concepts such as 'Empower member states',

‘Transfer more power to the EU-level', and such ideas as the EU as a transnational or multi-level democracy. The third group of ideas addresses the question of what kind of political organisation the EU should have. This includes such ideas as the federal EU, ‘Europe of nations’ as a looser union, and the EU as a superstate.

The level of disagreement was considerably higher than in the overall debate. Although there were many uncontested concepts, almost half of the ideas had both advocates and opponents. As Figure 10 demonstrates, the most heated debate was around the ideas of the federal structure, renationalisation, intergovernmental changes, and the transfer of power at the EU level.

Although Figure 10 shows disagreement on ideas, it does not allow us to see the complexity of interrelations between them. DNA was applied to the data set to capture the interplay between different ideas. As a result, an aggregated network of concepts was computed and visualised through visone (Figure 11). A few observations can be made. First, as anticipated, this sub-debate was divided into two major groups. Group 1 was structured around the support of the concept of European sovereignty, the federal EU,and European parliamentary democracy, as well as the rejection of renationalisation and intergovernmental changes. The core idea of the second group is support for national sovereignty. Among other prominent ideas of this group are the rejection of the supranational state, federal structure, and centralisation. Unsurprisingly, the reform options in this group of ideas included empowerment of member states and renationalisation, while the desired model of political organisation was the looser union of nations.

The second interesting observation is that despite the overall dominance of pro-European ideas on a programmatic level, in this sub-debate, the most prominent group of concepts – with stronger internal links and a more significant number of statements made – is the one that is centred around the idea of national sovereignty. In other words, this sub-debate was primarily led by Eurosceptics and proponents of national sovereignty. The idea of European sovereignty appeared in the debate only in 2017. Comparison of Figures 6 and 11 shows that this sub-debate was central to the overall system of their programmatic level ideas. At the same time, the pro-European discourse was more focused on other ideas such as Social Europe, transparency, and further integration.

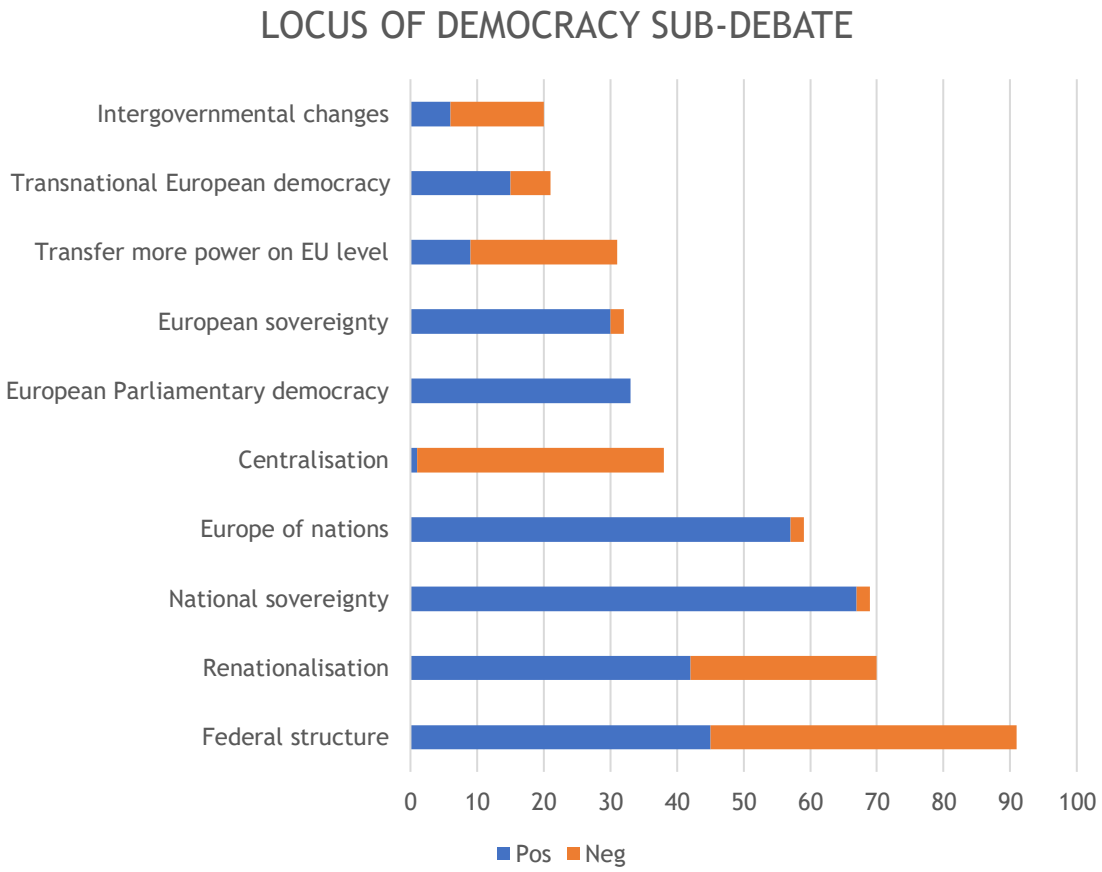


Figure 10. Ten most discussed ideas in the sub-debate on the focal point of democracy.

However, it is worth noting that although ideas in this sub-debate can be divided into two distinct groups, they are interconnected. It means that some actors engaged with ideas from both groups simultaneously. Thus, it would be unfair to say that the pro-European group of ideas denies the notion of national sovereignty. As Figure 11 demonstrates, the rejection of the idea of national sovereignty was in the marginal position in the debate.

Moreover, it may seem that conflict was also structured around the idea of the federal EU, which has become has become synonymous with centralisation and stateness (Fossum and Jachtenfuchs 2017) and the EU as an intergovernmental organisation. However, the situation is more complex than that.

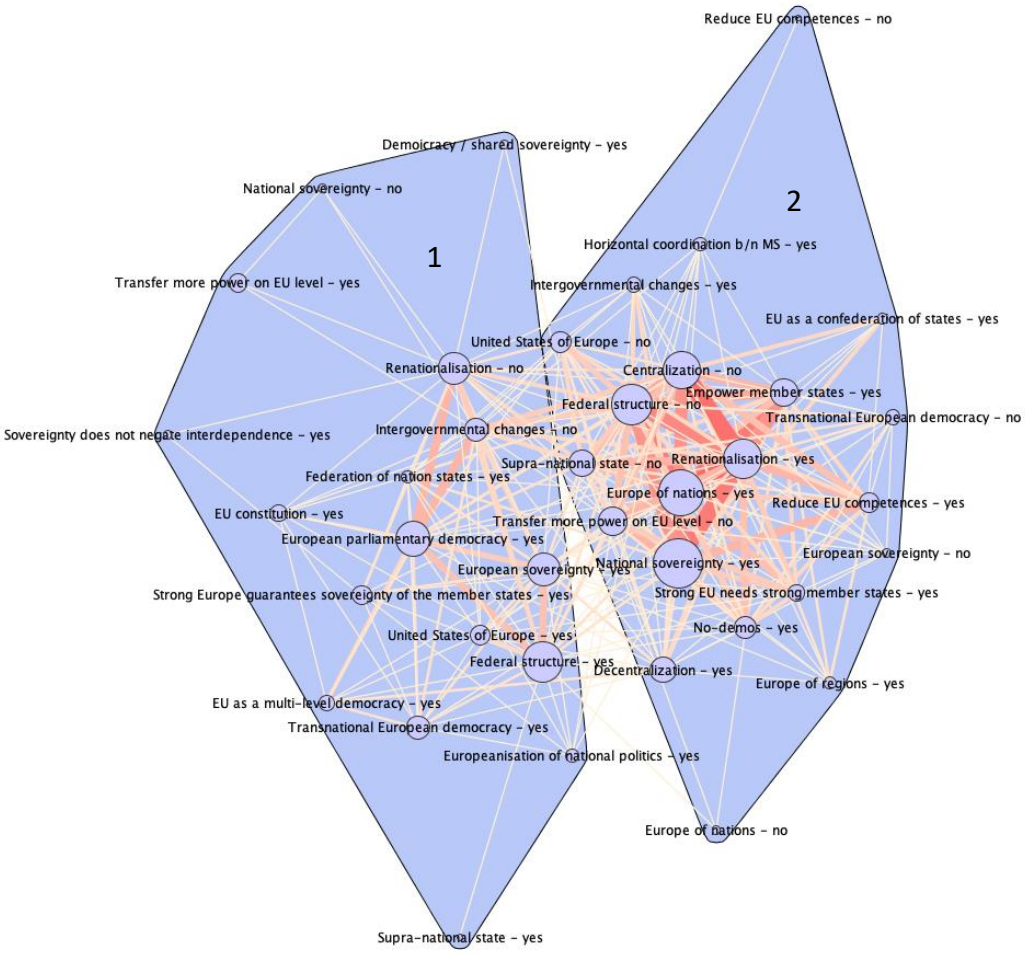


Figure 11. Aggregated congruence network of ideas for the 'focus of democracy' sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows ideas that appeared in the sub-debate between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

As Figure 11 demonstrates, support for establishing a supranational state and transferring more powers to the EU level also took marginal positions and only appeared once in the debate. Thus both supporters and opponents of the federal EU did not want the EU to be transformed into a fully-fledged supranational state. Furthermore, a closer look at the links the concepts of the 'federal structure–yes' and 'integovernmental changes–no' (Figure 12 and Figure 13) shows these ideas had connections with the ideas of support for national sovereignty and rejection of centralisation. Therefore, the cleavage line in this sub-debate lay between the idea of an intergovernmental union and a federal union rather than a state.

However, as mentioned, although there was a conflict line, the debate was interconnected, especially in the upper part of the network. It means that there was a division within the pro-European ideas, which is more subtle and not clearly visible in Figure 11. While there was an agreement (within the pro-European set of ideas) on the need for European democracy, there was no consensus on balance between the two focal points of this democracy – national and European. This conflict line revealed itself in the debate on the lower-level idea of transnational lists (see Chapter 6 for more details). Moreover, a more detailed analysis of the links the idea of intergovernmental changes had with other ideas in this sub-debate showed that it had even stronger ties with the pro-'nation-state' group of concepts. This includes links to ideas that support horizontal coordination and reject federal structure and centralisation.

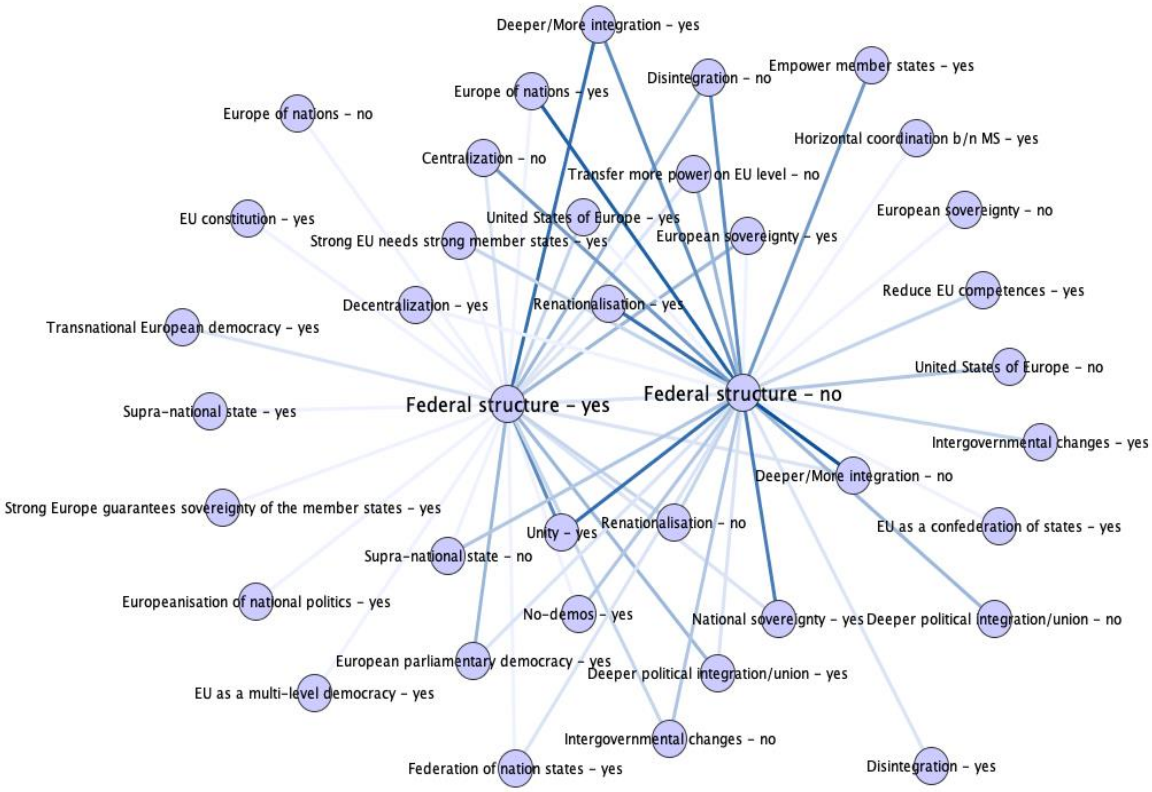


Figure 12. Aggregated congruence network of the idea of the federal EU.

Notes: It shows all the links the idea had with concepts from the 'focus of democracy' sub-debate between 2014 and 2019. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

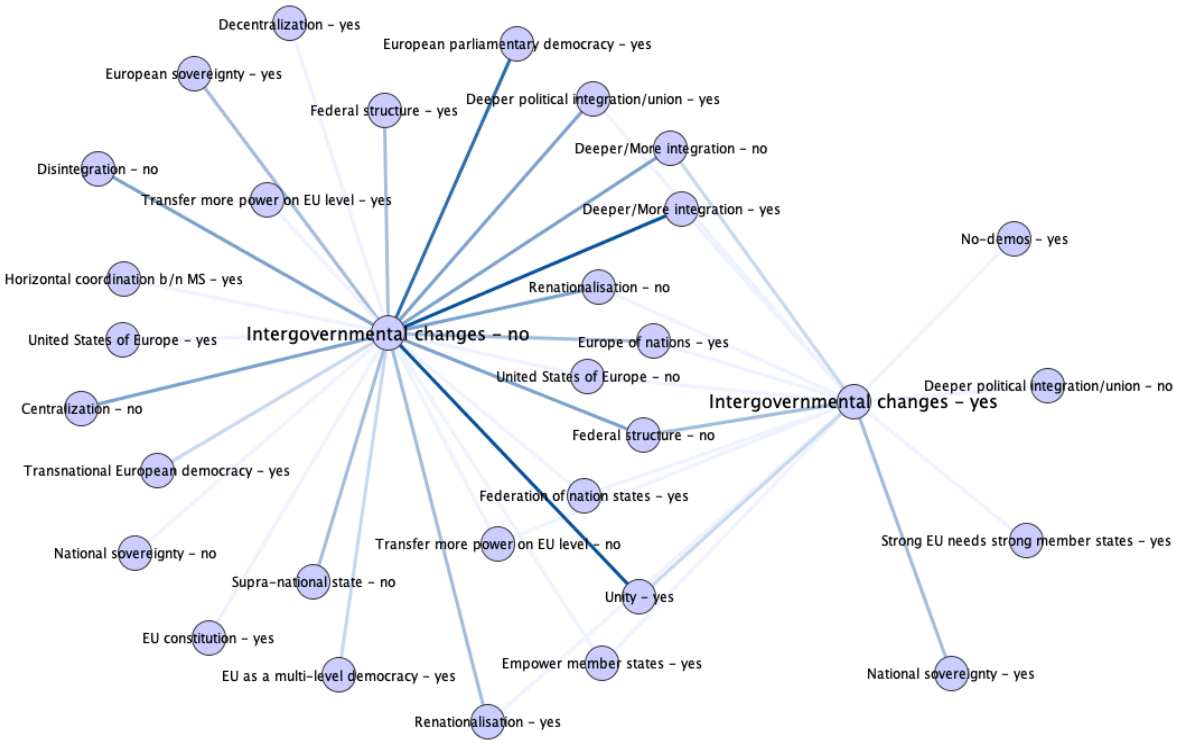


Figure 13. Aggregated congruence network of the idea of the intergovernmental changes.

Notes: It shows all the links the idea had with the concepts from the 'focus of democracy' sub-debate between 2014 and 2019. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

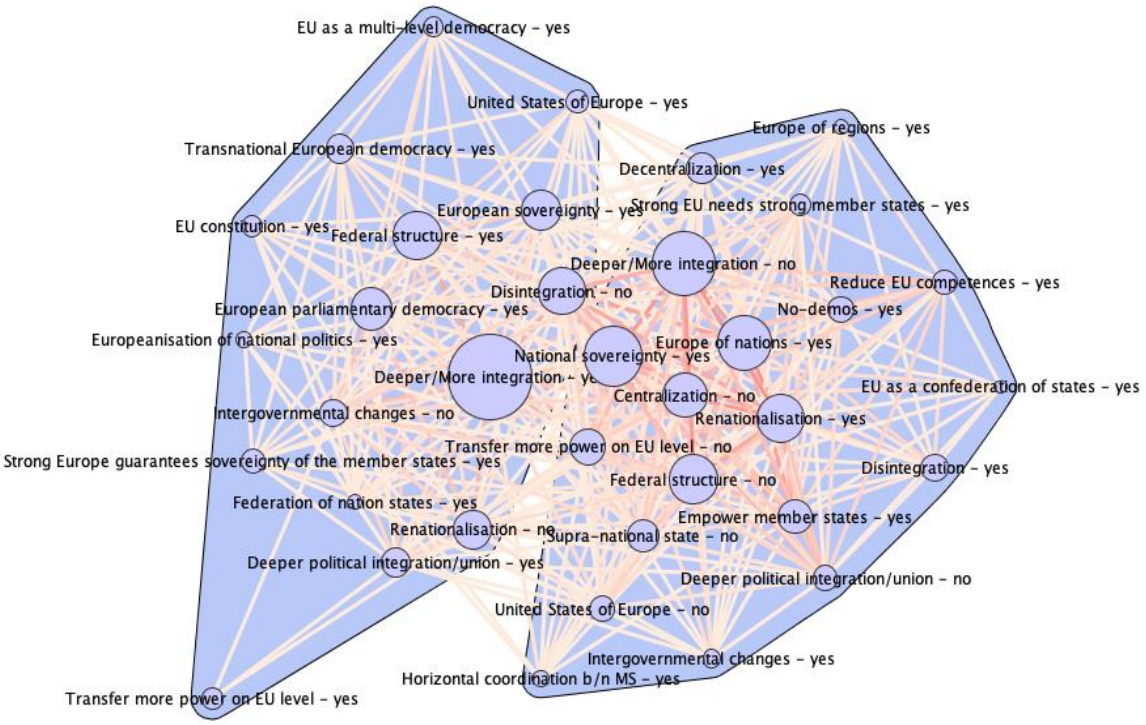


Figure 14. Aggregated congruence network of ideas for the 'focus of democracy' and integration sub-debate.

Notes: The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

Finally, Figure 14 shows the sub-debate on the focal point of democracy with integration-related concepts added. One can see two similar groups of ideas joined by the rejection of the idea of disintegration. Overall, in this network, the support for integration belongs to the group of ideas on European democracy and federal EU, while rejection is a part of a group of pro-nation state ideas. However, it should be noted that rejection of integration was often presented in conjunction with the idea of not allowing empowering 'Brussels'. In other words, it seems possible that the dispute is largely not on integration or no integration per se but instead on the idea of centralisation of powers.

Actors

Figure 15 shows an aggregated network of organisational actors who participated in the debate on the EU's democracy loci more than once between 2014 and 2019. Due to the fluid and unstable nature of the debate, it may be challenging to grasp actors' positions in relation to each other. However, since the positions of actors on this topic did not change much over time, it makes sense to investigate aggregated networks in search of coalitions. The aggregated network allows seeing all main actors and their interconnection simultaneously, even if the statements were made at different time points.

There are two reasons to look at organisational actors. First, although the graph with organisation actors does not show the internal divisions within a state, party, or institutional actor, these actors often have to act as unitary actors in the EU arena. Thus, in the news outlets, member states' positions, parties, or institutions are covered without any reference to a specific person. It is, therefore, insightful to see a snapshot of these average positions on the debate map, especially given that it is possible to further investigate internal conflict by looking at the person level preferences. The second reason is theoretical – the Advocacy Coalition Framework deals with (predominantly) organisational actors and influential individuals (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994).

As Figure 15 demonstrates, organisational actors were divided into two major groups interconnected by the set of bridging nodes. The actors in the left part of the graph (group 1) are the proponents of national sovereignty, who object to centralisation of powers and transfer of competences at the EU level, while

actors on the right (group 2) are supporters of pro-European ideas, of a federal union and European democracy.

The subgroup of actors that engaged with the idea of European democracy contains a number of European Party Groups (S&D, ALDE, Greens-EFA, GUE/NGL), national parties and movements (SPD, LREM, Volt, Diem25), prominent individuals academics as well as former EU politicians and officials, think tanks and NGOs. Unsurprisingly, not many governments support these ideas – only French and Greek state actors can be seen in this part of the graph. However, this does not mean that they reject the idea of national sovereignty (thus, only two of all the 1000 actors openly said that national sovereignty had become an illusion). What it means is that their hopes for a better future and more democracy lie with the EU rather than the nation-state.

The actors resisting centrifugal forces of European integration and the idea of European sovereignty are more numerous and include many more governments. In line with expectations, this group includes Eurosceptic parties from different member-states such as the Netherland, the Czech Republic, the UK, Germany, France, Poland, Hungary, and Austria and Eurosceptic European Parliamentary groups of ECR and EFD. Also, among its active members were a few governmental actors of the EU member states and two major French parties: Les Republicans (LR) and the French Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste).

The reasons for organisational actors' in-between positions differ. It can stem from an internal disagreement, which is usually the case when a member state is governed by a coalition of different parties with different perspectives on sovereignty, or a disagreement between concessive governments. The latter is true for the Italian, Czech, and Slovak governments. There were, however, actors holding the in-between positions because they accepted both pro-European and pro-'nation-state' ideas. For instance, Germany actively supported a few ideas of the pro-'nation state' group but rejected the idea of renationalisation. As Freudlsperger and Jachtenfuchs (2021, 117) point out: '[Germany] prefers the regulation of national capacities over the creation of European capacities, and (increasingly) the intergovernmental rather than supranational control of those capacities. Only in existential crises, Germany supports European capacity-building under intergovernmental control'. Extrapolating this to the focus of democracy debate, the German government accepted the idea of transnational

democracy, but the focus of this democracy should have been left on the national level.

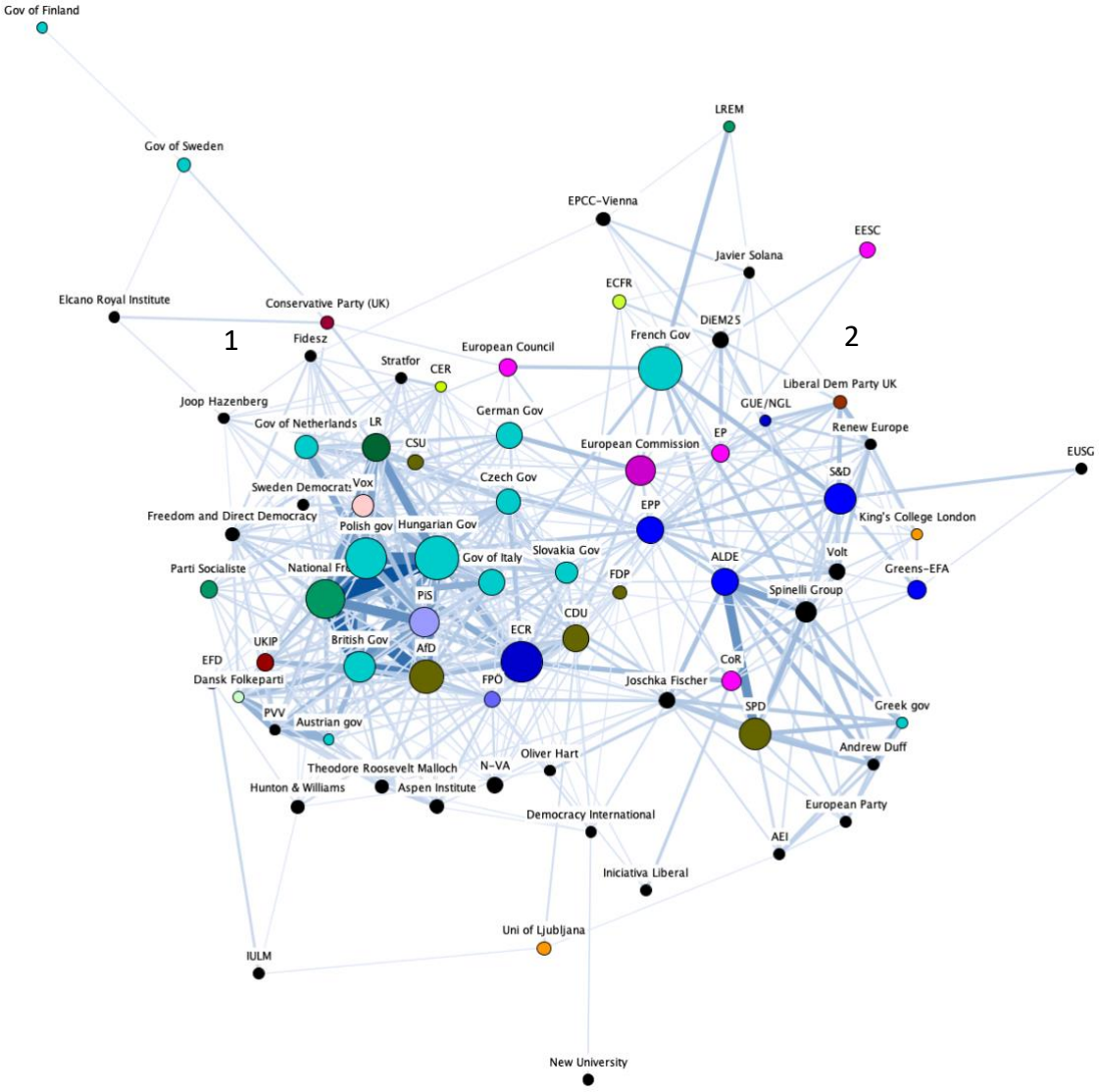


Figure 15. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate.

Notes: The network shows actors who participated in the debate between 2014 and 2019. Actors that made only one statement were excluded from the network. The network is normalised ($w \geq 0.4$). The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: the same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

In order to get a better understanding of the debate, we should also look at its development in time. Figures 16 to 21 demonstrate the temporal changes in the debate on sovereignty. It is clear from comparing these graphs that the debate intensified and became more complex over time. The remarkable thing is that the

network became more connected. Although there is a divide structured around more vs less Europe ideas, there was a trend towards convergence. This convergence was both inter-coalitional and within the group supporting national sovereignty and nation-state as a focal point of democracy.

At the beginning of the period, the group of advocates of national sovereignty was split on the matter of disintegration. While the so-called 'hard' Eurosceptic parties (Treib 2020) advocated for disintegration, other actors accepted the idea of the union. As Figure 22 demonstrates, most supporters of less Europe were in the group that rejected disintegration – it is a group on the left. However, in line with the most recent literature on Eurosceptic parties (Treib 2020; Ivaldi 2018), the analysis of EU media discourse demonstrated the shift of the nationalist parties towards a softer Euroscepticism. In other words, the 'hard' Eurosceptic parties that used to be anti-systemic switched to the idea of reforming the EU from the inside, which is reflected in the in-between position these actors take in the aggregated network of actors shown in Figure 22. This resulted in the consolidation of the cluster advocates for national sovereignty around the ideas of a looser 'Europe of nations' union.

The change in the composition of the group of supporters of the nation-state as the focal point of democracy and national sovereignty is also remarkable and worth mentioning. Thus, Figures 16, 17, and 18 show that before the Brexit vote, together with the nationalist parties, the UK government was the leading actor in the national sovereignty and less Europe coalition. However, with Brexit and the migration crisis, the countries of the Visegrad group (especially Hungary and Poland) took the leading roles.

There was also an inter-coalitional convergence. Thus, the position of one of the most active and prominent pro-European actors and proponents of the idea of European sovereignty – Emanuel Macron – also shifted towards the idea of the EU as an alliance of nations. However, his alliance is a 'federation of nations', which implies closer cooperation than the 'Europe of nations' advocated by the proponents of 'less Europe'. It is worth mentioning that Macron's vision of the EU has been criticised for not 'provid[ing] a clear definition of what sovereignty is, beyond power, and a clear link between sovereignty and democracy' (Bogain 2020, 226). In essence, his vision does not seem to be very well elaborated or communicated in the discourse clearly.

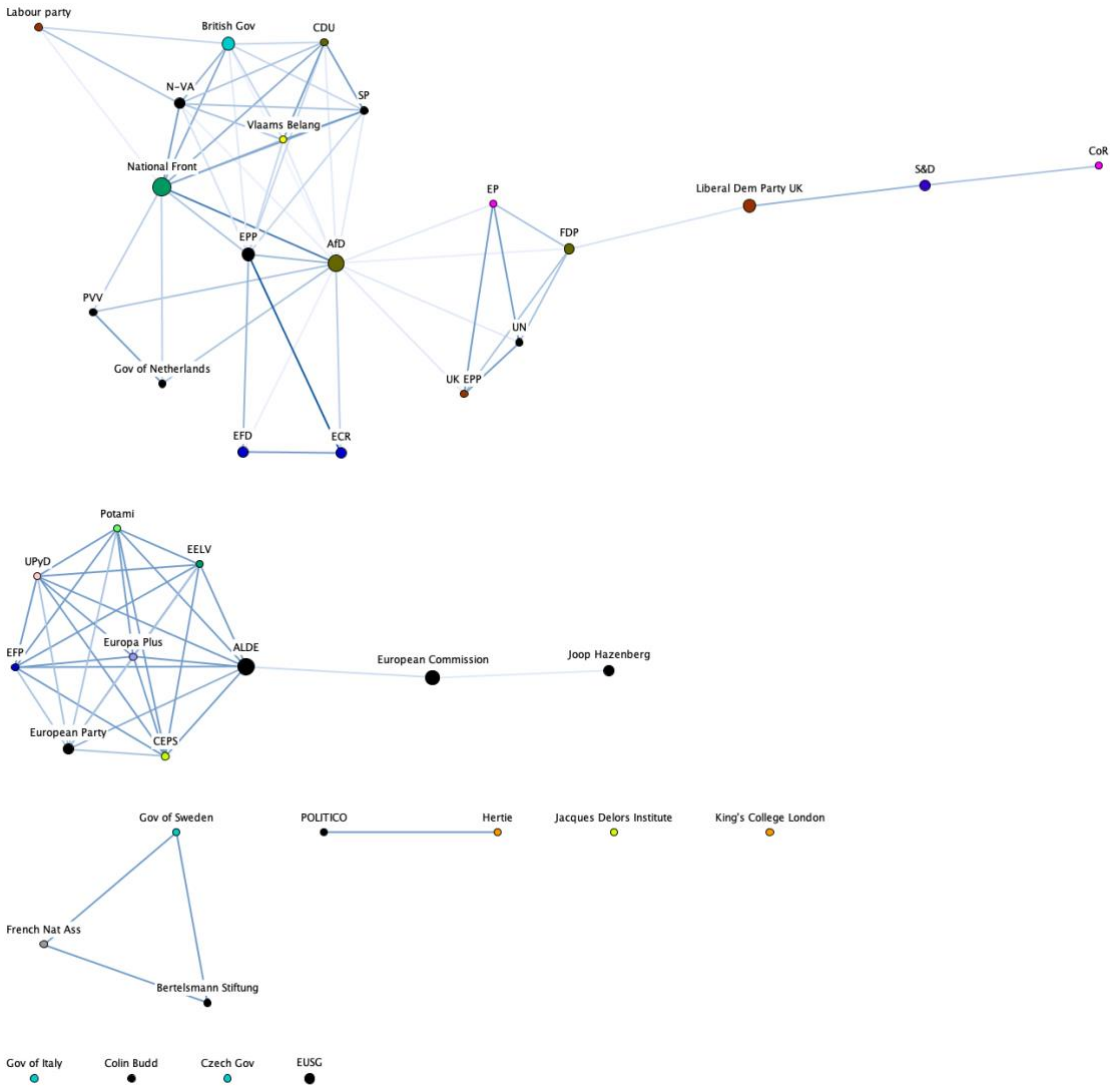


Figure 16. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2014.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

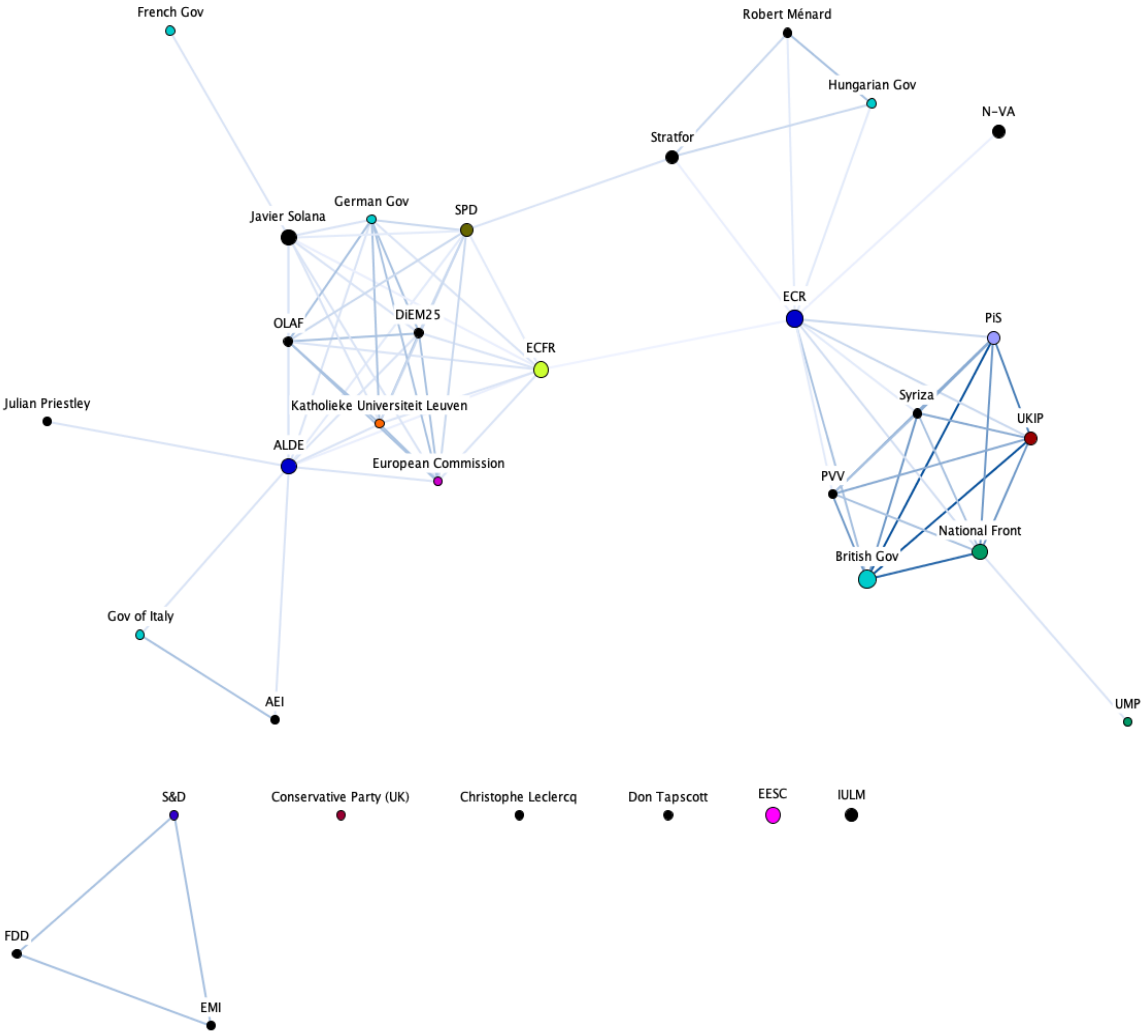


Figure 17. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2015.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Same colours as in Figure 3 Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

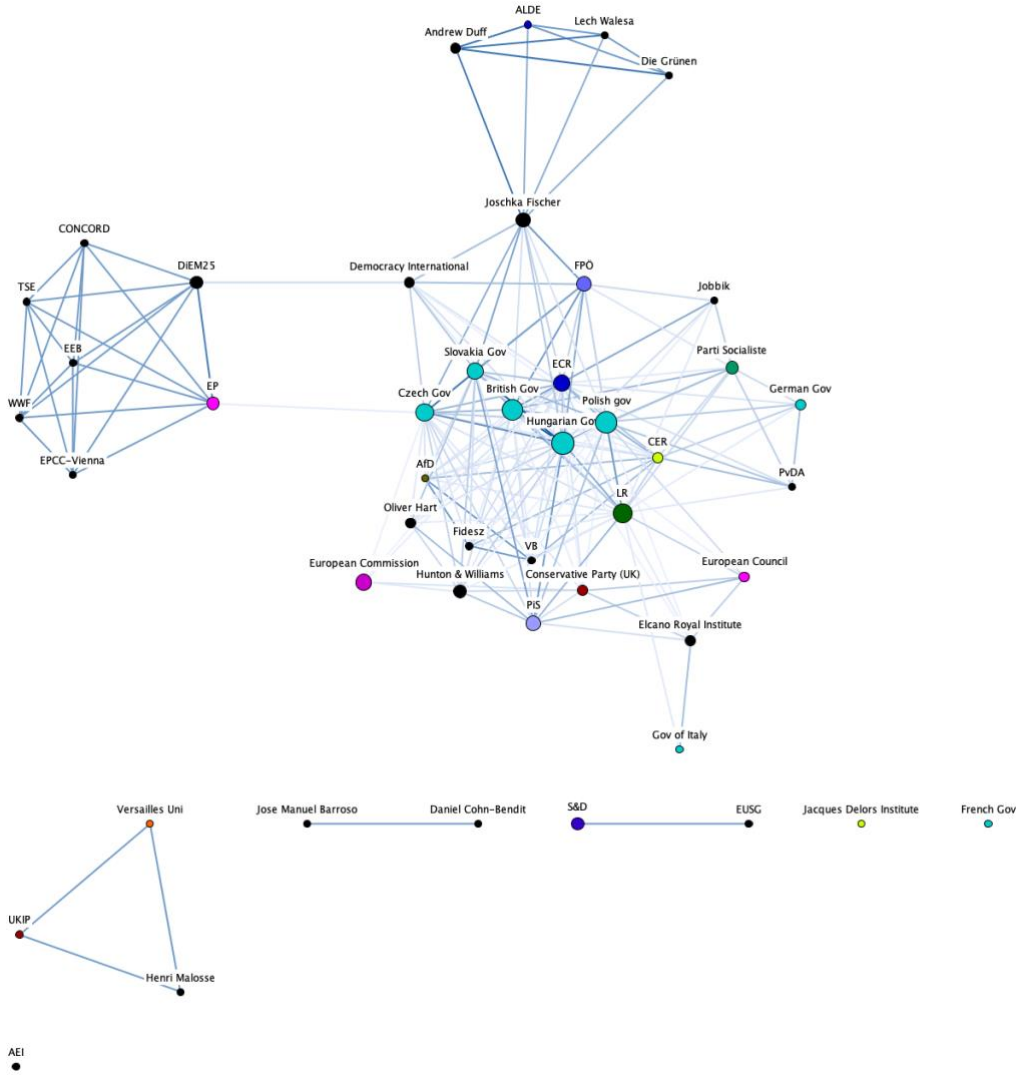


Figure 18. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2016.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Same colours as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

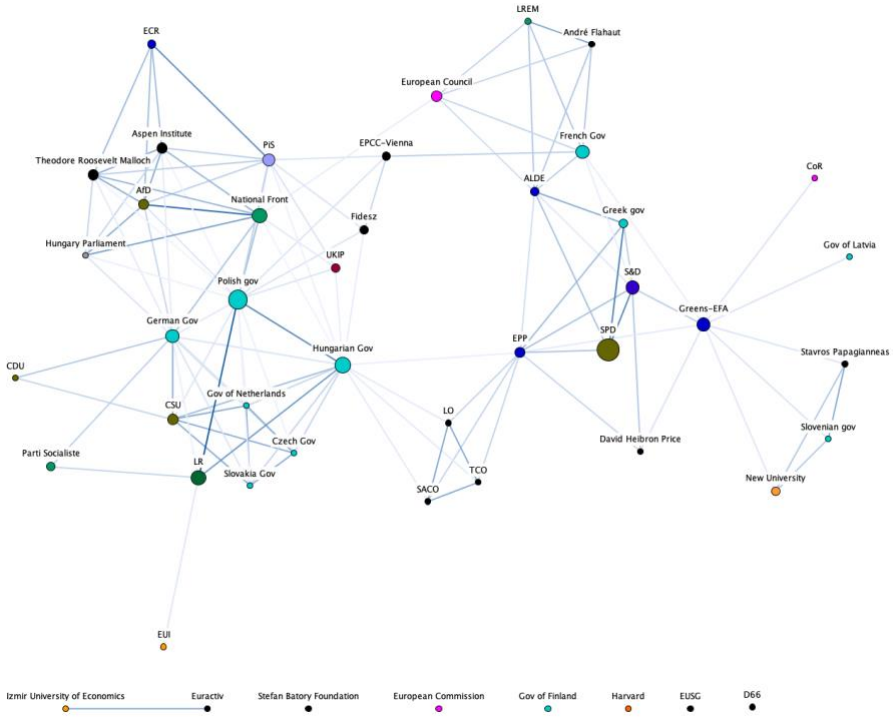


Figure 19. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2017.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Same colours as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

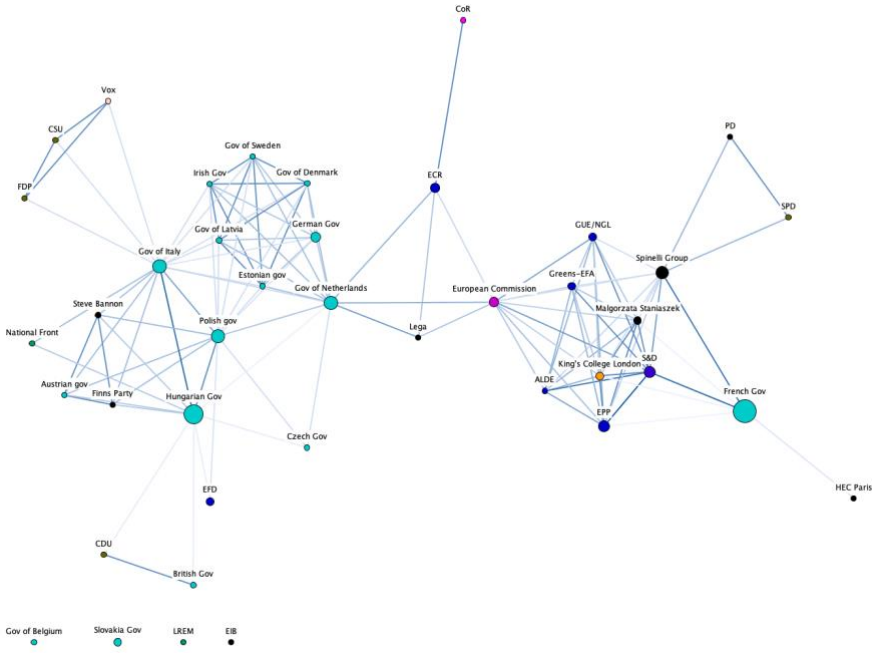


Figure 20. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2018.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Same colours as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

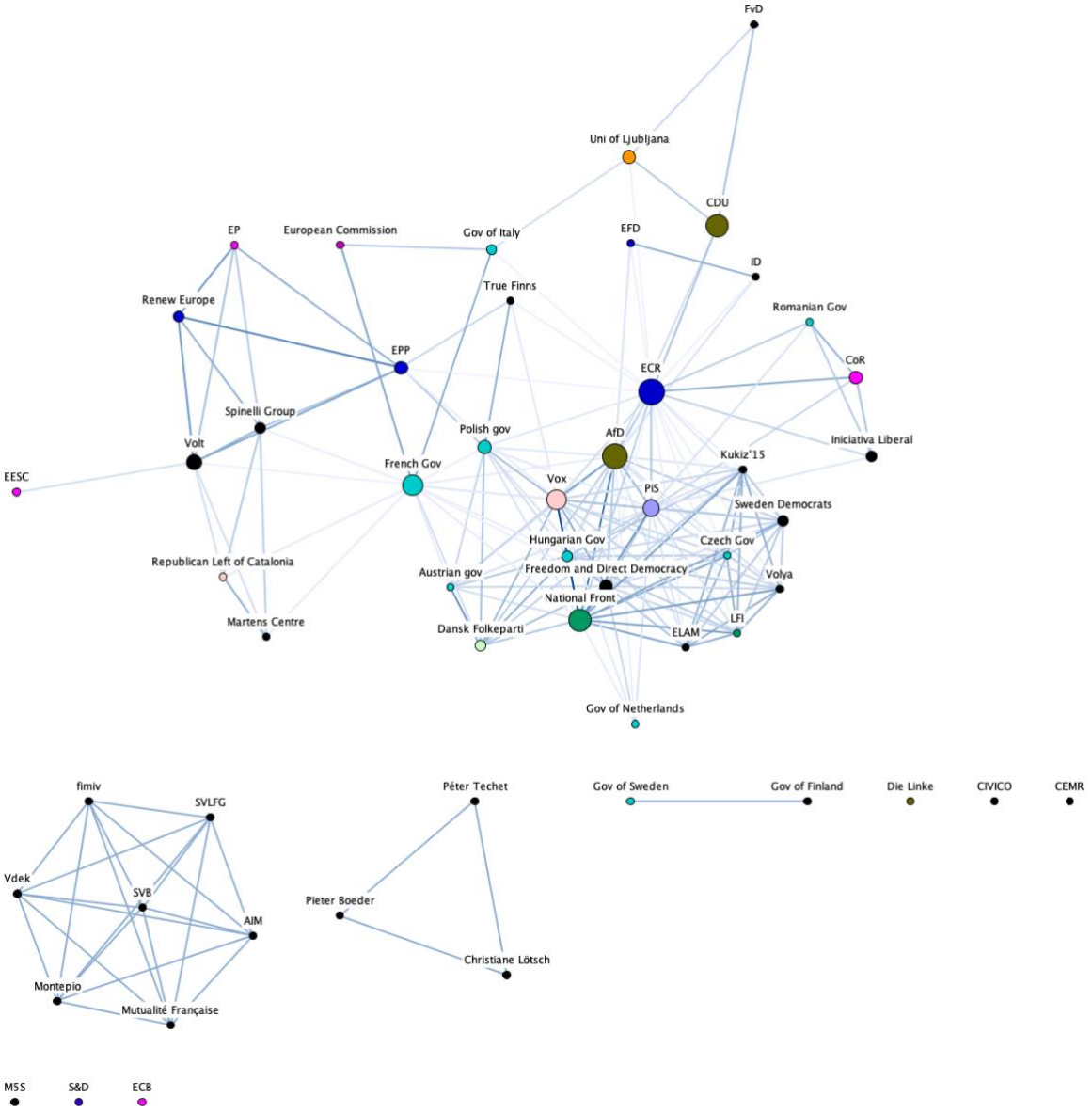


Figure 21. Congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the 'focus of democracy' debate in 2019.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Same colours as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

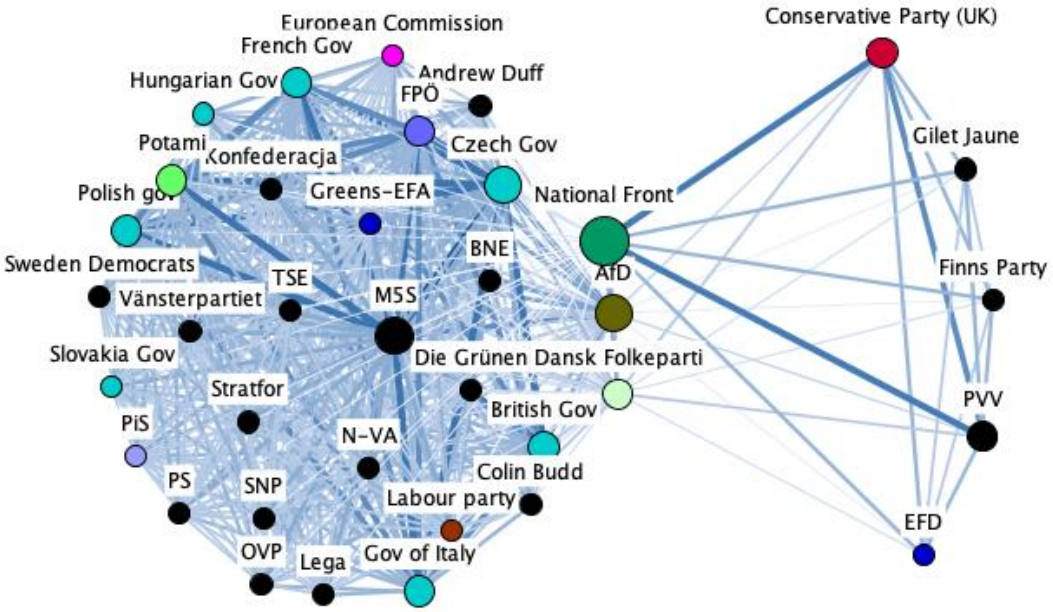


Figure 22. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the debate on the idea of disintegration.

Notes: The network shows actors who participated in the debate between 2014 and 2019. The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

Overall, although it is difficult to speak about the emergence of a consensus on the EU's desired model and end goal, with an agreement reached on the need to sustain the union, a trend for convergence was visible in the debate.

On the matter of further integration, the debate was also split (Figure 23), which aligns with the analysis of the ideas networks. However, as mentioned, the analysis of the statements made by actors shows that opposition to integration was, to a large extent, the opposition to centralisation of power. What is remarkable is that Britain was the main opponent of integration in the debate. Hence, with the Brexit vote, the new Eurosceptic governments that took the lead in the group and other actors were less active in rejecting integration. Moreover, as Kyriazi (2021) points out, Hungary was in favour of enhanced cooperation. Thus, the main confrontation has shifted to the discussion of differentiated integration.

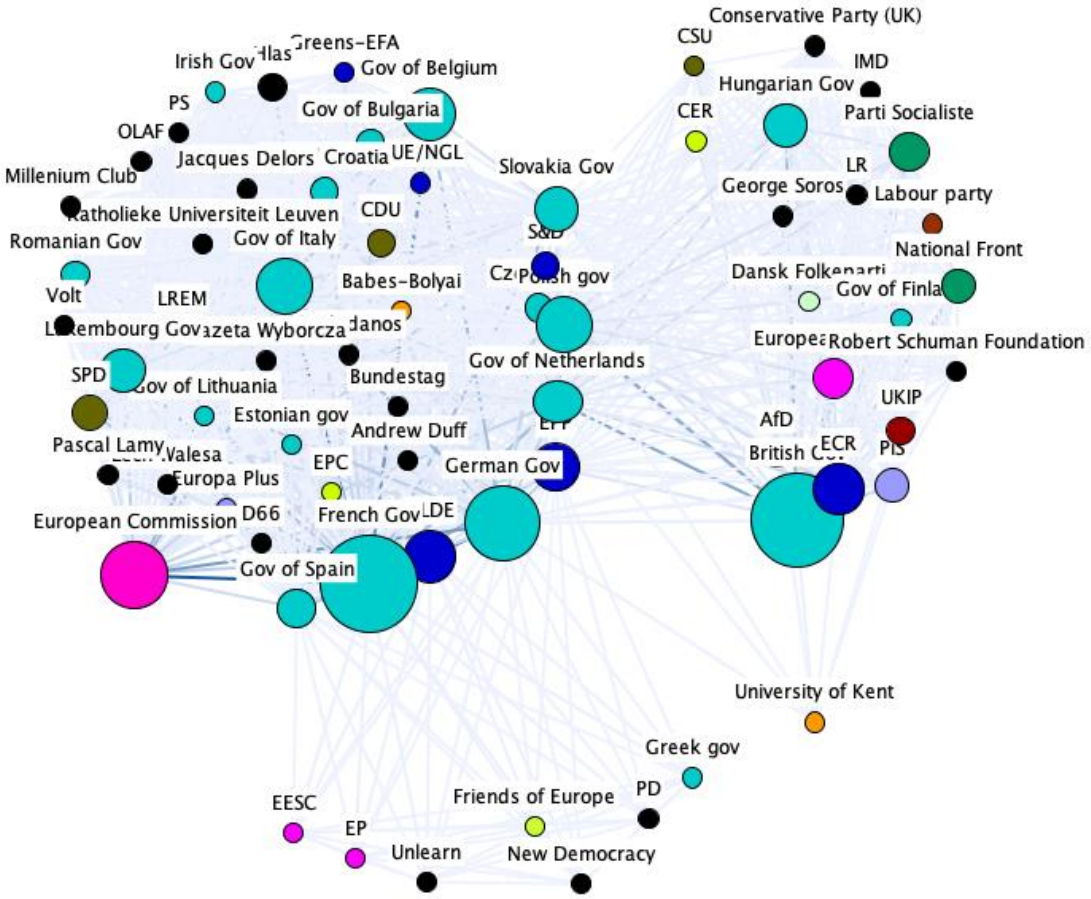


Figure 23. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for the debate on deeper/more integration and deeper political integration.

Notes: The network shows actors who participated in the debate between 2014 and 2019. The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

Unity without uniformity (and domination)

While the previous section described one of the central cleavage lines, which lies between the supporters of more Europe and less Europe, this section will focus on a second major conflict – on the level of programme ideas – established around differentiated integration.

There is a consensus among academics that differentiation is a reality and intrinsic feature of the EU (Schmidt 2019a; Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014; Verhelst 2013). As Vivien Schmidt (2019a, 294) puts it: '[T]he future of Europe will be one of differentiated integration. The question is not whether but how that

differentiation will develop'. This is a pragmatic question as well as a normative one because it is intrinsically linked to the quality of the EU democracy.

The EU is not a uniform political system and integration project. Having increased the number of its members from 6 to 28, the EU had to accommodate differences in their preferences and capacity (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014). Allowing accelerated integration for those willing to deepen (or broaden) cooperation and opt-outs for those who were not, the EU managed to avoid gridlock.

However, there is a certain tension between the notion of union and differentiation. Although it has been acknowledged that differentiation can be beneficial for political unity (Tekin, Meissner, and Müller 2019), it is important to strike a balance between two ideas and not undermine unity by too much differentiation. In other words, the EU needs to ensure enough flexibility for the system to accommodate the diversity of its members but not allow differentiation to stimulate more divergence than it could handle.

Heterogeneity of a political system brings about democracy-related issues (Lord 2021). This includes creating a fair decision-making process and ensuring the autonomy and equality of its members when they do not form a conventional community and have different rights and obligations (Heermann and Leuffen 2020).

What the DI brings is a matter of its institutional design and a method for differentiated integration.

Differences in differentiation

Differentiated integration is a concept overarching various principles of integration and sometimes contradictory visions of the EU polity end goal. There is, however, a fundamental difference between temporary and durable (permanent) accommodation of heterogeneity and, thus, the resulting political systems. There is also a considerable difference between the systems of integration that emerge from various types of durable integration.

The idea of a multi-speed Europe, for instance, is built on the variety in pace but uniformity in goals of integration. As the official EU definition of a multi-

speed integration says: ‘whereby common objectives are pursued by a group of EU countries both able and willing to advance, it being implied that the others will follow later’ (EUR-Lex 2018b). The assumption is that integration generally leads to convergence and elimination of disparities between states (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020). Thus, although some members in a certain period may lack the capacity to proceed at the same pace as others, they will inevitably join later. In essence, multi-speed integration is a temporary differentiation between countries trying to reach common goals, and DI is an intermediate step in the quest for uniform political union.

In contrast to temporary, durable differentiation is supposed to accommodate divergent goals and preferences of members rather than differences in their capacities (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020). Durable differentiation acknowledges that member states do not always share the same objectives and avoid uniformity. Thus, it results in a heterogeneous union either of a multi-tier Europe with a core of vanguard actors surrounded by circles of periphery actors (Piris 2012), a soft-core Europe of variable geometry with multiple overlapping communities, or a ‘Europe a la carte’ – a union of ‘clubs’ that do not necessarily go in the same direction (Schmidt 2019a; Majone 2014).

The difference between a hard and soft-core EU lies in the nature of the core. The former presupposes a strong and stable centre of gravity– ‘a fixed composition of a group of Member States all cooperating together on different issues and matters’ (Piris 2012, 70). It is implied that a core group shares quite a wide range of similar interests and goals and peruses them, allowing other actors to hold back. It is close to the idea of a multi-speed Europe. However, unlike in the case of a multi-speed integration, those lagging behind actors are not expected to join the vanguard group inevitably.

A soft-core EU (Schmidt 2019a) has a more complex structure without a pronounced centre. In this case, the union is more flexible and formed by several clusters structured around cooperation in separate policy areas. Because the lines are drawn not between the countries per se but rather between policy areas (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020) – soft-core Europe has a few groups of leading member states rather than one. In essence, this variable geometry type of differentiation ensures flexibility without creating deep dividing lines between

member states. Moreover, it also allows more flexibility regarding the direction of integration and the possibility of reordering the union.

'Europe a la carte' is a form of an even more flexible and looser union. Although it is stated in its official definition that this method of integration requires a minimum of areas of cooperation (EUR-Lex 2018a), the term is usually used to refer to an extreme form of differentiation when member states are 'cherry-picking' areas of cooperation and 'going forward in many different directions' (Schmidt 2019a, 306).

The EU has been developing combing different types of DI. However, the logic of temporary differentiation and a multi-speed integration was dominant in European discourse (Tekin, Meissner, and Müller 2019) and the actual integration process (Lepoivre and Verhelst 2013; Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020).

Debate on differentiated integration

As has been highlighted in the section on the focus of democracy debate, the idea of disintegration disappeared from the repertoire of nationalist parties by the end of the period. It was substituted by the concept of 'Europe of nations'. This was coupled with a sharp increase in attention to the ideas of unity (Figure 24) and differentiated integration (Figure 25). However, while broad consensus was formed around the need for unity, there was no agreement on differentiation.

Although the idea of differentiation was present in the debate before the Brexit vote, it was not very prominent. As Figure 25 demonstrates, there was a dramatic increase in the number of statements made on the topic of differentiated integration. The Brexit vote has had a dual effect on the differentiated integration discourse. On the one hand, it highlighted the existence of differences in preferences between EU members and demonstrated that these differences could be irreconcilable. This affirmed the idea that a uniform integration might be an unfeasible option for further development of the EU. On the other hand, the Brexit vote brought a chance for and realisation of the need for an impetus for the EU. All this intensified primarily the debate on a deeper integration for core members and the idea of two-speed or multi-speed Europe, which were used interchangeably.

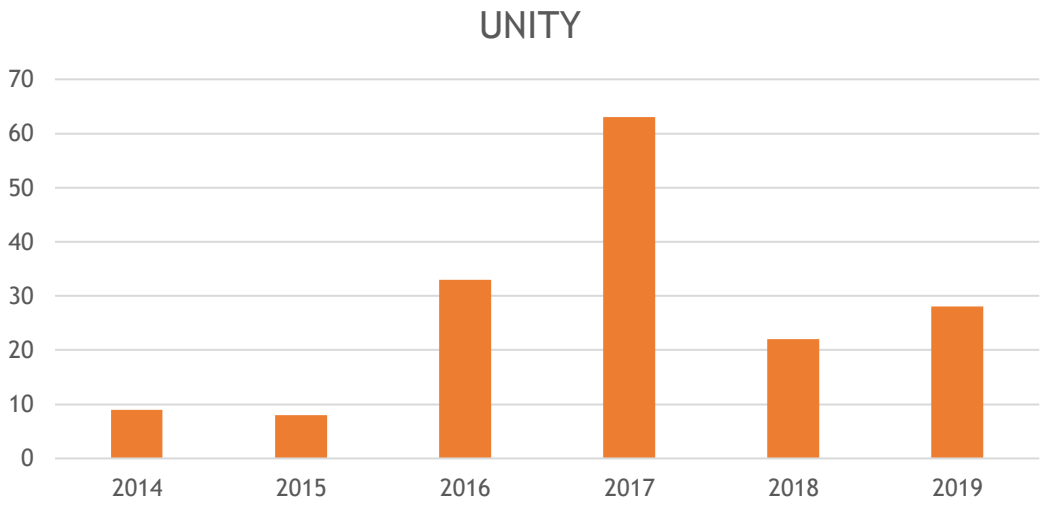


Figure 24. Number of statements in which the concept of 'Unity' was used per year.

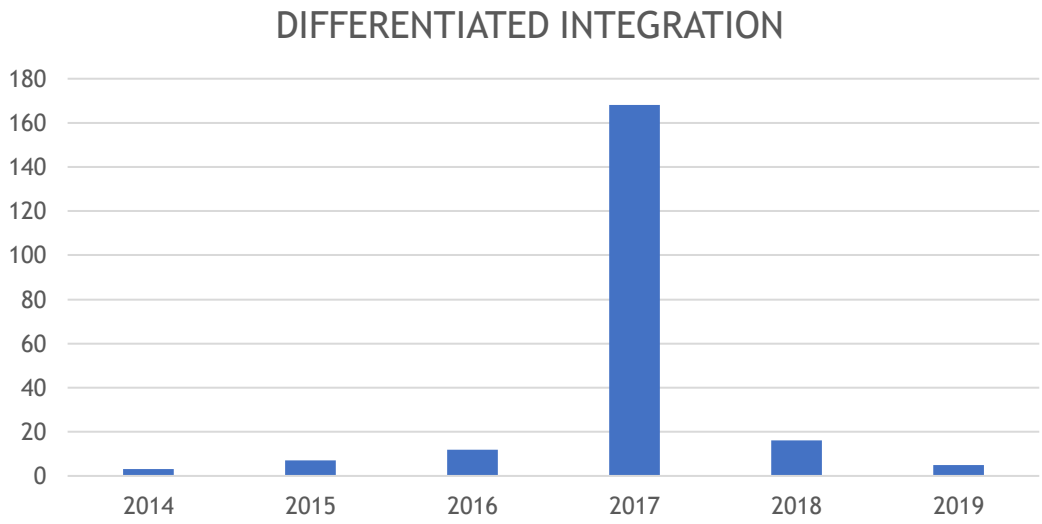


Figure 25. Number of statements in which concepts associated with DI were used per year.

These findings – the lack of consensus on the type of differentiation and acknowledgement of the need for DI for political unity – are in accord with recent studies of the discourse on differentiated integration (Tekin, Meissner, and Müller 2019). In essence, this indicates that between 2014 and 2019, the pre-existing trend continued and was further reinforced. However, even more interesting is a consolidation of a strong cleavage line between those supporting the multi-speed Europe and rejecting it. It is also remarkable that this conflict was formed due to democracy-related concerns around the idea of core-periphery development of Europe.

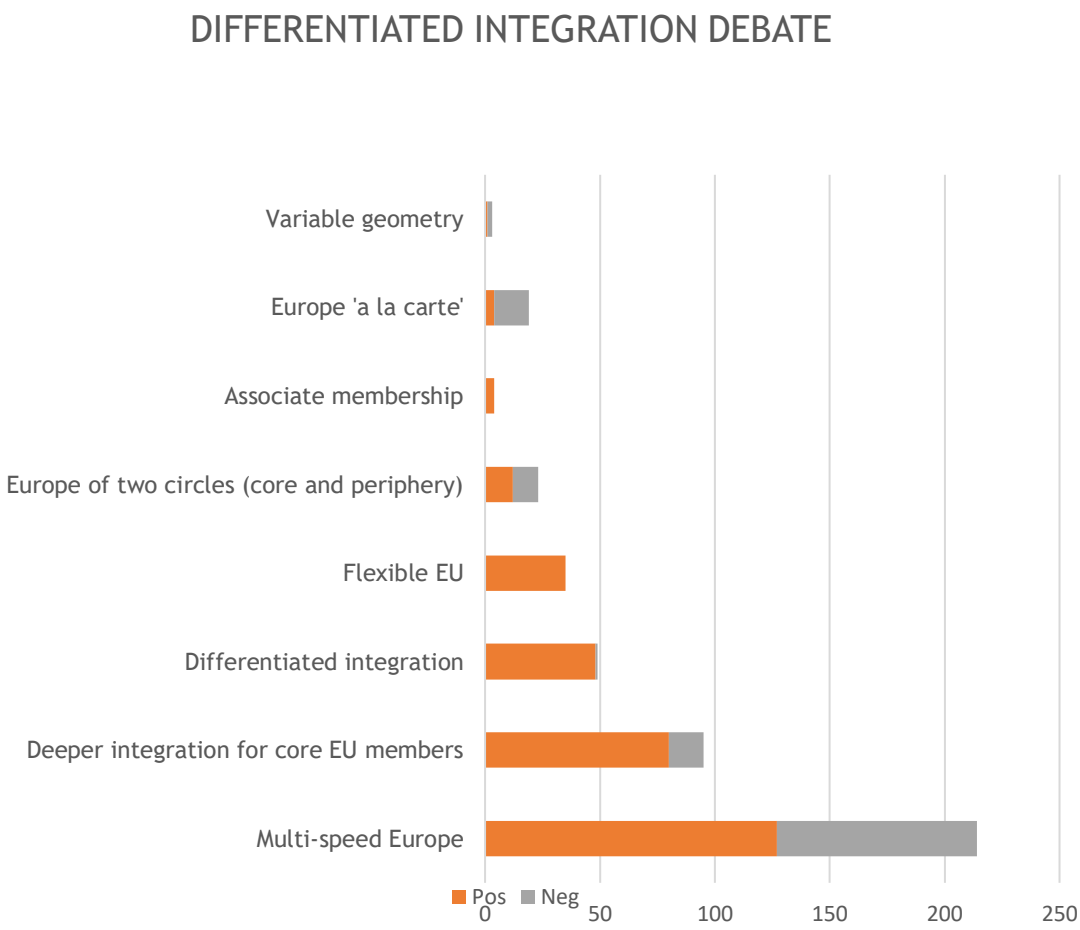


Figure 26. Statements made in support and rejection of ideas in the sub-debate on differentiated integration (2014-2019).

Initially, as mentioned, a multi-speed Europe is an instrument or a mode of differentiation that enables those who want to proceed further and be a motor for future EU development while also allowing those unwilling to deepen or broaden integration to proceed with their own pace. However, there was a shift in the meaning of a multi-speed integration – from temporal to durable status of differentiation – bringing it closer to the idea of multi-tier integration. Thus, Emmanuel Macron, in his speech, in August 2017, said: 'We should imagine a Europe of several formats: going further with those who want to advance, while not being held back by states which want… to progress slower or not as far' (2017). In other words, multi-speed Europe was discussed as temporary differentiation and as a characteristic of a system.

Notwithstanding its potential appeal to Eurosceptic actors, the idea of deepening integration for core members faced significant resistance from Eurosceptic and pro-European actors.

As Figure 27 shows, the aggregated network of actors that participated in the debate on differentiated integration from 2014 to 2019 consisted of two interrelated groups. Group 1 is a group of supporters of multi-speed integration. It is comprised of a diverse set of actors, including European Parliamentary groups, European institutions, German and French political parties, and think tanks with a core formed by the six oldest members of the EU and Spain. It is noteworthy that Britain was also part of this group of multi-speed Europe advocates. However, although Britain supported multi-speed integration, the British government raised concerns regarding the democratic qualities of such a system. Thus, in pre-Brexit EU reform talks, Cameron mentioned that Britain wished to have more say on Eurozone integration, which it was not part of.

The opposing group – group 2 in Figure 27 – was also formed by a diverse set of actors. The so-called new Eurosceptic governments of the Visegrad group were the main opponents of the idea of the multi-speed Europe. They were joined by such generally pro-EU actors as the governments of Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, and Finland. In addition to that, not only the member states but also pro-European European party groups rejected the idea of the EU of different tiers (EPP, S&D, Greens-EFA). It should be noted that European party groups expressed their support for deeper integration for core members. However, they raised their concerns regarding the possible inequalities that could arise if multi-speed integration became a durable feature of the project and transformed it into a permanently multi-tier union.

A possible power imbalance and an exclusive regime of decision-making that it could bring was the major reason for opposing the multi-speed integration. Those protesting against it feared that strengthening the core would entail the loss of autonomy and establishment of a 'second class' citizenship for the periphery. Thus, in 2018, the European Parliament made a report on the challenges of differentiated integration in which it was stated that: 'any form of differentiation initiative that leads to the creation of first- and second-class Member States of the Union, or to a perception thereof, would be a major political failure with detrimental consequences for the EU project' (European Parliament 2019a).

This division formed around the idea of multi-speed Europe can be interpreted as another manifestation of the so-called centre-periphery cleavage

defined by Treib (2020). However, while Treib (2020, 9) is talking about the conflict line forming as a 'reaction to a new form of centre-formation at the European level: the building of a union that has, by now, assumed many state-like characteristics', and which has been described in the previous section, the multi-speed debate conflict reveals a different – horizontal – dimension of the centre-periphery concerns. Opponents of multi-speed Europe were resisting the concentration of power in the hands of a particular group of member states – older and more integrated member states.

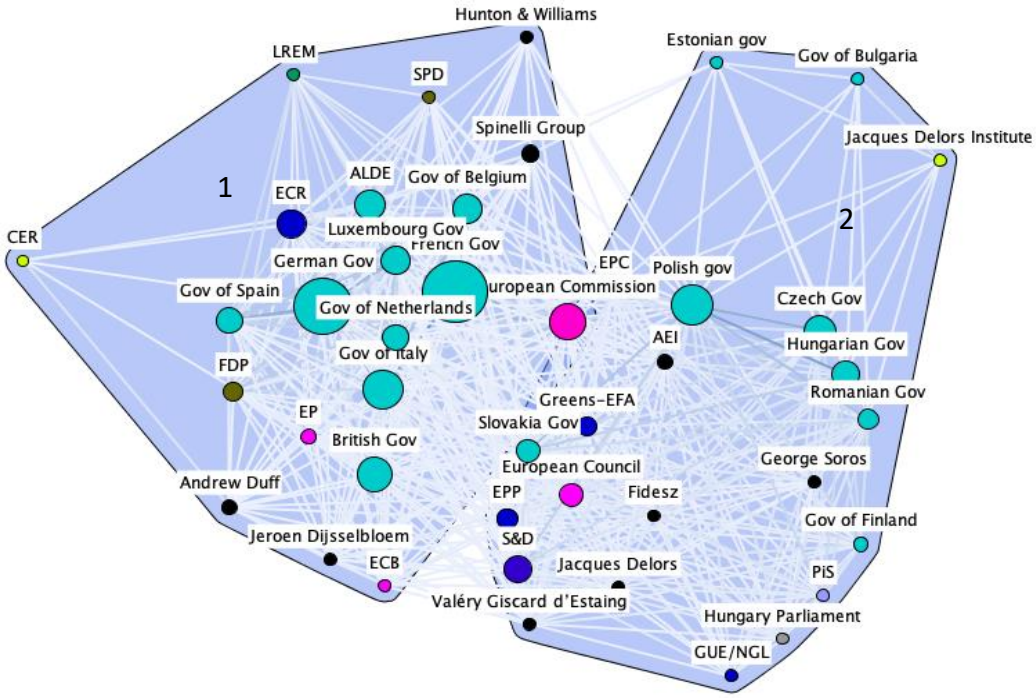


Figure 27. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for differentiated integration sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows actors who participated in the debate between 2014 and 2019. The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

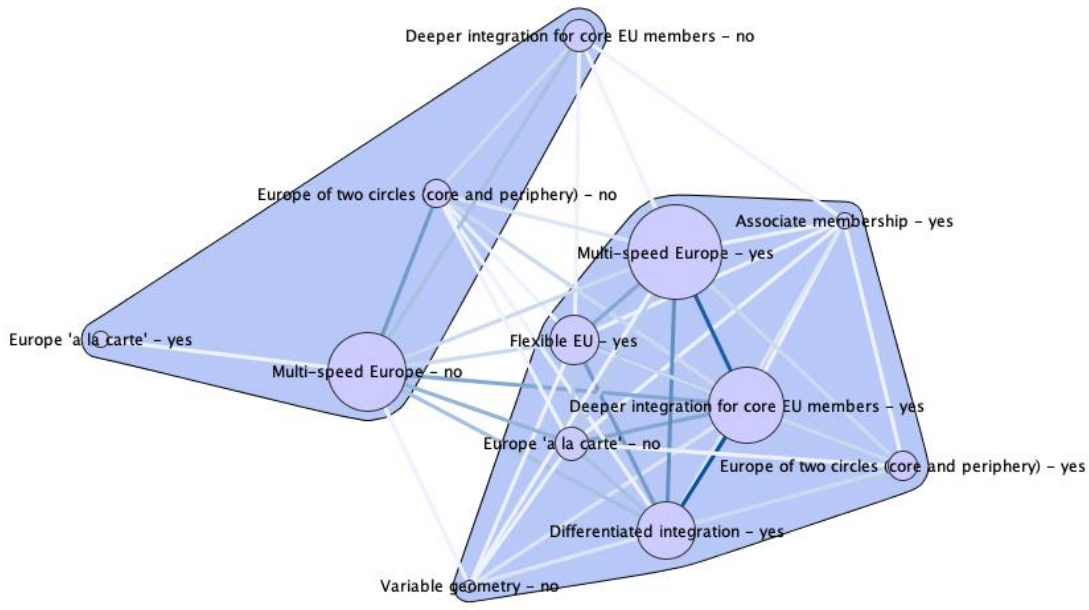


Figure 28. Aggregated congruence network of concept for differentiated integration sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows concepts that appeared in the debate between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

As can be derived from Figure 28, which shows an aggregated congruence network of ideas of the differentiated integration debate, actors employed the language of core-periphery. Thus, ideas that were used by the opponents of multi-speed Europe (group 1) include rejection of the idea of a Europe of two-circles and thus a core-periphery structure.

Although there was clear opposition to the idea of a Europe of multiple speeds (and tiers), it does not mean that the EU would be headed towards a uniform union. As shown elsewhere (see Kyriazi 2021; Heinikoski 2020; Badulescu 2021), actors that belong to the coalition opposing the multi-speed integration have different visions of the EU's end goal and approaches to differentiation. Some actors, such as Finland, Estonia, and Romania, believe that differentiation should be an instrument, not an objective. They want to preserve the unity of goals and keep all states on board. Whereas actors like Eurosceptic governments – for instance, Hungary – don't mind differentiation being a permanent feature (Kyriazi 2021).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the far-right parties such as Vox and AfD joined the debate and acknowledged differentiated integration as a viable option for the revised version of the EU – the 'Europe of nations' project.

Conclusion

To understand whether there is a stalemate in the debate that could explain the lack of EU democratic reform and what kind of direction the EU might be heading, this chapter looked at the structure of the debate. Apart from analysing the overall networks of actors and ideas, this chapter also investigated the major conflict lines identified in the debate. As mentioned, the EU democratic reform debate is complex. The focus of this chapter's analysis of conflict lines was on the higher-level – programmatic – ideas, in particular, the sub-debate on the EU as a polity and a system of integration.

To briefly summarise the findings, the debate on the EU's democratic reform was vast and open to new actors and new ideas, but it was also divided by cross-cutting cleavage lines. The open and fluid nature of the network shows that the lack of ideas was not the reason for limited reform, whereas lack of support may have prevented many of the ideas that entered the debate from success. Moreover, ideas that received considerable attention faced resistance from opposing actors. A major conflict line in the overall debate was identified in the network of programme ideas. It lies between the idea of more Europe (European democracy and more integration) and less Europe (national sovereignty and less integration).

Further analysis showed that there was also a disagreement on the idea of deeper integration for the core EU members. The differentiated integration cleavage line was cross-cutting the more vs less Europe coalitions. Moreover, the analysis demonstrated the signs of divergence in the ideas on European democracy. This divergence was around the issue of the focus of democracy. In particular, some actors perceive the national level as the most appropriate locus of power in European transnational democracy.

All these confrontations lead to the lack of consensus on how to re-establish the EU project. However, the trend for convergence should be noted. Thus, previously divided on disintegration, the cohort of actors advocating for 'less

Europe' consolidated over the idea of the 'Europe of nations'. At the same time, the most active proponent of the idea of European sovereignty, Emmanuel Macron, suggested that the EU should be a federation of nation-states.

This chapter is the first of two chapters dedicated to analysing the architecture of the debate. The next chapter will take a closer look at the institutional reform domain of the debate on the EU's democratic reform. On the one hand, the institutional reform debate is a separate sub-system of ideas. But on the other hand, it continues the discussion on the EU as a polity because institutions are the instrument that allows more abstract ideas to be translated into reality.

Chapter 6. Analysis of the institutional reform debate

While the previous chapter focused on the program-level ideas related to actors' understanding of the EU as a polity – its end goal as an integration project and sovereignty – in this chapter, the debate around institutional reforms will be analysed. The chapter aims to describe what kind of environment discourse in this part of the debate created for potential democratic transformations. While the previous chapter demonstrated a subtle ideational convergence that has appeared in the sub-debates on integration and the focus of democracy, this chapter discusses multiple disagreements on how to translate normative ideals (as well as empirical ideas) into reality.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first half of the chapter is dedicated to the debate on institutional balance. It talks about the models of the EU's institutional development presented in academic debate and the role of different institutions in tackling the problem of the democratic deficit. The main points analysed are the ways in which the reform strategies of restoring national sovereignty and the parliamentarisation of the EU have dominated the democratic deficit debate at the level of institutional reform. The second half of the chapter focuses on three significant institutional reform attempts that took place within the period under consideration and explores the reasons for their failure in terms of discourse. These are the election of a section of the European Parliament via transnational lists of MEPs standing in a single EU-wide constituency, the Spitzenkandidaten process, which connects the nomination of the President of the European Commission with Europarty pre-electoral campaigns and the results of European elections, and finally, the 'green card' procedure, which allows national parliaments to initiate legislation as a collective actor in the EU. Both parts start with a short introduction of the academic debate and proceed with presenting the main findings.

Models of institutional balance – another cleavage line?

This section will discuss the main models of the EU's institutional development presented in academic debate, the solutions to the democratic deficit that these models suggest, and the related interinstitutional tensions. Divergence in

institutional prescriptions is primarily based on different visions of the EU's *finalité* – end goal – and interpretation of its sovereignty (Beetz 2019; Müller Gómez, Wessels, and Wolters 2019). However, even within a single understanding of sovereignty, ideas on translating ideals into reality may vary.

Broadly, the ideal models can be divided into those trying to overcome the hybrid nature of the EU – which is neither a state nor an intergovernmental organisation – and those trying to accommodate it. Thus, according to both the intergovernmental and supranational logic, self-rule is connected to the idea of a state. While intergovernmentalism tries to preserve the nation-state as the focal point of democracy, supranationalism is directed at aggregating the nation-states into a new superstate and shifting the focal point of democracy to the European level (Beetz 2019).

From the intergovernmental perspective, making the EU more democratic requires actions on two levels. On the EU level, the Council as a body representing states should be empowered regarding the main EU institutions (Puetter 2014, 236), especially the EP, which embodies the idea of European sovereignty. According to this model, the EP 'merely serves as a forum for exchanging positions' (Müller Gómez, Wessels, and Wolters 2019). The locus of democratic control remains on the national level; national parliaments should be strengthened as means of control over EU affairs (Beetz 2019).

In this logic, the EU is an international organisation with no single European people but a group of sovereign peoples willing to cooperate. It means that EU matters stay in the realm of international affairs, which makes states (the executives) legitimate representatives of their peoples' interests. Strengthening the position of the Council (coupled with extended veto rights for the governments) is directed at preserving the autonomy of member states and preventing any sort of domination, while strengthening the involvement of national parliaments into EU affairs on the domestic level allows for restoring public control over their executives and the policy outcomes. In other words, executives represent their respective countries and are controlled by their respective parliaments domestically.

According to the supranational logic, to be democratic, the EU should develop into a superstate and reproduce one of the conventional models of

democratic government (Beetz 2019). Since the EU has been following the logic of parliamentary democracy, this would entail making the EP an institutional focal point of democracy. In terms of institutional architecture, this means that if the EU developed as a bi-cameral system, the EP would be the primary legislative chamber and the Council – the secondary chamber (Müller Gómez, Wessels, and Wolters 2019, 57), while the Commission would lose its exclusive right of the legislative initiative and become a government of the European supranational state. In this logic, the EP is the most appropriate institution to represent the EU citizens and control the executive (Beetz 2019). In contrast, national parliaments transformed into regional assemblies would lose their role as a backbone of the democratic order.

In sum, according to both logics, the EU's hybrid nature is incompatible with democratic government self-rule. Thus, in institutional terms, the democratic reform requires favouring one of the embodiments of popular sovereignty – either the Council (coupled with improved oversight by national parliaments) or the European Parliament.

These models require radical transformations of the EU. There are, however, alternative views on the EU's *finalité* and democratisation that accommodate rather than reject its unconventional nature. The starting point of this line of reasoning is that the EU's unique nature requires revision of standards of democracy (e.g. Nicolaïdis 2013; Schimmelfennig 2010; Cheneval, Lavenex, and Schimmelfennig 2015; Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). As national democracies – strikingly different from the original democracies of ancient Greek polis – became a step in the development of democracy, democracy on the transnational scale is the next step in this gradual evolution. From this perspective, the new type of democracy – transnational – should be different from the nation-states and should be developed based on the novel interpretations of sovereignty and representation in which the main emphasis is put not on self-government but on shared government (Beetz 2019).

From an institutional perspective, a remarkable thing about the transnational model of EU democratisation is that it seeks to preserve the tension between the Council and the EP rather than resolve it (Müller Gómez, Wessels, and Wolters 2019). According to most interpretations of transnational democracy, the EU does not need to vest the ultimate power into one of these institutions

(see Habermas 2015a; Nicolaïdis 2013). Instead, its dual nature – embodied in the constant balancing between the Council and the European Parliament – ensures that EU citizens are represented in decision-making both as individuals and peoples. In other words, the sustained conflict between the Council and the EP (being responsible for different types of representation) allows them to complement each other to represent citizens in their different capacities.

Democratisation, according to the model of transnational democracy, however, highlights and reinforces other institutional tensions. In particular, these are tensions related to the involvement of national parliaments in EU decision-making. Although there is a broad consensus around strengthening the role of member states' parliaments, there is no agreement on what functions they should exercise and how influential they should be. According to some interpretations, national parliaments should still be just accountability forums (Crum 2005; Crum and Curtin 2015) or have a collective veto right (Cooper 2016); according to others, national parliaments should be aggregated into a third chamber and take equal participation in the legislative process (Cooper 2013; van der Schyff and Leenknegt 2007). The most radical suggestion is to reconsider the overall idea of sovereignty and the place of national parliaments in representing their respective peoples in the EU decision-making in a way that makes the assembly of national parliaments central (and preferably the only) body in the EU decision-making (Beetz 2019).

In essence, this means that there is conflict within the model of transnational democracy along the line of how to better represent the people(s) of the EU. It creates tensions between national parliaments and both the EP and the Council because all these institutions claim to represent effectively the same citizenry.

Another remarkable thing is that the transnational democracy ideal is not homogenous in both interpretations of sovereignty – shared (Nicolaïdis 2013) or double (Habermas 2015a; Fabbrini 2021) – and the institutional models it prescribes. As Ronzoni (2017) points out, it does not develop a unique variant of institutional architecture different from intergovernmental or federal visions of the EU, possibly, with a notable exception of the interpretation that vests all the power in the assembly of national parliaments (see Beetz 2019).

In sum, all this means that there is a potential for different actors' configurations on the level of the institutional reform debate. The following three sections will cover the analysis of the political debate starting with the ideas discussed in the debate on institutional balance.

Institutional balance: contested powers

Sub-debate on the balance of institutional power includes actors that made statements on the need to (dis)empower any EU institution or on the change in the disposition of the legislative or executive powers. These statements can be grouped into several categories. The first category of statements covers general claims on the need to increase the power of certain EU institutions, for instance, strengthening the role of the national parliaments in the EU decision-making. The second group includes specific claims. These statements indicated how the balance of power should change or a particular aspect of power that needs to be strengthened. These subcategories included, for instance, such ideas as the European Parliament's empowerment with regard to the Commission or the Council and providing the EP with the legislative initiative.

Along with the mentioned reform ideas, the statements indicating actors' attitudes towards the legitimacy of institutions were also included. This allows for a better understanding of the rationale behind the support for certain institutions.

Analysis of the debate demonstrated that, in line with expectations, the parliamentary dimension of the EU government was central to the debate. Thus, Figure 29 shows that the concepts of strengthening the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament were the most frequently used ideas and engaged the biggest number of actors. This is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, parliaments are institutions responsible for controlling the executive, while, as has been mentioned, one of the main democratic deficiencies the EU faces is the growing executive dominance (Curtin 2014; Habermas 2015a). Moreover, for many decades, parliamentarisation – an increase in the power of parliamentary institutions – has been the main instrument of the EU's democratisation (Schimmelfennig et al. 2020).

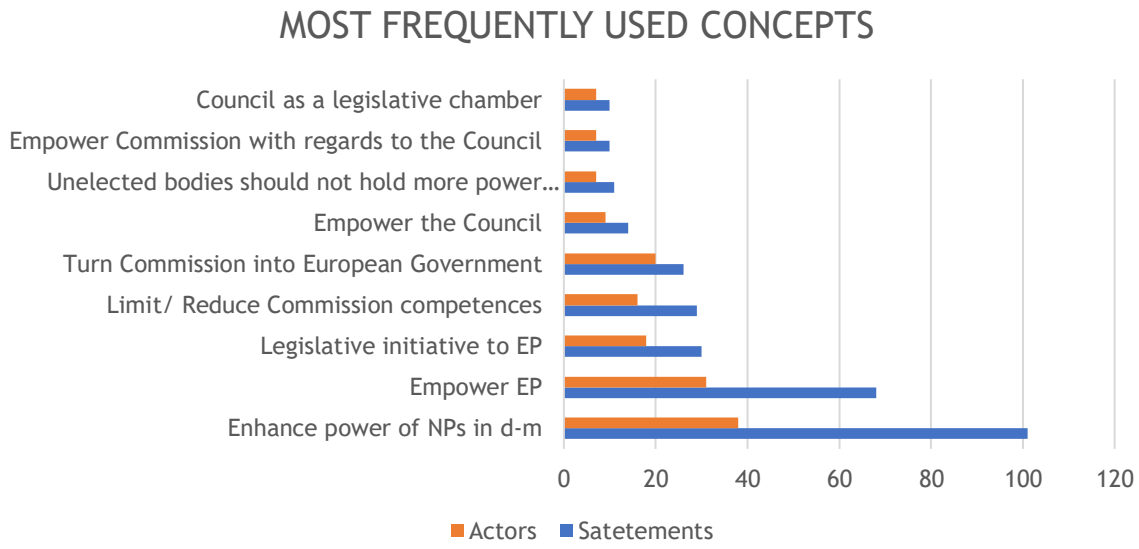


Figure 29. The overall number of statements and the number of actors that made statements on the most frequently used concepts.

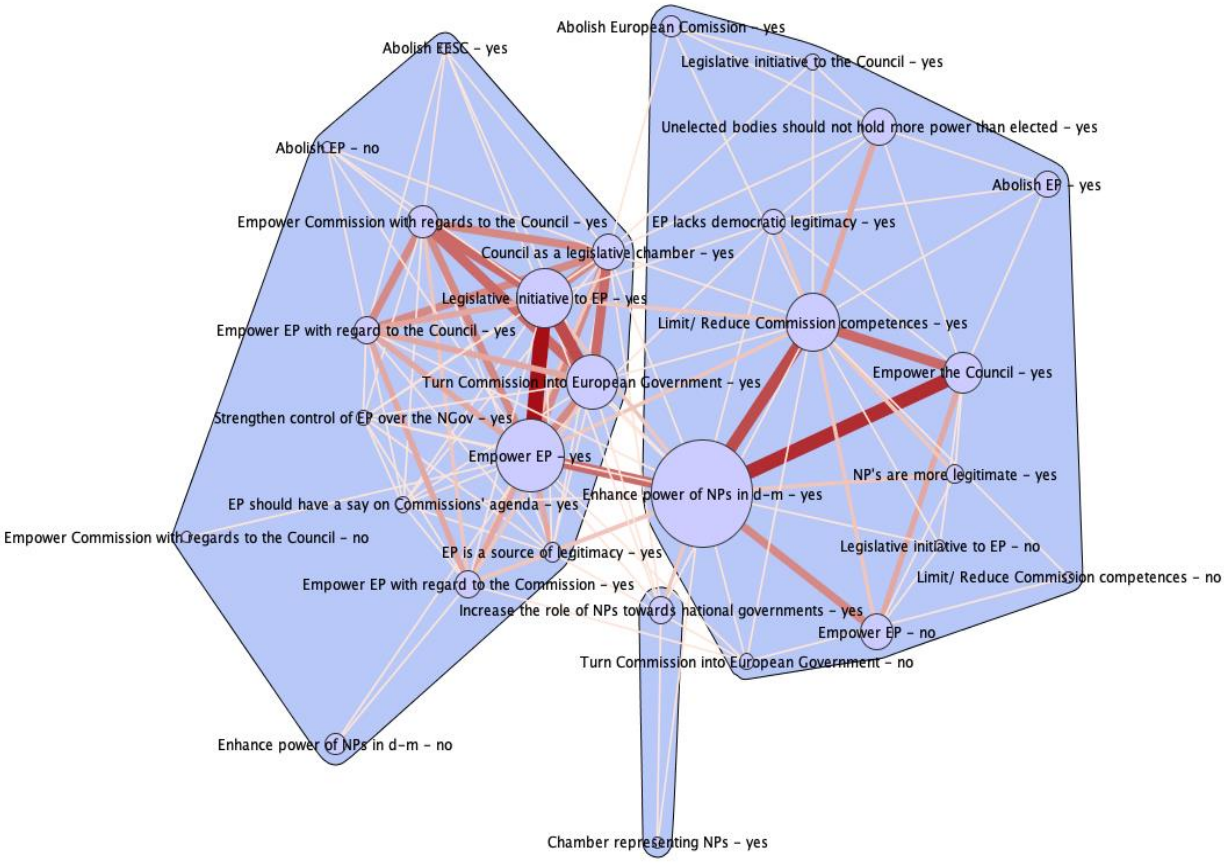


Figure 30. Aggregated congruence network of concepts for institutional balance sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows concepts that appeared in the sub-debate between 2014 and 2019. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Louvain community detection algorithm has been used to unfold the coherent groups of ideas. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

However, what is interesting is that the idea of enhancing the role of national parliaments took the central place in the debate. On the one hand, this indicates that between 2014 and 2019, the pre-existing trend continued. What is meant here by the pre-existing trend is the attention to the idea of more active involvement of domestic parliaments in the EU decision-making. Not only has it been on the agenda since 1990, but the Lisbon Treaty also established national parliaments as a collective legislative actor at the EU level (Raunio 2009).

This, however, puts the national parliaments in a position of confrontation with the EP. As Winzen, Roederer-Rynning, and Schimmelfennig (2014) point out, national parliaments and the EP speak to the same constituency. Analysis of the aggregated congruence network of ideas demonstrates that there was a certain tension between these ideas in the debate. Thus, as Figure 30 shows, the idea of enhancing the role of national parliaments took an in-between position by being connected to both support and rejection of the empowerment of the European Parliament. However, it should be clarified that this does not mean confrontation between the institutions.

What should also be noted is a dramatic decrease in the frequency of statements made on enhancing the role of the national parliaments in the second part of the period under consideration (Figure 31).

The second most debated topic in the institutional balance sub-debate was the competences of the European Commission. This is not contrary to expectations. The European Commission is not just a very powerful executive body; it is an unelected technocratic institution with the right to initiate legislation. Increasing politicisation and growing demand for popular rather than expert government (Schmidt 2019b) make it an anticipated target for criticism.

The analysis showed a general agreement that the Commission needs reform. However, there were two opposite positions on how to do that. The first option was to limit or reduce the scope and extent of Commission competences. The second option was to turn it into a more conventional executive – an equivalent of the government in nation-states. Both ideas got equal support and attention and appeared in the debate equally frequently, but it was unevenly

distributed within the period. It is noteworthy that the idea of limiting or reducing Commission competences was most actively discussed in 2014.

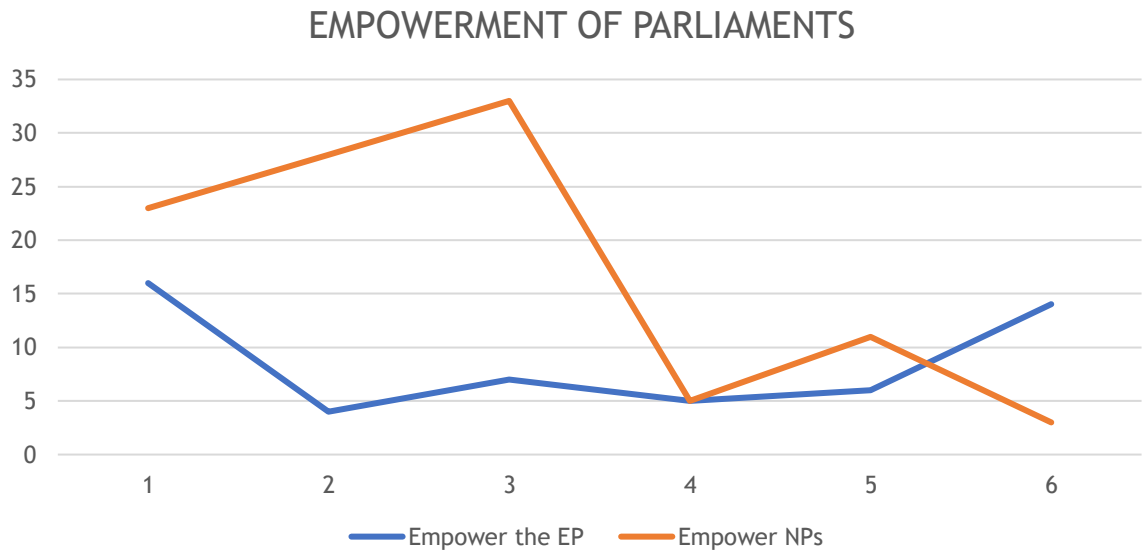


Figure 31. Number of statements made on the empowerment of national parliaments and the EP per year between 2014 and 2019.

It should be noted that, strictly speaking, turning the European Commission into a government and limiting its competences are not mutually exclusive. This means that the transformation of the Commission into a government entails the loss of its exclusive right to initiate legislation and thus its legislative power. However, it also means its empowerment as an executive body and transformation of the EU into a system similar to conventional bicameralism and separation of powers. The analysis, however, showed that in the debate on institutional balance, these ideas were most often used as alternatives (Figure 30). This means a conflict between a more federalist (supranational) vision of the EU and an intergovernmental model.

What may be even more interesting is to take a wider perspective. The debate demonstrated a complex discussion on the (re)distribution of different types of power between the EU-level institutions in which the locus of both executive and legislative power was contested. Although the Lisbon treaty established a certain equilibrium in the distribution of legislative power between the Council and the Parliament (Craig 2021), in the period under consideration, we can see a conflict around the right of legislative initiative with an increasing demand to transfer the right of a legislative initiative to elected bodies (Figure

32). This contestation of the legislative authority that the Commission holds was coupled with the advocacy for shifting the locus of the executive power. While the increasing demand for popular government can explain the former, the latter can be interpreted as a reaction to the slide of competences to the external unelected bodies resulting from what has been called a new intergovernmentalism (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015). In essence, this means the transfer of powers at the EU level that happens outside the treaty rules and control of the Parliament. This might have boosted interest in the empowerment of the Commission as an executive that can be more easily held to account.

The idea of empowerment of the Council was not very salient in the debate. Its proponents rarely explicitly mention how they wanted to change the Council's powers.

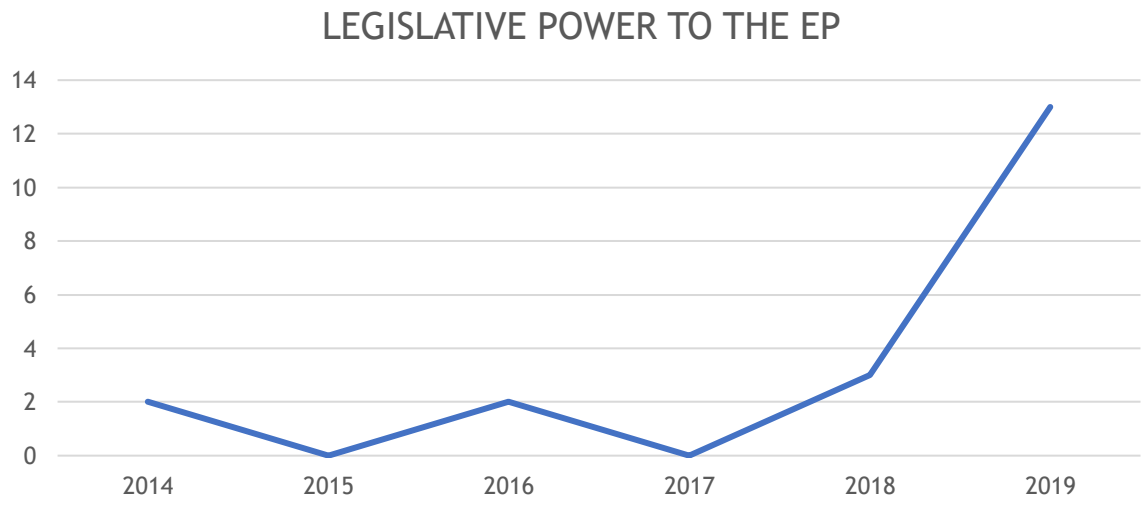


Figure 32. Number of statements made in support of the idea of the transfer of the legislative initiative to the EP per year.

Institutional balance: more disagreements?

While the previous section focused on the ideas that structured the institutional balance debate, this section will be concentrated on actors and their interrelations, demonstrating the main differences and convergences within and between the coalitions.

Overall, around 20% of all organisational actors participated in the debate on institutional balance within the six years. Although the debate included a diverse range of actors, by the number of statements made, it was dominated by

the Eurosceptic member states, the European parties, the European Parliament, and the Eurosceptic national parties from France (National Front) and Germany (AfD) (Figure 33). The group of less active actors included representatives of national parliaments, a wider variety of national political parties, academics, and civil society organisations.

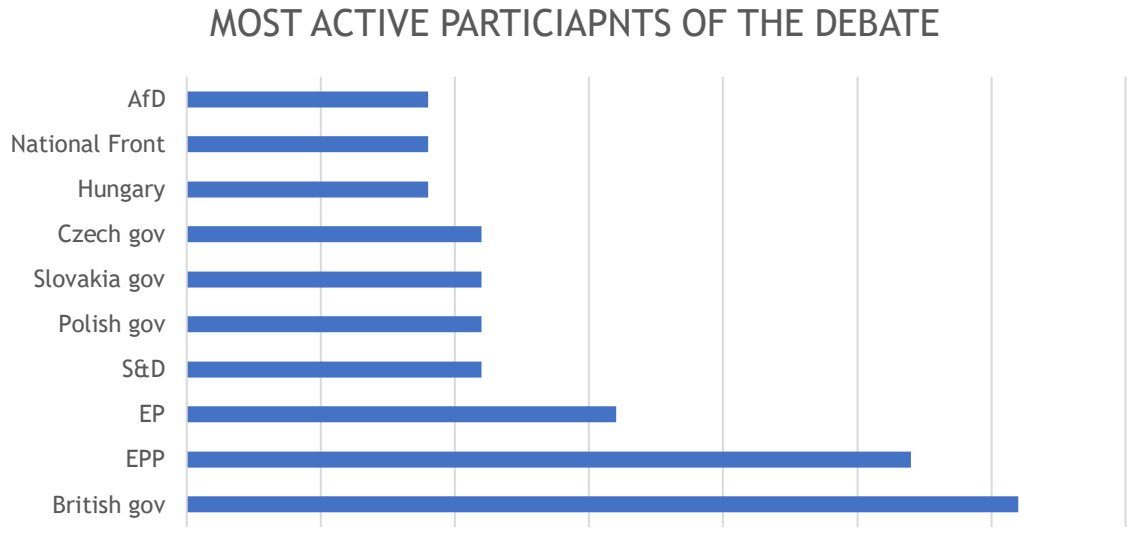


Figure 33. The most actively engaged actors in the institutional balance sub-debate between 2014 and 2019.

It is noteworthy that despite the relatively active participation of French national parties in the debate, French state actors were not actively engaged in the discussion around institutional balance. A similar pattern of participation was also characteristic of the German state actors. One possible explanation is that German and French state actors deprioritised the institutional balance debate because their attention was focused on the institutional reforms in the Eurozone.

To understand the interrelations between actors in the debate, I used DNA to create an aggregated network of organisational actors (Figure 34). Since actors' positions on this topic did not change much over time, it makes sense to investigate aggregated networks searching for coalitions. Due to the fluid and unstable nature of the debate, it may be difficult to grasp actors' positions in relation to each other. The aggregated congruence network allows for seeing all the actors and their interconnections simultaneously.

In terms of actors' configurations, the map of actors confirms the expectations. There is a cleavage line between the supporters of the intergovernmental and federal path of development for the EU.

However, the debate is divided into more than two subgroups (Figure 34). This is due to internal divisions within the major groups caused by differences in actors' prioritisation of ideas. As mentioned in the previous section, the institutional balance sub-debate was structured around two main topics – the Commission competences and the power of parliaments. Within each of these topics, actors advocated conflicting viewpoints. Thus, four respective clusters can be distinguished in the map of the overall debate (Figure 34). Actors in lower clusters were mainly engaged with ideas on increasing the role of parliaments: group number 3 advocated for the empowerment of the European Parliament, while group number 4 supported the idea of strengthening the role of national parliaments. The two clusters at the top of the graph were structured around the discussion on the competences of the European Commission and unelected bodies, more generally. However, it should be noted that actors that constitute group 1 also advocated for the legislative initiative to the European Parliament.

The pro-intergovernmental group seems to have been more divided on their beliefs on the desired institutional balance. Firstly, while the new Eurosceptic governments mainly advocated enhancing the national parliaments' role, such prominent actors of this intergovernmental group as the National Front and the AfD did not engage with this idea; instead, they focused on Commission and Council competences. Secondly, aside from this divergence being reflected on the graph (Figure 34), a closer look at the repertoire of ideas of separate actors reveals even more divisions. For instance, the National Front and the AfD promote conflicting ideas on the future of the EP. While the German party promotes the idea that the EP is undemocratic and needs to be abolished, the National front suggests reforming the EP. In other words, we can see a spectrum of different interpretations of how to translate into reality the idea of the primacy of national sovereignty and with which institutional designs it is compatible.

The group of pro-European actors also presented a spectrum of ideas. In particular, while some actors supported strengthening the role of the EP but did not spell out how exactly they wanted to empower it, others explicitly stated their support for the transfer of the legislative initiative to the EP.

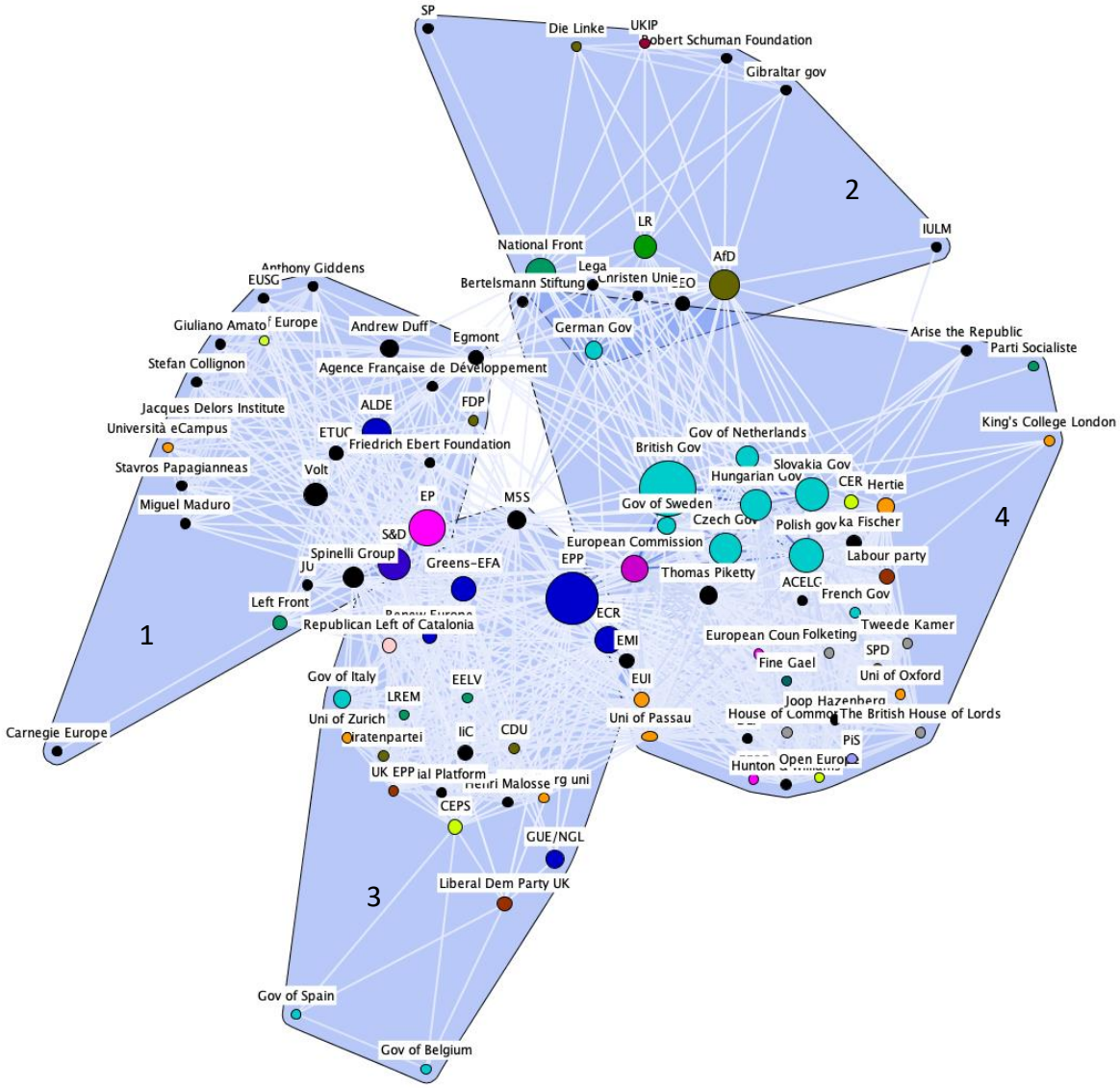


Figure 34. Aggregated congruence network of actors (organisation x concept) for institutional balance sub-debate.

Notes: The network shows actors who participated in the sub-debate between 2014 and 2019. The network is normalised ($w \geq 0.125$). The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours are the same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

There were two points of overlap between the groups with conflicting visions of the EU's institutional development. Firstly, the National Front and major European Parliamentary groups shared the idea of the need to transform the Council into a legislative chamber. Secondly, and most importantly, an overlap occurred in the discussion on the empowerment of parliaments. This can be explained by the agreement of some actors to empower both the European Parliament and national parliaments. However, it does not mean that there was no tension between the ideas of empowerment of the EP and domestic

parliaments. Although actors may be speaking about a multi-level interparliamentary system, rather than two alternative and mutually exclusive single-level ones, there is a difference in their understanding of this system – the primacy and the role of institutions in it.

The following section will discuss the idea of strengthening the role of national parliaments to demonstrate differences in interpretation of this empirical idea – how it reflects existing practices and affects further transformations.

Enhancing the role of national parliaments – a prevalent but problematic idea

While the previous section described the main structural characteristics of the discourse and revealed the central tensions and conflicts both within and between different groups of actors, this section will be focused on the idea of empowerment of national parliaments. Interestingly, this idea had limited success despite gaining support from actors across opposing coalitions. The only empirical embodiment of this idea translated into reality was the 'green card' initiative which provides national parliaments with the power to initiate legislation as a collective body. It was initiated a few times through the informal reinterpretation of the political dialogue mechanism. However, over this period, the reform did not gain a foothold in the EU's institutional practice.

Although many factors contribute to the success and failure of specific ideas, different interpretations – lower-level, more specific reform ideas – of strengthening the role of the national parliaments will be at the locus of our attention. In essence, we zoom in to explore ideas and actors that constitute the debate on this concept and see that the unity of actors supporting the idea masks fundamental internal disagreements.

Existing mechanisms of the national parliaments' involvement and their limitations

Currently, national parliaments of EU member states can act in two different capacities – as individual institutions controlling their respective governments and as a collective actor participating in the EU legislative process.

Although on the national level, the mechanisms of engagement of national parliaments in EU affairs vary depending on the country, two main models – the document-based and the mandating – can be distinguished (COSAC 2005). While the document-based model is focused on 'information-processing and the development of parliamentary discussions and positions', the mandating model emphasises the control of the government's position (Jans and Piedrafita 2009, 21-22). There is almost even distribution of each of the models in the EU. However, it should be noted that there is small a group of parliaments that do not engage in any formal scrutiny but rather use informal mechanisms to influence EU decision-making (Kiiver 2006).

The problem with the parliaments' involvement on the national level is that it does not solve the issue of lack of control over the Council and the possibility of domination by other countries (Crum 2005). This is because, in a situation of a qualified majority voting, a national government can be outvoted, and an individual national parliament would still be left without sufficient control over the process of decision-making.

In this respect, enhancing the role of the national parliaments as a collective actor seems more promising because it allows for directly influencing the decision-making process at the EU level. Thus, with the ratification of the Lisbon treaty, the so-called early warning mechanism gave power to the national parliaments as a collective actor to participate in the EU legislative process (Cooper 2013; Pimenova 2018). Although this mechanism does not allow parliaments to veto legislation, it allows them to raise objections and initiate the revision of legislative proposals (Öberg 2018). However, there are doubts about the extent to which this mechanism contributes to solving the democratic deficit problem (Jans and Piedrafita 2009).

Analysis of the debate

The political debate reflected the variety of actual practices of national parliaments involvement in EU affairs and the visions of the future EU and its institutional architecture. The data shows that actors were trying to address different problems when advocating for the empowerment of the national

parliaments; thus, rather broad support for the concept masked a lack of consensus on what this reform should entail.

Individual vs collective empowerment

The least radical interpretation of strengthening the role of domestic parliaments in the EU decision-making – in terms of transfer of actual power to domestic parliaments – was offered by the European Commission. The Commission emphasised the need to improve communication between itself and individual parliaments and ensure Commissioners' engagement in the national political processes. This idea was supported by the French government, which is not surprising since the French Assembly employs the model of document-based scrutiny centred around scrutiny of the Commission documents (Jans and Piedrafita 2009). It was also echoed in the opinion piece written by Birgitta Ohlsson, the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, even though Sweden is following the mandate system.

A remarkable thing about this proposal is that it is focused more on Europeanising national politics rather than giving extra authority to the national parliaments per se. Although better access to information allows for better scrutiny and is indeed important (Fromage 2020; Curtin 2014), it does neither radically change the position of national parliaments in the institutional architecture of the EU nor allows them to ensure proper control of the Council as a whole.

Other interpretations of empowerment of national parliaments as individual actors also drew on existing practices. One of the proposals was to strengthen the role of the national parliaments towards their governments to improve the indirect channel of control. In particular, Birgitta Ohlsson suggested the idea similar to negotiation mandate. However, it should be noted that she did not discuss a mandatory unified mechanism. Rather, she appealed to the governments to commit themselves to consultations with their respective parliaments before every Council meeting.

Another suggestion was made by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). They stressed the need for better interparliamentary cooperation between levels and proposed a mechanism that would allow national parliaments to directly

advise the European Parliament without necessarily getting approval from all member states' parliaments. This is not surprising since there is a high level of cooperation between the German parliament and German MEPs (Kiiver 2009).

However, the most broadly and actively discussed was the enhancement of the role of national parliaments as a collective actor. The debate was structured around two main proposals – the 'green card' (see Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2017; Serowaniec 2015) and the 'red card' mechanisms. The former entails that national parliaments as a collective EU body would get the right to initiate legislation, while the latter means that they would get the power to veto legislation. Comparison of Figures 35 and 36 shows that the so-called 'green card' initiative got much less attention and support in the debate than the 'red card'. It was mentioned only by the EP and two national governments – Spain and Netherlands. On the other hand, the 'red card' initiative not only was much more popular than the 'green card', but it was also the most debated reform option related to the empowerment of national parliaments within the period under consideration.

The idea of the 'red card' appeared in the debate thanks to the Conservative party. It was included in their pre-Brexit EU reform initiative. However, it should be noted that this idea originated in the Labour party and was introduced by them a decade earlier (Wintour 2003). The initial proposal by a group of Conservative MPs in 2014 was to give each parliament a veto right. However, it was further reformulated as a collective right to reject laws contradicting the national interests of member states.

Cameron's proposal was close to being accepted, arguably, due to the extraordinary circumstances of the pre-Brexit debate. As Figure 35 demonstrates, both the Council and the Commission agreed to support the 'red card' initiative. However, after the Brexit vote happened, actors diverted their attention away from this reform option. An attempt to revive this reform idea was initiated, in 2018, by the new Eurosceptic governments of the Visegrad group (Visegrad Group 2018), but it did not receive much resonance.

Although the 'green card' initiative did not receive much attention in the debate, as mentioned, in 2015, it was introduced as an informal procedure based on the reinterpretation of the mechanism of political dialogue. Originally, the idea of more proactive involvement of national parliaments in the legislative process

was formulated at a COSAC meeting in 2013 and then further developed by three EU member states' parliaments: the Danish Folketing, the Dutch Tweede Kamer, and the British House of Lords. It was then tested by 'the EU Committee of the House of Lords [who] put forward a proposal for a trial 'green card' on the issue of food waste' (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2017, 251). This initiative gained support from 18 parliaments (UK Parliament 2015), and it was addressed by the Commission. After that, three more green cards were initiated. However, none of them succeeded.

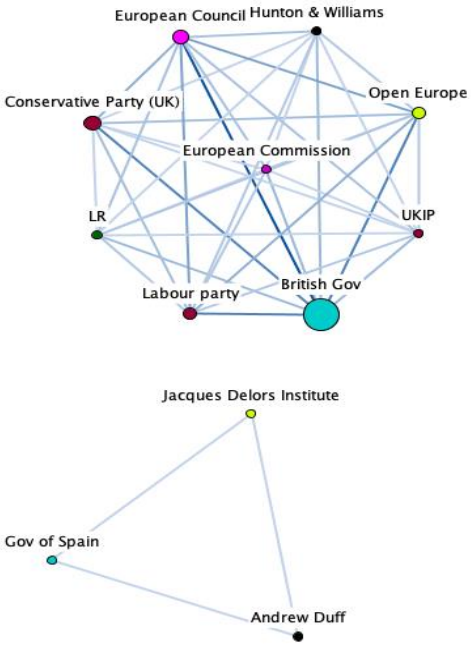


Figure 35. Aggregated congruence network of the debate on the 'Red card' procedure.

Notes: The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

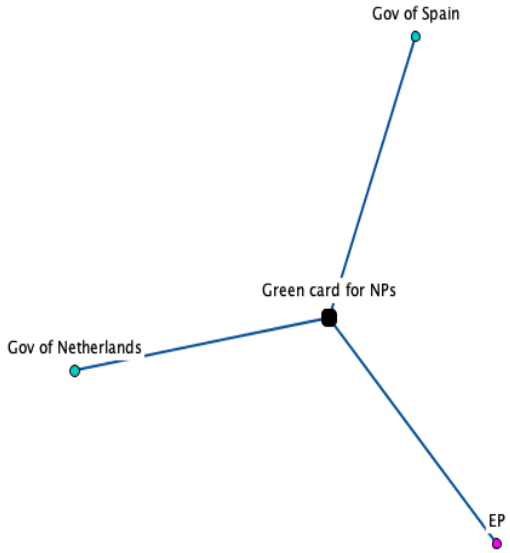


Figure 36. Actors who made statements on the 'Green card' mechanism. Two-mode network.

Notes: The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

Similar to the Spitzenkandidat initiative, there was a short-term success of the idea of 'green card'; however, 'green card' initiative lost momentum after 2016. It is possible to assume that the Brexit vote and the fact that Eurosceptic actors lost one of their main leaders and proponents of expanding the role of national parliaments played an important role. Moreover, some of the new Eurosceptic governments (as well as other member states such as Sweden) are much more

sensitive to the expansion of the legislative engagement of national parliaments (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2017, 2021). It is remarkable that, unlike Spitzenkandidat, this initiative was much less visible in the debate.

It should also be noted that although 'green cards' did not receive any formal status, the precedent set by these few 'green card' initiatives means that 'green card' can potentially be triggered again.

The role of national parliaments in the power balance

In terms of anticipated change in power balance that strengthening the national parliaments would entail, data shows a clear division between intergovernmental actors and actors supporting the idea of more Europe (Figure 30). While proponents of the idea of more Europe and transnational democracy advocated for the strengthening of parliaments on both levels, intergovernmental actors, although they rarely articulated it openly, resisted further democratisation through the EP's empowerment. In that sense, their promotion of the enhanced role of the national parliaments was an alternative to the well-established mechanism of dealing with the democratic deficit. In other words, while the core pro-European actors (such as major European parties) perceive empowerment of national parliament as a supplementary mechanism of control and representation, the national governments and more Eurosceptic actors supported the national parliaments as a way to resist further strengthening the EP. Because of a collective action problem, it is difficult to say that strengthening the national parliaments can be considered the member states' direct empowerment. However, given the fact that, in particular, Visegrad countries and Britain coupled the idea of NPs' empowerment with the idea that national parliaments are more legitimate and that the EP lacks legitimacy, their support for strengthening national parliaments can be interpreted as a way to resist further strengthening the EP.

This incoherence within the group of actors advocating for the empowerment of national parliaments was also reflected in actors' commitment to the idea of empowerment of the national parliaments. Thus, unsurprisingly, it had a more prominent place in the discourse of member states than of the European party groups. In contrast, while the EPP supported strengthening the

role of national parliaments, they prioritised increasing the power of the EP in their discourse.

While this observation does not allow us to state that it was the ultimate reason for the failure of the reform idea, it is a valuable one because it allows us to unmask the divergence existing in the understanding of the empowerment of the national parliaments and see the tension between the idea of empowerment of the national parliaments and the EP clearly.

Brexit and change in configuration of the group of proponents of strengthening the role of national parliaments seem to have negatively affected the chances for success of such reforms as Red or Green cards for national parliaments. With the leading advocate gone, the debate on concrete reform options almost faded out as well as actual informal reform attempts by reinterpretation of the rules.

The following section will cover the debate around two reform ideas connected with the powers and nature of the European Parliament. These debates revealed a conflict in the group of actors supporting the idea of transnational democracy within one coalition, which prevented the implementation of either of them. On the one hand, it demonstrates the importance of the divisions in lower-level configurations of actors. On the other hand, it serves as an example of how ideas are used and changed in the debate process.

The European Parliament: its democratic challenges and aspirations

The EU has for many decades relied on strengthening the EP as the primary means for democratisation. However, despite the gradual expansion of the EP's competences and introduction of direct elections in 1979, the EU is still being accused of a continuing democratic deficit. The reason is that the unusual nature of the EP – including its interrelations with citizens – made it a part of a problem of democratic deficit rather than a solution to it (Lord 2018; Hix and Høyland 2013). In other words, in its current state, the EU cannot improve its democratic qualities only by the empowerment of the EP because the EP has its own democratic challenges.

The EP was born as a mechanism of control and accountability over the newly established supranational body – a precursor of the European Commission (Rittberger 2003; Schimmelfennig et al. 2020). For several decades, this horizontal control was seen as the main task for the EP to ensure the democratic legitimacy of the decisions made at the EU level. However, with the expansion of the integration process, the EU's democratisation discourse has shifted from the horizontal control over institutions to the vertical connection with citizens and their input into decision-making. While the EP has succeeded in the former, the quality of the EP's performance as a mechanism that effectively brings citizens into collective decision-making at the EU level has been called into question (Lord 2002).

Broadly, the main problem of the EP as an instrument for democratisation is its credibility as a democratic institution. This is due to the quality of the electoral link and '[L]ow politicisation of its work' (Lord 2018, 44). In essence, the EP is critiqued for failing to effectively aggregate and represent citizens' interests and to be an arena for the will formation at the European level.

Firstly, the nature of the European Parliament as *working* rather than *debating* parliament affects its ability to engage citizens in decision-making and serve as a forum for collective will formation (Lord 2018). On the one hand, being a working parliament allows the EP to effectively balance other EU-level institutions and input into the law-making process. On the other hand, it prevents the EP from making the political process open and inclusive. Thus, the European Parliament becomes not a forum for public contestation that actively engages with its voters but another institution with technocratic expertise that takes part in secretive deliberations on behalf of the citizens. This leads to citizens being poorly informed of the EU-level developments. The EP fails to facilitate the establishment of a cross-national political process and link national political debate (Habermas 2015b).

The second object of the EP democratic critique is the EP electoral mechanism. It has been criticised for making the EP not representative of its voters and not allowing for controlling (awarding or punishing) those in power (Hix and Høyland 2013). The main problem is that the election process is structured around and dependent on national politics and national parties. The problem is two-fold. On the one hand, due to this mediation by national parties (coupled with

a lack of knowledge of the EU), elections to the EP become 'second-order' (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Thus, citizens do not necessarily express their positions on cross-national issues when casting their votes. Most often, they support candidates based on their positions on domestic issues. In essence, in this case, voters don't assess MEPs based on their performance at the EU level but rather punish or award national parties depending on their performance at home (Lord 2004).

On the other hand, the representative power of the EP in its current form can be seen as bounded because 'there are limits to how far a party system can represent the public in one political system by means of voter preferences expressed in another' (Lord 2002, 45). From this standpoint, even if citizens vote in the EU elections to explicitly express their preferences on EU policies, there is no guarantee that they will be accurately reflected in the EP behaviour, unless there is a direct link between the citizens and transnational parties that represent them. Since there is no such link and voters can only choose between national parties, there is a chance of distortion in representation because the decision of a national party on which transnational group to join does not always go in line with the original voters' preferences (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2014).

Another reason why the representativeness of the EP is often interpreted as bounded is its attempt to balance partisan and territorial forms of representation (Lord 2004, 116). This line of critique draws on the idea that the EP does not fulfil its functions of representing EU citizens as individuals and as citizens of the EU.

Interestingly, research on congruence between voters' and parties' stances showed that despite the peculiarities of its electoral process, the EP does represent the EU citizens quite well (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2014; Sorace 2018). However, what the empirical research also showed, is that the EP lacks a pluralistic representation of different voices while being able to represent the average European (Sorace 2018).

In an attempt to improve the democratic qualities of the EP, two reforms were put on the table in the period between 2014 to 2019. The next section will look in detail at the debate around these proposals.

Transnational lists

The idea to '[T]ake European elections out of a national frame' has been discussed both by academics (Lord 2004, 119; Hix 2008; Hix and Lord 1997) and politicians for a long time. One of the reforms related to this idea is the introduction of transnational lists of candidate MEPs that would be submitted by European rather than national political parties and include candidates from at least one-third of EU Member States (Charvat 2019). These MEPs would be elected by all EU citizens in a single constituency, and the seats they would occupy would represent (initially at least) a proportion of the existing number of seats in the European Parliament.

This idea has been championed by supranationalists and some proponents of transnational democracy as a step towards the creation of a pan-European political space and as an instrument that would allow a better quality of transnational representation (Nicolaïdis 2015). The idea of transnational lists has also been advocated as a step towards creating a fully-fledged EU-level party system. Despite the broad acknowledgement of the crisis of the party democracy, parties are still seen as playing 'a key role in connecting the citizen with those who exercise power' (Duff 2019, 4). The lack of fully-fledged political parties on the EU level can be interpreted as an impediment to establishing a credible mechanism of control and aggregation of citizens' interests and for the creation of a coherent cross-border political process. In sum, according to the advocates of transnational lists, this innovation would add a European dimension to European elections, stimulate transnational debate, and, ultimately, 'enhance the ability of citizens to exercise collective agency across borders' (Wolkenstein 2018, 297).

Opponents of transnational lists defend their position on the grounds that it is either undesirable to take the elections out of the national frame or that it is not the right way to do so. The main argument of those who share the former perspective is that, since there is no common European people, citizens of the EU should not be 'bound by a majority of Europeans' (Nicolaïdis 2013). Therefore pan-European constituency created by transnational lists is unacceptable. According to this logic, mediation of transnational politics by national parties with national lists and quotas can be justified as a mechanism that allows for keeping the focus of democracy at the domestic level and preventing the segments

constituting the political community – the peoples of its member states – from domination (Scherz 2017). However, it should be noted that, as Scherz (2017, 504) rightly points out, the actual proposals of reform put forward in political debate 'could hardly lead to supranational domination'. The proposals discussed by politicians would allow citizens to elect a small group of pan-European MEPs alongside their national MEPs. In its most recent version suggested by Emmanuel Macron, it was the portion of seats vacated after Brexit.

Another argument against transnational lists is that this innovation would not strengthen the European parties but 'reinforce the national character of European elections' (Drounau 2019). From this standpoint, better integrated European parties should come before transnational lists and result from closer cooperation between national parties. Also, opponents of transnational lists claim that they would not lead to better representation because, firstly, they would widen the gap between the EU and its citizens (Hökmark 2018), and, secondly, they have the potential to split the European Parliament, creating a sub-chamber of MEPs with different status (Van Hecke and Wolfs 2018). Finally, this innovation is being accused of turning the EU into a presidential system by stealth (Järviniemi 2020).

Failure of transnational lists?

The idea of transnational lists has been present in political debate for a few decades. It appeared twice in reports on electoral reform of the European Parliament – in 1998 (European Parliament 1998) and 2011 (European Parliament 2011) before the large-scale debate in the period under consideration. What is interesting about this debate is that despite having gained the support of a rather large coalition of actors, the idea failed to be adopted due to the conflict within the group of supporters of transnational democracy.

Transnational lists were not discussed much during the 2014 debate on electoral reform. As Figure 37 demonstrates, a significant increase in the number of statements started in 2017. The reason for the new wave of attention to this idea was two-fold. Firstly, after Brexit, the seats of the British MEPs had to be vacated, so it was necessary to decide what to do with these seats. This opened the window of opportunity for the transnational lists reform. Secondly, a newly

elected president of France – Emmanuel Macron – started actively promoting the idea.

Macron managed to build a large and diverse coalition of supporters (Figure 38). Among the advocates of transnational lists were many national governments, major European Parliamentary Groups, central EU institutions, transnational movements (such as Volt and DiEM 25), and academics. As Figures 38 and 39 show, not only was this coalition larger, but it was also much more actively engaged in the debate. Thus, we can see that proponents of transnational lists made more statements than the opposing coalition. This allowed for advancing the debate on this reform idea further than ever before; however, it was not enough for it to succeed.-991-141

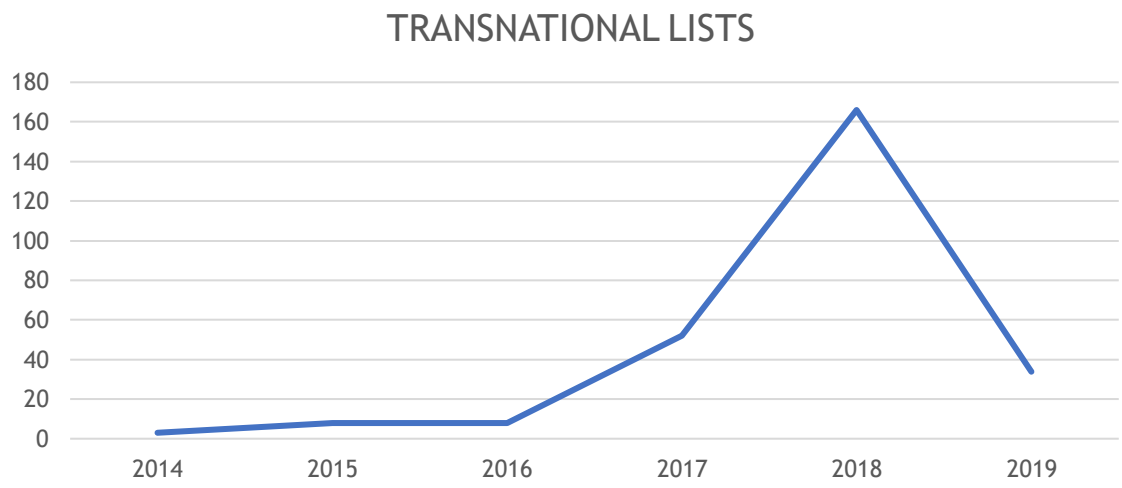


Figure 37. Number of statements made on transnational lists between 2014 and 2019.

The main reason for the failure of transnational lists was that the predominantly Eurosceptic group of the opposition to transnational lists was supported by the largest party group of the European Parliament – the EPP. Not only did the EPP disapprove of the idea of transnational lists, but they also became the most vocal opponent of the reform. Thus, Figure 39 demonstrates that the EPP made more statements than any other actor and the biggest part of these statements were negative.

As de Wilde (2020) notes, the possible motivation behind this behaviour of the largest European parliamentary group might have been the fear of losing control over the European Parliament. This, of course, was not part of the

arguments used by the EPP to justify their rejection of transnational lists. Their arguments were built around the idea that transnational lists would not make the EU more democratic because the pan-European MEPs would be too distant from the public and, contrary to the desire of European citizens, would bring even more centralisation (Euractiv, 2018).

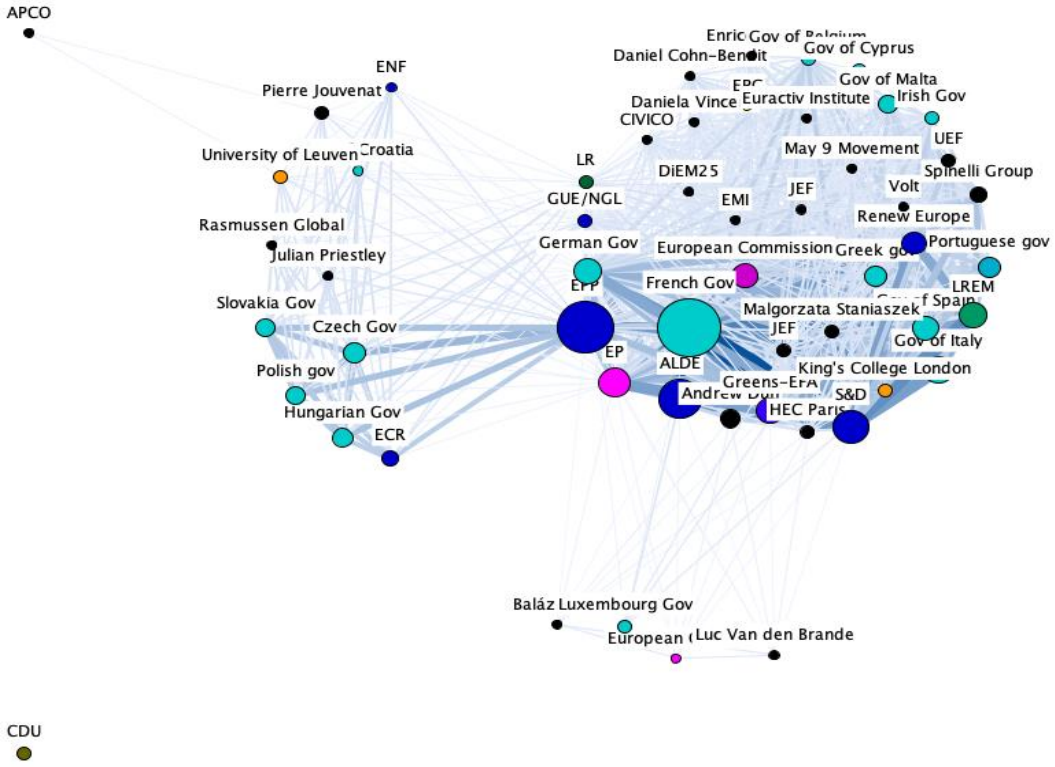


Figure 38. A group of supporters of transnational lists reform outweighed the number of its opponents in 2018.

Notes: This is a normalised congruence network of actors that discussed ideas related to transnational lists. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

The conflict between what can be called the EPP's and Macron's vision is not entirely unexpected. As demonstrated in the analysis of the programmatic ideas, the EPP supported ideas of both national and European sovereignty, while Macron predominantly engaged with the idea of European sovereignty. What is interesting, however, is that, unlike most Eurosceptic actors that advocated for 'less Europe', the EPP supported the idea of transnational European democracy just like Macron. Therefore, this conflict that revealed itself in the debate on the specific reform proposal was, strictly speaking, not a conflict between intergovernmental and supranational visions of the EU but rather between rival

accounts of the EU as a transnational democracy. This division is along the lines of the focus of democracy. Although the EPP was supportive of strengthening the role of the European Parliament, it was not ready to change the nature of the parliament in a way that could possibly weaken the position of the national parties. In a certain sense, this is an attempt to preserve the focus of democracy on a national level.

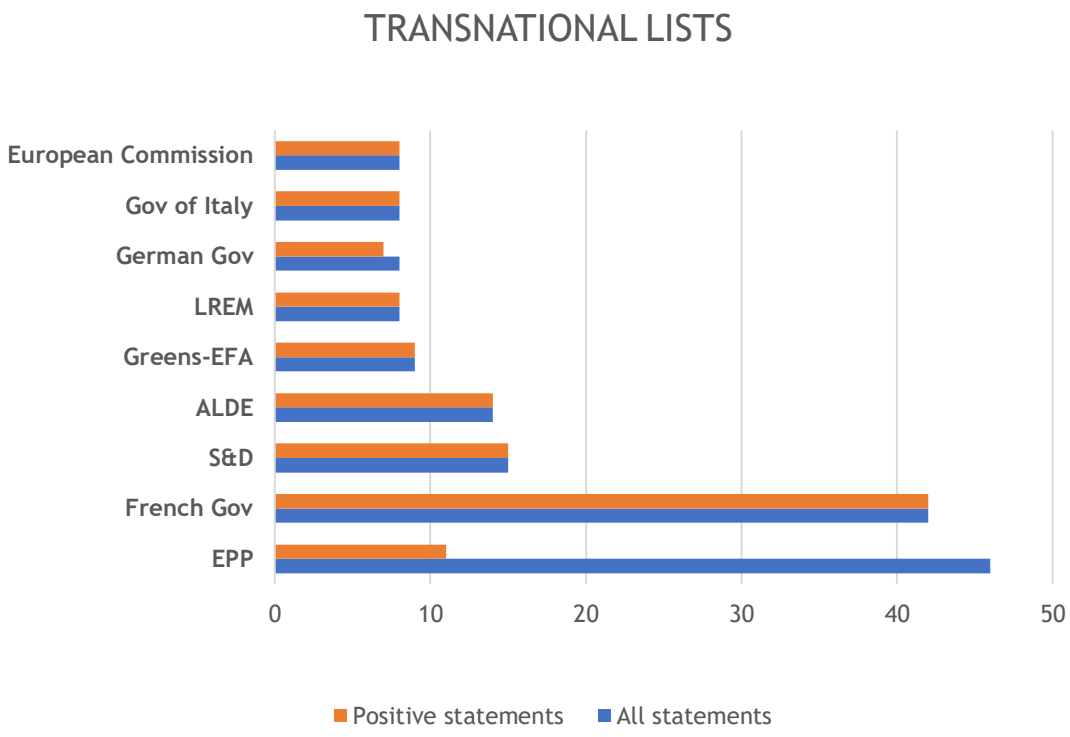


Figure 39. Number of statements made by the most active participants of the 'transnational lists' debate.

The reluctance of the major European party to endorse transnational lists caused the lists' failure in 2018. However, it did not mean that transnational lists disappeared from the debate. On the contrary, the confrontation continued in 2019. The following section will discuss how the strategic use of the idea of transnational lists allowed to resist against the realisation of the Spitzenkandidat (as an almost automatic nomination for the Commission presidency) and successfully challenge the well-established direction of EU's democratisation.

History and the meaning of Spitzenkandidat

The idea of Spitzenkandidat originated in CDU in the late 1990s and then was actively promoted by the EPP (European Parliament 2015). In essence, this suggestion for reform continued a long-term trend and a well-established strategy of increasing democratic qualities through the empowerment of the parliamentary institution (Westlake 2016).

The concept of Spitzenkandidat (lead candidate) is constituted of two main elements. Firstly, parties would nominate candidates to lead the electoral campaign for European elections across the EU (European Parliament 2012). Secondly, the winning party lead candidate would be automatically nominated for President of the European Commission for the following term of office.

The meaning of Spitzenkandidat is also affected by the ideas connected to it. Arguably, the most important idea is the democratisation of the EU. In 2013, it was presented by the Parliament as a reform allowing the establishment of a direct connection of citizens' choices with EU-level 'governmental' actions. Spitzenkandidat, in essence, was almost equated with the concept of increasing democratic legitimacy. The second important (and related to democratisation) idea is the notion of Europeanisation. The proponents of the Spitzenkandidat argued that it would bring more attention to European issues and foster cross-border debate. This, however, was not the case, as research on the 2014 election campaign demonstrated (Braun and Schwarzbözl 2019).

The third idea is the shift in the current institutional balance. Unlike the 'transnational lists' initiative, the lead candidate innovation was perceived as a transformation in parliamentary rules and structures and as an attempt to empower the European Parliament. According to the Lisbon Treaty, the European Council proposes a candidate for the President of the Commission '[T]aking into account the elections to the European Parliament' (TEU, Article 17). In 2012, the Parliament suggested modifying this procedure by introducing another under which each of the European political parties was supposed to nominate a top candidate who would, in case of the party's victory in elections, almost 'automatically' become the European Commission President. The role of the European Council in this interpretation was limited to the formal approval of the winning candidate.

In 2014, the lead candidate of the winning EPP party – the former Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker – was approved by the European Council and got the post of the President of the Commission. Thus, despite being contested by some member states' governments, Spitzenkandidat succeeded, mainly because it was presented as 'the symbol of democratic reform' (European Parliament 2015). In 2019, however, the situation was different. The discursive battle between Macron and the EPP, which started a year earlier, continued leading to reconsideration of the democratic value of Spitzenkandidat.

Success and failure of the Spitzenkandidat reform

Between 2014 and 2019, Spitzenkandidat was a matter of heated debate. It was the most frequently used concept in the overall discussion on the EU's democratic reform, with the most significant number of both statements and actors engaged with it. However, this attention was unevenly distributed over time, with two major peaks in the years of Parliamentary elections – 2014 and 2019 (Figure 40).

Figure 40. Number of statements made on the concept of Spitzenkandidat each year between 2014 and 2019.

In 2014, the group of actors advocating for the lead candidate innovation was larger than the opposing coalition. It included a diverse range of actors from main European party groups and various national parties to academics and member states (Figure 41). Although small, the opposing coalition was predominantly comprised of influential actors – the member states – including such powerful actors as the British and German governments.

Despite the resistance, the reform succeeded mainly because it was tightly interrelated with the idea of democracy (de Wilde 2020). Those advocating against Spitzenkandidat emphasised that this interpretation distorted the institutional balance. In other words, they did not oppose the idea of this new procedure as an internal parliamentary change that would structure the election campaign but were reluctant to accept the decrease in the European Council's power to nominate the Commission President. In a way, these actors insisted on the primacy of indirect legitimacy and accountability in the EU. This argument, however, was not enough to question the value of Spitzenkandidat for democratisation. As de Wilde (2020, 38) puts it, 'opposing Juncker equalled opposing 'democracy''. As a result, Angela Merkel had to surrender under the pressure of the media, who 'emphasized the promises that were made and forced Merkel to accept Juncker's nomination' (Reiding and Meijer 2019, 77) and join the coalition of actors advocating for the nomination of the EPP lead candidate for the Commission presidency.

Two things should be noted about this initial success of the Spitzenkandidat reform. Firstly, the lead candidate innovation proponents were coherent in their interpretation and justification of the reform and included all major European political parties (the EPP, S&D, ALDE, and Greens-EFA). In other words, the EP was united in pursuing this change. Secondly, although the Council allowed the lead candidate to be implemented in 2014, right after its success in 2014, the Council suggested reforming Spitzenkandidat. This idea received support from some of the EP party groups; however, no debate on how to reform the Spitzenkandidat process followed. Thus, as mentioned, there was a dramatic decrease in attention to this idea between the two European elections.

The return of the discussion around Spitzenkandidat happened in 2018 in connection with Macron's proposal of transnational lists. Arguably, this link with transnational lists was an important point in the development of the lead candidate initiative (de Wilde 2020). Not only did rejection of transnational lists make the French President refuse the Spitzenkandidat process, but it also allowed him to question the legitimacy and value of the reform on the new grounds and gather a coalition of supporters among highly pro-European actors.

The situation with actor configurations in 2018 and 2019 was both similar and very different from 2014. On the one hand, the debate was still comprised of

two coalitions – supporting the lead candidate and rejecting it. On the other hand, there were two significant differences. First, the coalition opposing the lead candidate grew bigger. Thus, a comparison of Figures 41 to 43 shows the increase in the number of vocal opponents to the idea of the lead candidate. Second, the anti-Spitzenkandidat coalition became more heterogeneous. Although the growth of the coalition could be attributed to the establishment of the so-called new Eurosceptic governments of Visegrad countries, a more detailed inspection of Figures 42 and 43 shows that the opposing coalition grew in size not only due to the increase in the number of Eurosceptic actors but also because some pro-EU actors joined it in 2018-2019. The most notable example are the ALDE and the French government. In essence, this led to a situation where the anti-Spitzenkandidat coalition included a mix of Eurosceptic proponents of less Europe and pro-European actors.

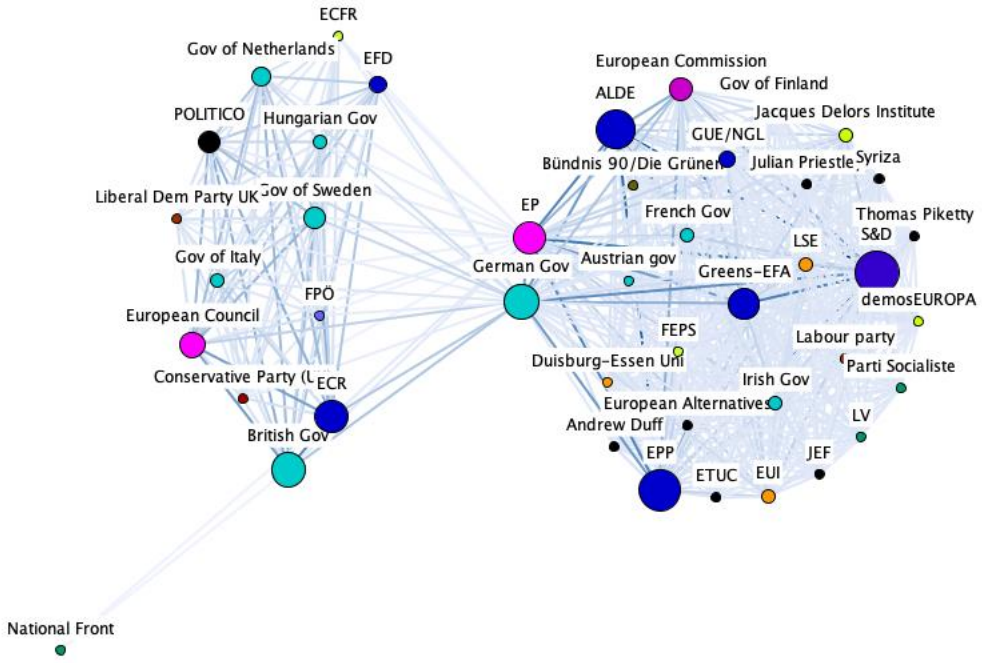


Figure 41. Congruence network of actors for Spitzenkandidat debate in 2014.

Notes: The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

The lead candidate debate in 2018-2019 was multidimensional. In other words, there were many reasons why actors supported or rejected the idea of Spitzenkandidat. On one level, it could have been caused by unwillingness to alter

the balance of power between the Council and the Parliament. Thus, the analysis shows that the idea that the European Council retains the prerogative of the appointing authority was actively used in the debate by different actors as justification for the rejection of the lead candidate procedure. On the other level, the debate on Spitzenkandidat was also shaped by actors' preferences on specific personalities. Some actors might have opposed a certain candidate rather than the procedure itself, to put it differently.

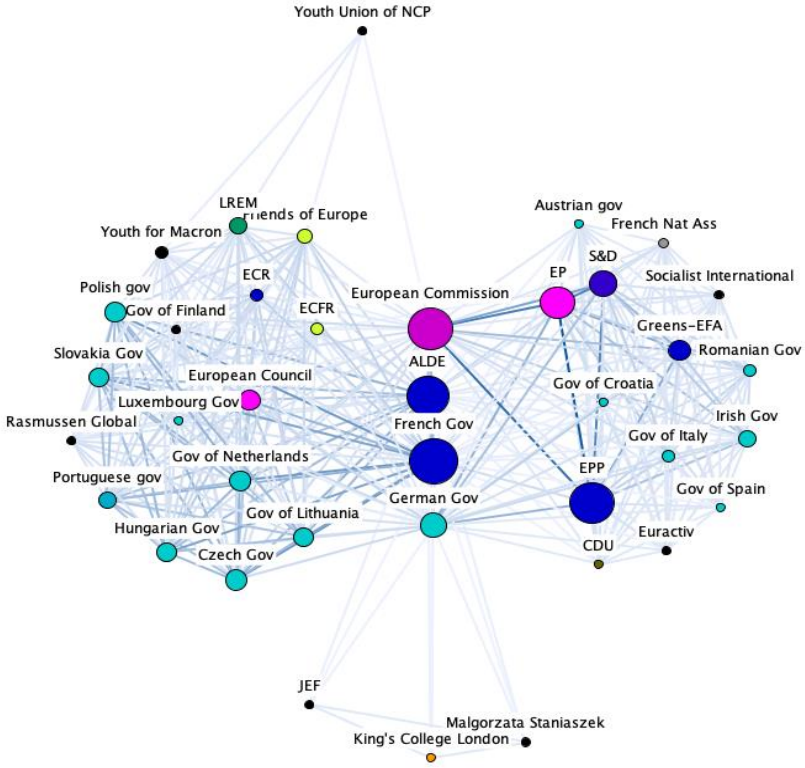


Figure 42. Congruence network of actors for Spitzenkandidat debate in 2018.

Notes: The network includes actors who discussed ideas related to concept of Spitzenkandidat. The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

However, what is interesting is that the anti-Spitzenkandidat coalition was actively trying to delegitimise the reform by saying that it was not democratic. The pro-European part of the coalition insisted that there was no point in Spitzenkandidat without transnational lists.

On the one hand, the Spitzenkandidat debate was another example of the clash between different perspectives on the EU as a transnational democracy which led to the failure of both pro-European democratic reform attempts. On

the other hand, however, it was more than that. Making legitimacy of the Spitzenkandidat dependant on the introduction of transnational lists, Macron and allies might have altered the reform direction.

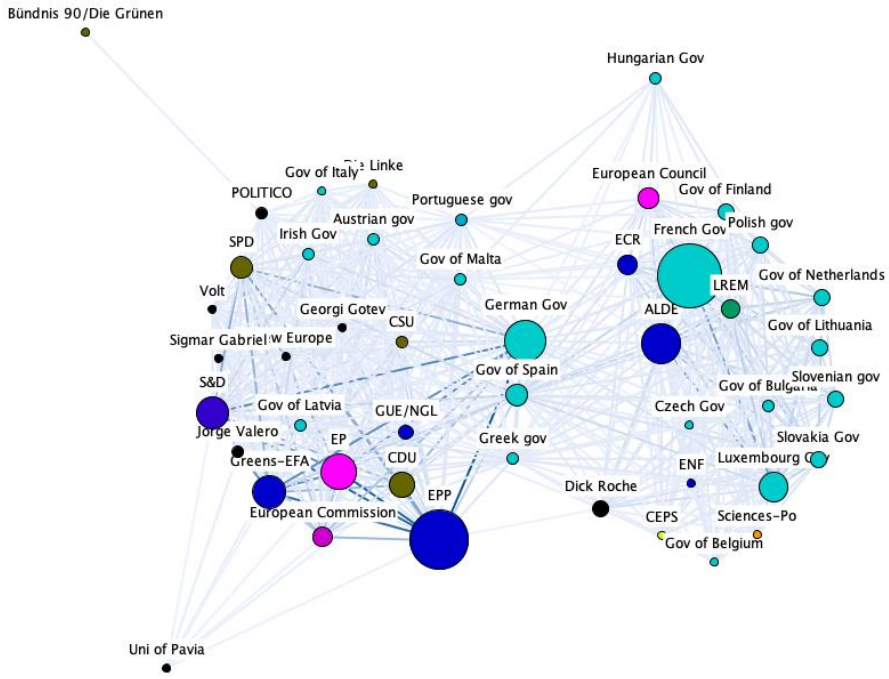


Figure 43. Congruence network of actors for Spitzenkandidat debate in 2019.

Notes: The network includes actors who discussed ideas related to concept of Spitzenkandidat. The network is normalised. The graph layout is based on a stress minimisation (MDS) of graph-theoretic distances as implemented in the 'quick layout' in Visone. Node colours: same as in Figure 3. Data sources: Euractiv and Politico.

It is noteworthy that up until February 2018, Macron expressed his support for the idea of the lead candidate (Figure 42). However, after the fall of 'transnational lists', Macron started his campaign against the Spitzenkandidat process, arguing that it was not democratic without transnational lists. In essence, Macron and his allies questioned the established mechanism for democratisation and emphasised the importance of Europeanisation. While the idea of developing a European dimension played an important role in the set of ideas constituting the meaning of Spitzenkandidat, it was arguably not the dominant one. The lead candidate aimed to develop a 'European perspective' and cross-border debate; however, it was not directed at transforming the nature of elections by taking them out of the national frame. Instead, the emphasis was put on giving citizens an instrument of direct control over decision-making.

This strategic usage of the idea of transnational lists allowed Macron and allies to effectively counteract the implementation of Spitzenkandidat in its original interpretation and, possibly, alter the traditional direction of the EU's democratisation. After being nominated by the Council, in her Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session, Ursula von der Leyen said: 'I want us to work together to improve the Spitzenkandidaten system. We need to make it more visible to the wider electorate and we need to address the issue of transnational lists at the European elections as a complementary tool of European democracy' (European Commission 2019). Of course, this does not guarantee that these reforms will happen. However, it does give tentative hope for further reform attempts.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of the institutional reform debate. In particular, it focused on discussing institutional balance and the lack of success of three major reform ideas related to institutional transformations. These are Spitzenkandidat, transnational lists, and the idea of strengthening the role of national parliaments in the decision-making process.

To briefly summarise the chapter findings, the analysis revealed that although the pattern of interrelation between actors is similar to the one that can be seen in the polity debate – with two main opposing groups – there were additional conflict lines within both coalitions. The most prominent was the conflict within the pro-transnational democracy group. It manifested itself in the debate on the reform proposals of Spitzenkandidat and transnational lists and contributed to the failure of both reform ideas.

In addition to that, the analysis showed that the distribution of both executive and legislative power between the principal EU institutions was contested. In particular, the locus of the executive power and the right of the legislative initiative. The empowerment of the national parliaments was the most widely supported idea.

Despite the broad support, the idea of strengthening the national parliaments was interpreted differently by actors, creating divergence in instrumental ideas attached to it: what kind of power and what place in the

institutional balance should get. This may have impeded this reform idea from moving further to implementation, notwithstanding the success of informal attempts to extend the power of the national parliaments by reinterpretation of the mechanism of political dialogue.

In terms of direction, the analysis showed that Macron's discursive activity to oppose the idea of a lead candidate might have altered the direction of the EU's democratic reform towards more Europeanisation in the European Parliament. Macron succeeded in linking the two reforms so that the lead candidate would have no democratic value without transnational lists.

While this chapter revealed structural characteristics in the debate on the lower-level ideas that signify further disagreements between actors on how to reform the EU and enhance its democratic qualities, the next chapter will shift the focus on the analysis of interrelations between actors and ideas. In particular, the chapter will dive into the analysis of the behaviour of actors toward ideas.

Chapter 7. Commitment to ideas. Theorisation and measurement

While previous chapters concentrated on the structural characteristics of the debate and the discursive environment created by actors – such as the central cleavage lines and disagreements, this chapter focuses on relations between actors and ideas. However, what interests us is not the relation between actors and ideas per se but its influence over the outcomes of the debate and the overall political process.

The contribution of this chapter is three-fold: theoretical, methodological and empirical. Firstly, the chapter introduces the notion of commitment to ideas and argues that commitment to ideas is a valuable analytical category that can help describe discourse and explain the development of debate and policies.

Commitment is a connection between an actor and a target (a focus to which the link is developed) with outstanding implications. This phenomenon received much attention from researchers in different areas of social science because it has been associated with an increased ability to reach desired outcomes and identified as an 'important condition for success' (Campos and Esfahani 2000).

Although the concept of commitment has been used in policy and political studies (Fox et al. 2015), it received limited attention in ideational research. This chapter focuses on actors' commitment to ideas and its link with the success of ideas – their ability to strengthen position in discourse and/or be adopted. In particular, the chapter links commitment and ideational power. It discusses the mechanism of pressure through discourse, allowing actors to exert influence over other actors using ideational elements and reach the desired outcome. Of course, success is dependent on multiple factors and what I intend to do in this chapter is not to create an all-encompassing model of ideas' success but rather speak about commitment as one of the factors that can influence ideas' destiny in the policy process.

In addition to that, the chapter introduces the concept of ideas of continued importance that allows expanding the descriptive potential of the discourse network analysis. Ideas of continued importance are the ones that actors are most committed to. These ideas are of interest because they form the backbone of the discourse and are the 'focal points' (Legro 2000) of ideation.

Hence, they can be perceived as successful in the discursive dimension and as having great potential to be implemented or institutionalised.

Methodologically the chapter contributes by introducing a measure that allows evaluating the levels of commitment through discourse networks. Assuming that actors' discursive behaviour can serve as a proxy for commitment, manifestations of this bond in discourse – stability, strength, and priority of the link with a specific idea over links with other ideas – are used to assess the levels of actors' commitment. The value of this measure lies in incorporating a critical component of the commitment construct – often overlooked in the analysis of textual data – the stability of relations.

Finally, the chapter provides insights into a substantial part of the debate on EU democratic reform by applying the new commitment measure to the overall discussion. It identifies the key focal points of collective ideation, the most committed actors, and speaks about the difference in levels of commitment to ideas as a potential reason for the lack of reform.

Conceptualisation of commitment

Commitment as a theoretical construct is often described as unclear and 'stretched' (Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012). One of the primary sources of confusion is that the term has been used to cover both the mechanism (i.e. psychological state or an attitude) that binds an actor to the target of commitment and the behaviour that results from it. This led to various indirect conceptualisations and the notion of different types of commitment (Klein, Molloy, and Cooper 2009).

This is further complicated by the fact that different mechanisms bind actors to the target, and different behaviours and, more generally, outcomes can result from this bond. Thus, for instance, in the organisational behaviour literature, depending on the underlying motivations, three types of commitment are distinguished: 1) affective – based on desire induced by emotions or shared values 2) normative – based on the willingness or necessity to obey norms 3) calculative or functional – based on existing 'side bets' or future benefits (Becker 1960; Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe 2004).

There was, however, an attempt to overcome this conceptual fragmentation by theorising commitment as a multidimensional construct in which types of commitment were redefined as components of commitment (see Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001) that interact with each other.

Another potentially confusing aspect in conceptualisations of commitment is that definitions of commitment in different disciplines are often target-specific. They include elements that are specific to the particular foci of commitment.

Broad and target-dependent understandings of commitment have recently been challenged. Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield (2012) introduced a narrow but at the same time more general – 'target-free' – conceptualisation of commitment. From this perspective, commitment neither has different types nor a complex structure of multiple components constituting it. It is a 'volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target' (Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012, 137). In sum, from this standpoint, commitment can be roughly defined as a moderate variant of affective and/or normative attachment that can manifest itself in the following outcomes: 1) 'allocating more effort and resources in support of the target' 2) willingness 'to make trade-offs in favor of the target when allocating constrained resources such as time and attention', and 3) unwillingness to abandon the target (Klein and Park 2016, 18; Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012).

The concept of political commitment has been used in line with the above-mentioned trends to refer to both mechanisms that connect an actor to a political system (or parts of it) and the outcomes of this relationship. For instance, DeLamater (1973), in his work on political commitment, concentrates on what makes people engage with political systems and distinguishes (depending on the underlining motives) between symbolic, normative, ideological, and functional commitment. Whereas Fox et al. (2011, para 3), in their study of responses of different countries to an increase in HIV rates, define political commitment through political outcomes and 'identify three components of political commitment (expressed, institutional and budgetary)'.

Since there is no agreed definition of commitment, it is important to clarify how commitment will be conceptualised in this research. This thesis employs a composite definition of commitment. On the one hand, commitment is a relational

phenomenon – a bond between an actor and the foci (target) of commitment – that manifests itself in a wide range of behaviours that can be grouped into two main categories continuance/non-switching and effort-related. On the other hand, in my definition, this bond is not limited to specific intentional affective and/or normative attachments as in the Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield (2012) model. Instead, in line with the broader inclusive conceptualisation, commitment is defined as a construct that incorporates various underlying motivations.

A few more aspects regarding the conceptualisation of commitment are worth mentioning. These are the things that commitment researchers agree on. Firstly, commitment is generally accepted as 'a function of how the target and environment are perceived' (Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012, 140; Morgan and Hunt 1994). In other words, commitment is a connection that an actor constantly reconsiders depending on what is happening with the foci of commitment (the target) and conditions (institutional, organisational, interpersonal etc.) in which an actor operates. In that sense, commitment, though associated with endurance and persistence, is not static and may change over time.

Secondly, commitment indicates that (or appears when) a target is important to or is associated with a certain value for an actor (Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012). However, it is worth mentioning that commitment is not binary, meaning that an actor can be committed to a target to various degrees. In addition to that, scholars agree that actors can have multiple foci of commitment (Reichers 1985; Cohen 1993; Becker 2016). There is, however, a lack of understanding of how these different commitments interact.

Finally, a commitment bond may appear between an actor and a target even if the target is negatively evaluated. For example, this would be the case if an actor perceives a target as a threat and continuously invests time and other resources into preventing it from happening. This type of bond will be referred to as negative commitment in this chapter.

Commitment: why it matters

Commitment has been the focus of research across different disciplines for many decades because of its potential in explaining and predicting outcomes in different social systems. Commitment shapes the nature of an actor's engagement with the

target in a way that benefits both an actor and a target and increases their chances for success.

As mentioned in the previous section, commitment is associated with two types of behavioural outcomes – a 'consistent line of activity' (Becker 1960) relevant to the target or 'non-switching' and intensive engagement with the target (i.e. support, advocacy, involvement). Thus, the notion of commitment has been extensively used to explain the development and sustainment of durable relationships (Meyer and Allen 1991; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Alkhawaldeh, Md Salleh, and Halim 2015) and willingness to exert effort in support of the target of commitment (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007; Linklater and Waller 2003; Kernecker 2017; DeLamater 1973). Most importantly, these kinds of behavioural outcomes have been associated with success.

In political systems, the commitment-success nexus is often studied in connection with the notion of political will (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2000; Lassa et al. 2019). Political will is understood as the quality of a powerful actor's engagement (often that of a national government) with a problem/solution and is seen as an important factor in explaining the success or failure of certain policies or decisions. This perspective has been widely used in policy studies from food and nutrition to healthcare and disaster prevention (Lassa et al. 2019; te Lintelo and Lakshman 2015; Brinkerhoff 2000; Fox et al. 2015).

Another way commitment affects social processes is its impact on collective action systems. For example, it has been recognized that commitment is beneficial for cooperation due to its ability to 'motivate individuals to act cooperatively in pursuit of shared collective ends' (Robertson and Tang 1995, 69; Linklater and Waller 2003). In other words, commitment facilitates agency development on a group level by favourably influencing the group's unity and cohesion. Thus, in political studies, the connection between the legislative success of parties and high levels of commitment demonstrated by their members has been revealed (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007)

Commitment to ideas: why it matters

While the bond of commitment can be developed to different foci, this chapter will discuss ideas as commitment targets. It is worth clarifying that this study will

be limited to investigating commitment to ideas expressed in discourse. As Fox et al. (2011) point out, political commitment can manifest itself in different dimensions: in discourse (expressed commitment), 'infrastructure and procedures' (institutional commitment), and allocation of resources in support of the target (budgetary commitment). By emphasising discourse and verbal 'commitment', the research does not aim to diminish the importance of other components or manifestations of the commitment bond. The rationale behind this approach is that discourse and discursive outcomes are not only explanatory variables but important social phenomena worth exploring (Blyth 1997; Diez 1999).

The shortest answer to why study commitment to ideas is that it can help explain the outcomes of political and policy processes as well as shed light on the direction in which it is going to develop. In this chapter, I suggest considering the commitment to ideas in the context of ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016) as a mechanism that allows exerting influence over other actors' beliefs and as a factor that can contribute to the success or failure of ideas through the behaviour of actors. The link between the success of actors (their ability to reach desired policy outcomes) and specific types of behaviour has already been previously revealed in the literature (e.g. Kingdon 2013; Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011). The contribution of this thesis is, firstly, in categorising this type of behaviour as commitment-induced, secondly, in articulating the discursive mechanisms that help ideas succeed and reach prominence, and, thirdly, in suggesting a measure that considers the temporal pattern of engagement with ideas.

Commitment – success nexus in ideational research

The link between what can be described as the outcomes of commitment and the success of coalitions was articulated in the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). Thus, one of the hypotheses developed within the framework states that the 'stability, strength, and intra-coalition cohesion' of policy beliefs over time increases the coalition's chances/likelihood of influencing policy outcomes (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011, 548). What is referred to as stability,

strength, and cohesion of policy beliefs in the NPF is in line with what researchers describe as the outcomes (or components) of commitment.

The NPF, however, is concentrated on the success of the coalition overall rather than the success of a specific idea. An actor's success and the success of an idea can overlap, but they are not equal. Actors can succeed in inducing a change in institutions or ideas; however, they will not necessarily implement all of the ideas they promote and advocate for. On the other hand, the success of an idea means that a certain idea changes (strengthens) its position in discourse (overall or in the belief system of one of the actors) in a way that favours it and/or helps it become institutionalised or get adopted.

A more direct link between commitment and success of ideas was described by Kingdon (2013, 179), who emphasised the importance of policy entrepreneurs – influential individual (or collective) actors who are persistent and 'willing to invest their resources…to promote a position'. Moreover, Kingdon also noted that for an idea to survive and move towards enactment, a certain 'softening up' process is necessary, which means that entrepreneurs must spread this idea to make the decision-makers and the public familiar with it and, thus, to create the favourable environment for it to reach prominence.

Extending the theoretical work on the link between commitment to ideas and success, I suggest a mechanism of discursive pressure through which commitment (or change in it) can affect the success of ideas. Drawing on the EU democratic reform debate analysis, this mechanism will be described in detail in the later sections of the chapter.

Commitment and power in ideas

The notion that actors' engagement gives weight to ideas is not new. Thus, the frequency of usage of ideas has been widely employed to study the weight of ideational elements. The contribution of this research is, firstly, in establishing a connection between the weight of ideas gained through the engagement of actors and their power, and, secondly, in incorporating the temporal aspect in the assessment of the weight of ideas. In essence, I suggest that actors empower ideas by maintaining and strengthening links with them and that the temporal aspect is important in this empowerment.

In that sense, commitment as a multi-dimensional construct allows one to get a more nuanced picture of the actor's relationship with ideas. By measuring the commitment of actors to ideas, one can identify not only important ideas but also ideas of continued importance. This can be done on different levels, from micro to macro and can help better understand the direction of the ideational development.

Operationalisation of commitment: a dynamic perspective

What is important for understanding the debate and its outcomes is not only knowledge about the actor's commitment to the idea(s) but also about the levels and/or its direction – whether it is positive or negative. For that reason, commitment should be measured. Although many different measures of commitment have been presented in various strands of literature (for an overview, see Jaros 2009), in this section, operationalisation and measurement adopted for the analysis of ideas will be introduced.

A variety of measures, from simple to complex, exists depending on how the commitment is interpreted. There is also a variety of ways to gather data on commitment. Thus, in organisational behaviour studies, the most common approach is through self-report (Goffin and Gellatly 2001), when respondents are asked questions that allow capturing different aspects of the commitment construct. At the same time, in marketing, the measures are mainly based on assessing actors (consumers) behaviour as a proxy for commitment (Zalaghi and Varzi 2014; Blattberg, Kim, and Neslin 2008).

Drawing on the literature that measures commitment through actors' behaviour and the research that attempts to incorporate temporal perspective into the analysis of affiliation networks (Sharara et al. 2010, 2012), I developed a measure that integrates time variance into the assessment of actors' relations with ideas.

Engagement-based measures

As mentioned, commitment is a bond that connects an actor and a target (an idea). Thus, in network terms, the level of commitment depends on the strength of the bond between these two units.

In marketing research, commitment or loyalty is often assessed through the number of purchases made or the share of the product in the pool of products (Kahan 1998; Singh, Ehrenberg, and Goodhardt 2008; Bhattacharya et al. 1996). According to this logic, commitment is manifested in repetitive actions towards the target. In other words, the primary source of information about commitment is the quantity of these repetitive actions performed within a given period.

It is intuitive to assume that the more statements the actor makes or, the more significant the share of the idea in the overall repertoire of ideas, the stronger the link. This approach can be called engagement-based, which means that the level of commitment is assessed through the intensity of engagement (in the case when the absolute number of statements is considered) or the intensity and priority of the idea in the overall repertoire of concepts (in the case when the share of the concept is considered).

In DNA, the engagement-based approach to commitment to ideas would entail considering how many statements attributed to a particular idea were made by an actor. This coincides with how the link between an actor and an idea is calculated in the DNA affiliation networks.

Although insightful, this approach misses an essential aspect of endurance (or a temporal aspect of interrelations) fundamental for the commitment construct (Sharara et al. 2010).

Based on the works on time-varying affiliation networks (Sharara et al. 2010, 2012), I suggest considering time as a variable that affects the quality of the connection between an actor and an idea. Time is often used to compare the strength of the bond rather than something that directly affects it. It is widespread to assess how the link between two units changes over time. For instance, if the number of engagements increases or decreases or if the bond is sustained at all. However, time is usually not considered something that directly

affects the strength of a connection. Nevertheless, it is possible to think of the strength of the bond as a function of the amount of time it has been maintained.

From this perspective, both the intensity and the temporal pattern of engagement would matter in assessing the strength of the relationship. In particular, the fact that the bond repeatedly manifests over time signifies that it is strong, while if the engagement is one-time or very rare, it would probably mean that the link is weak.

For example, imagine we need to assess the commitment of an actor who made an equal number of statements to support two different concepts within five periods. However, the temporal patterns of their engagement with the concepts were different. The actor mentioned the first idea only in the first period out of five under consideration, while the second idea was present in their discourse in all the periods (Figure 44). Figure 45 shows that if the engagement-based operationalisation of commitment is adopted, the actor would be considered equally committed to both ideas in the last time point because the overall number of references to the ideas was the same. Thus, the temporal variance will not be reflected in the commitment levels.

The two-component commitment measure that combines engagement and stability elements will be introduced in the following section. This measure is based on assessing the number of statements an actor made and the number of periods in which the link between an actor and a concept was sustained.

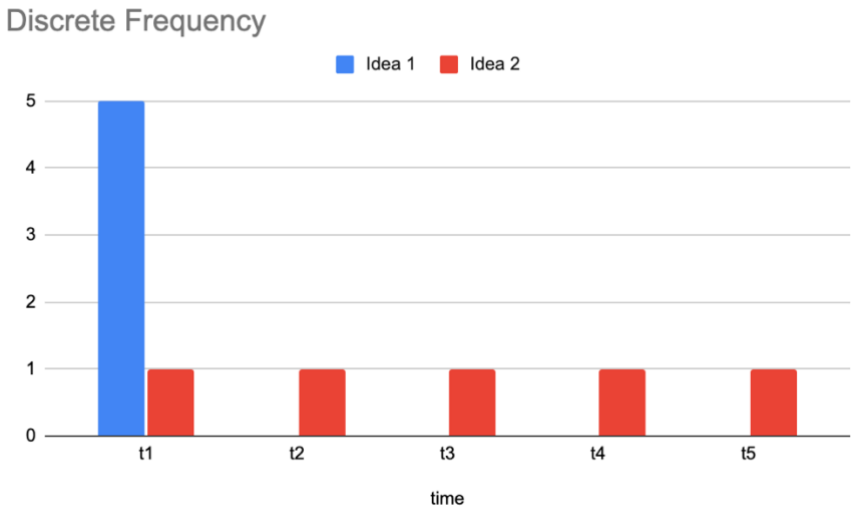


Figure 44. Number of statements on idea 1 and idea 2 made by an actor at each time point.

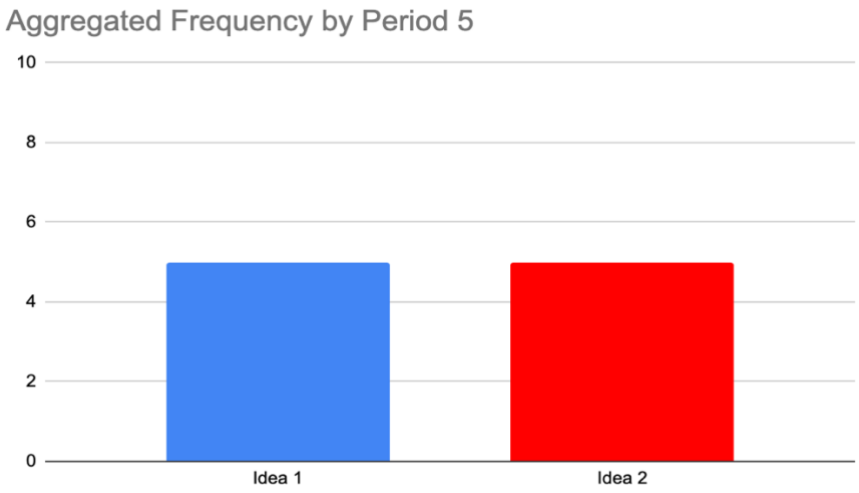


Figure 45.Cumulative number of statements made by an actor by the time point 5.

Two-component commitment measure

Although the commitment measure developed in this research draws on the work of Sharara et al. (2010) on a general-purpose loyalty measure, it differs in how the temporal aspect or stability of relations is operationalised. Unlike the measure in Sharara et al. (2010), both elements of the measure presented in this thesis – the intensity and the stability one – are based on the calculation of shares. In the case of intensity, it is a share an idea has in the overall number of statements made by an actor, while, in the case of intensity, it is a share of time steps in which the actor engaged with an idea in the overall number of time steps.

Calculating the share an idea has in the overall quantity of statements made by an actor allows for incorporating prioritisation into the measure and making the commitment to one idea in the set of actor's beliefs dependent on their relations with other ideas. As was discussed in the section on the conceptualisation of commitment, one of the commitment outcomes is the willingness 'to make trade-offs in favour of the target when allocating constrained resources such as time and attention' (Klein and Park 2016, 18; Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield 2012). This means that the higher the commitment, the more resources actor allocates to support the idea. Thus, it will take a larger share of his repertoire of ideas.

To create a continuous measure of actors' commitment for each time step I calculate how many statements representing a particular idea c_l were made by an actor compared to the overall number of actor's statements Σ_c in the

cumulative period Δt . The cumulative period starts at time point t_1 and finishes at the time point under consideration t. So, if our data is divided into six periods, we will have six time steps to consider. At each time step t following the starting period *t1*, the cumulative period Δt would include all the statements made within and before t.

$$Int = \frac{n(a_i, c_l, \Delta t)}{n(a_i, \Sigma_c, \Delta t)}$$

This element repeats the key element of the loyalty measure developed by Sharara et al. (2010) – the frequency-based loyalty. The difference lies in the second component. While Sharara et al. (2010) emphasise continuous, uninterrupted engagement, I define stability as recurrent engagement. Undoubtedly, constant engagement with no gaps could indicate higher levels of commitment than discontinuous. However, applied to the analysis of discourse, the measure developed by Sharara et al. (2010) happens to disfavour recurrent but discontinuous engagement with ideas and privilege intensive one-time engagement over consistent but less active involvement with ideas. In the context of this research, it was paramount that the commitment measure would privilege ideas present in the discourse for more time than others.

To make a measure coincide with the interpretation of commitment and the tasks of this research, I developed an alternative two-component measure by changing the second element responsible for capturing the stability of the relationship with ideas. This element of the measure is calculated by dividing the number of periods an actor engaged with the concept *(np)* within the cumulative period Δt by the total number of periods T_{tot} :

$$Stab(a_i, c_l, t) = \frac{np(a_i, c_l, \Delta t)}{T_{tot}}$$

To calculate the commitment level, therefore, one needs to multiply intensity by stability.

$$Commitment(a_i, c_l, t) = Int(a_i, c_l, t) * Stab(a_i, c_l, t)$$

To demonstrate how the measure works, let us compare it with two engagement-based measures using the example mentioned above of an actor engaging with two ideas. An actor made an equal number of statements to support/reject two ideas. However, their engagement with them had different

temporal patterns. While idea 1 was used only in the first time step, idea 2 was used in every time step. If we were to evaluate commitment based on the cumulative number of statements (Figure 46), we would see that the strength of the bond between an actor and idea 2 grew, whereas the strength of the bond between the actor and idea 1 remained at the same high level. Also, at the last time point, the actor was equally committed to both ideas.

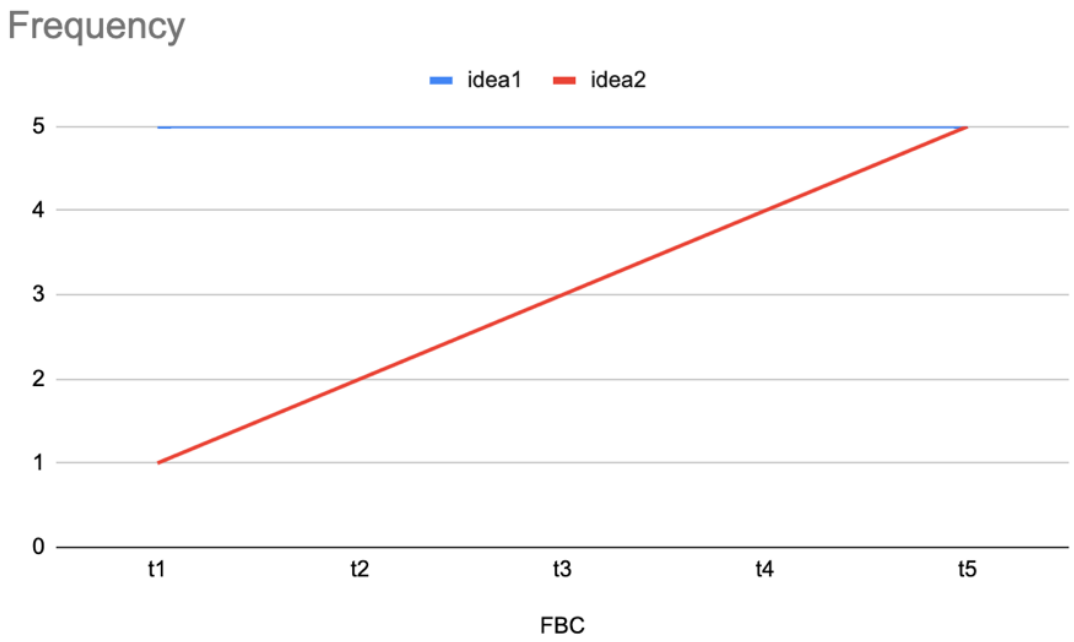


Figure 46. Cumulative number of statements on ideas 1 and 2 made between t1 and t5.

Notes: Based on the example from Figure 44 and Figure 45.

If we were to assess the level of commitment based on the share of the idea in the overall number of statements, we would better understand how the relationship between an actor and an idea developed over time. Thus, Figure 47 shows that the share of the first concept in the overall repertoire of actor's ideas gradually decreases, while idea 2 becomes more salient over time. However, the fact that idea 1 was used only once, while idea 2 appeared in all five time periods, is disregarded in this engagement-based measure.

The two-component commitment measure introduced in this chapter allows favouring recurrent (stable) participation. Figure 48 shows that at the final time step, the level of commitment to idea 2 is higher, even though the actor made the same number of statements to support/reject each of the ideas.

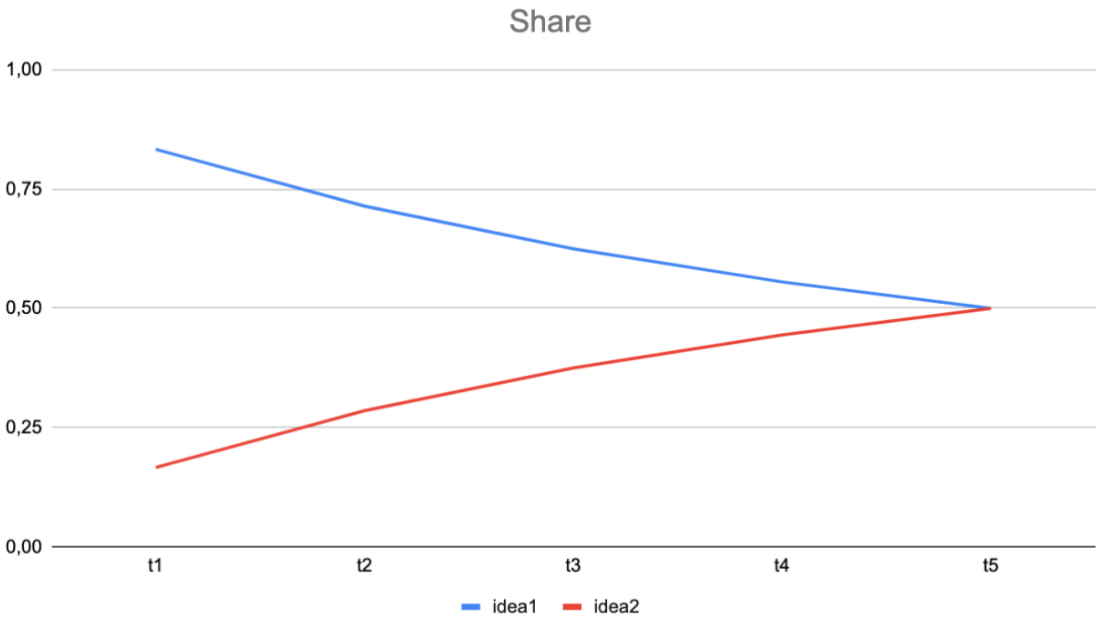


Figure 47. Share of ideas 1 and 2 in the overall number of statements between t1 and t5.

Notes: Based on the example from Figure 44 and Figure 45.

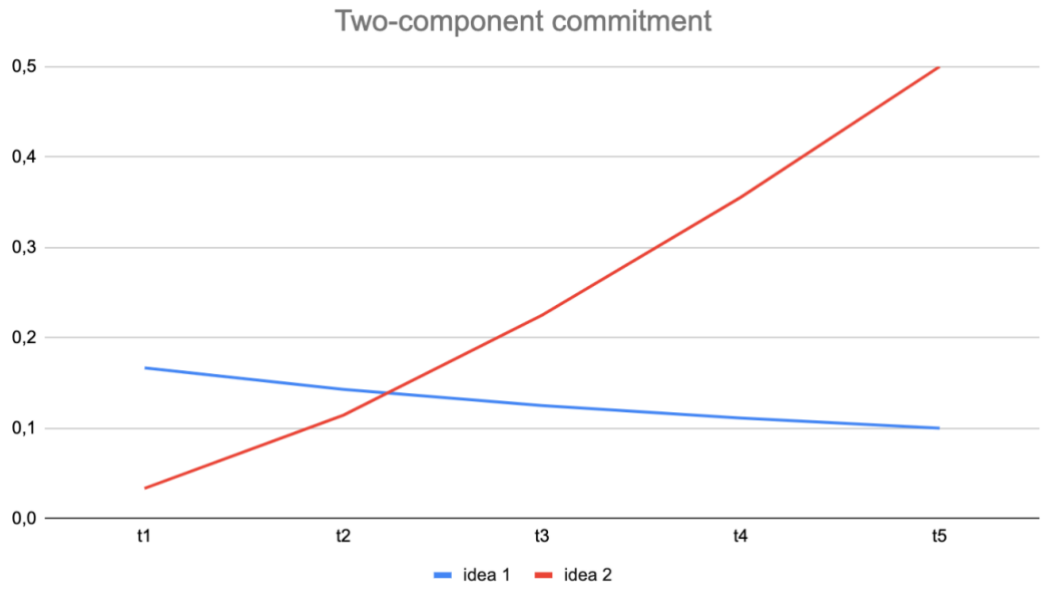


Figure 48. Commitment to ideas 1 and 2 between t1 and t5.

Notes: Based on the example from Figure 44 and Figure 45.

It should be noted that the first component of the measure – the engagement-based – can vary depending on the research task. For instance, if one needs to analyse the repertoire of ideas of a particular actor or coalition and measure the weight of each particular idea in it, it would make sense to take into consideration all statements made by this actor and calculate a share of each idea in their repertoire of ideas. However, if the goal is to analyse and compare the behaviour of different actors towards one particular idea, it would be reasonable to calculate the commitment of actors to an idea without taking into consideration all other ideas they engage with. In that case, one needs to calculate a share of statements made by each actor who engaged with this idea in the overall number of statements in which this idea was mentioned.

Commitment and switching behaviour

The measure introduced in the previous section is structured around a specific understanding of stability as maintenance of a relationship. It means that an actor is considered committed for as long as they engage with the idea, whereas switching behaviour would mean changing the focus of commitment. This interpretation may be sufficient for various foci (such as parties and brands); however, in the case of discourse, stability has an additional dimension: the consistency of an actor's evaluation of an idea. It is common for actors to change their attitude to concepts due to situational influences and continue to engage with them. To accommodate this aspect, I introduce a tool that allows us to track positive, negative, and overall commitment.

In network terms, the overall commitment (or commitment to a topic) is the connection built between an actor and an idea without considering the agreement qualified. It means that an actor is committed if they engage with a concept regardless of whether they agree or disagree with it. This approach does not consider the above-mentioned dimension of stability as consistency in attitude. This can be seen as a limitation. However, it can be helpful in some analytical tasks, such as assessing the prominent ideas – ideas of continued importance – which will be introduced in more detail later in this chapter.

To account for the agreement variable, one can calculate the positive and negative commitments. In the former case, only positive statements (e. g.,

support of a concept by an actor) would be counted in the assessment of commitment, while, in the former, only negative statements (e. g. rejection of concepts by an actor). In order to do so, one would need to link each concept node 'to one of the agreement patterns' (Leifeld 2017, 309). To put it simply, one needs to divide each concept into a pair of a positive concept and a negative concept. For instance, the concept of a single presidency would be divided in the EU institutions or 'single presidency – support (cr=1) would be a positive concept, while its rejection 'single presidency – reject' (cr=0) would be a negative concept.

Commitment, success, and power: theorising about and measuring commitment to ideas

Drawing on Narrative Policy Framework Sharara et al. (2010) and the ideational power approach (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016), this section discusses factors and mechanisms related to actors' commitment that can potentially contribute to an idea's success. It also presents the notion of ideas of continued importance.

To unfold the argument, I will start by distinguishing between different types of success. Firstly, there is an actor's success and the success of an idea. They can overlap, but they are not equal. Actors can succeed in inducing a change in institutions or ideas; however, they will not necessarily realise all the ideas they promote and advocate for. The success of an idea means that a certain idea changes (strengthens) its position in discourse (overall or in the belief system of one of the actors) and/or is being institutionalised.

Secondly, a distinction should be made between discursive success and other types of success. Discursive success is related to the ability to induce/prevent changes in the discursive realm – change the position of idea in discourse, change actors' beliefs. Thus, while the overall concept of success includes discursive success, it also covers other aspects – such as institutionalisation, policy reform etc.

This section will discuss the link between commitment to ideas, success, and ideational power. Carstensen and Schmidt (2016, 321) define ideational power 'as the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements. They distinguish between three types of power – two direct and one indirect. The

direct power stems from either the ability of actors to persuade other actors using arguments or from the ability of an actor to impose or resist the imposition of certain ideas. The key difference is that in the latter case, actors exercising ideational power do not need to change the beliefs of other actors. Indirect power comes from the ability to change the ideational environment that determines the range of what is perceived as 'thinkable' and 'mentionable' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016).

This section argues that it is possible to assume that, on the one hand, commitment-induced (active and stable) usage of ideational elements by actors can improve their ability to influence other actors, while, on the other hand, behavioural outcomes of actors' commitment can improve the position of an idea in the discourse thus making it more powerful.

Drawing on the hypothesis developed within the NPF that states that 'stability, strength, and intra-coalition cohesion' of policy beliefs over time increases the coalition's chances/likelihood of influencing policy outcomes (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011, 548), I developed a discursive explanation for the success of ideas broadly defined.

The following section will describe the discursive mechanism through which the behaviour of committed actors can influence the outcomes of the policy process.

Discursive pressure

While early ideational research focused on external events as explanations of ideational dynamics, recent scholarship has shifted its focus to 'how specific actors use […] ideas' (Saurugger 2013, 896) as well as on specific qualities of ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). Carstensen and Schmidt (2016), theorising ideational power, mention persuasion as a mechanism that allows actors to affect ideational structures. From their perspective, persuasiveness is a quality of an idea that 'depends on … the cognitive and normative arguments that can be mustered in its support' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, 324).

However, it is possible that the capacity of an actor to affect other actors' beliefs by using ideational elements also depends on their behaviour in discourse

(whether it is intentional or not). In particular, I suggest that discursive pressure created by committed actors through their usage of ideas can be the mechanism that contributes to the ability of actors to succeed in their promotion of ideas and, thus, enables ideas to succeed.

I define discursive pressure as an influence that the usage of ideational elements in the debate rather than their substance has on other actors. In other words, what is important is not only what arguments actors make but how they present them. This means the actor's effort and persistence in promoting /advocating for or against the idea. Discursive pressure is a result of discursive actions of committed actors who actively and continuously promote their idea.

The idea of discursive pressure as a mechanism that allows the exertion of influence over other actors' and contributes to the success or failure of an idea draws on the above-mentioned NPF hypothesis and the work of Kingdon (2013) on norm entrepreneurs. In the Narrative Policy Framework hypothesis, strength and stability of policy beliefs are mentioned as possible factors affecting the ability of a coalition to reach the desired policy outcomes. I borrow these characteristics for the discursive pressure mechanism to explain the success of ideas. This means that by using an idea stably and intensively, an actor can create a pressure that would influence other actors and contribute to producing a change in their ideational configurations (temporary or permanent). This also goes in line with Kingdon's (2013) idea of 'softening' the environment to make it ready to accept the idea.

What I call direct pressure is an influence exerted by the usage of ideational elements on the targeted actor who is expected to change their position on a certain idea. This mechanism is supposed to work through repetition and accelerate the persuasiveness of the statements made by actors. Repeated exposure increases awareness and stimulates the formation of preferences towards an idea (Ernst, Kühne, and Wirth 2017). Moreover, research showed that repetition increases the message's persuasiveness and positively affects 'perception about… credibility' (Patrick Rau et al. 2014).

The pressure formed by the discursive activity of actors can also work indirectly. This is to say that, even if the effort made by the actor does not achieve a change in the beliefs of the targeted actor, active and prolonged promotion of

the concept can induce social pressure that would indirectly affect an actor. This is closer to what Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) mention in their description of *power over* – the ability to impose or resist the imposition of ideas – and *power in* ideas rather than persuasion per se. In such cases, actors affect the discursive environment surrounding a targeted actor by feeling it with the idea they advocate for. So not only is a targeted actor exposed to the idea, but all other actors are also. The key assumption is that a lasting and active presence in the discourse would make the idea more powerful – in a sense that it would bring it more weight and, thus, it will become more difficult to ignore it. Even if the targeted actor themselves doesn't change their attitude towards the idea, the surrounding actors may create social pressure that would affect the position of the targeted actor.

Illustrative examples: Spitzenkandidat and transnational lists

The success of the Spitzenkandidat reform in 2014 could be an illustrative example of how discursive pressure works. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the lead candidate succeeded because it was tightly interrelated with the idea of democracy. However, the fact that the coalition advocating for the lead candidate innovation was larger than the opposing coalition and included a diverse range of actors from main European party groups and various national parties to academics and member states, and was very active might have also contributed to its success.

The turning point in the debate was when Angela Merkel changed her position on, though still did not accept, the idea of the lead candidate of the winning party as a president of the European Commission. What happened was, on the one hand, what the concept of *power over* ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016) describes – Angela Merkel had to shift to a pro-Spitzenkandidat coalition due to the normative ideational pressure created by the media (Reiding and Meijer 2019, 77)

On the other hand, we can assume that, in addition to that, actors advocating for the lead candidate reform created indirect discursive pressure by actively spreading their message, and thus made it more difficult to resist the idea of Spitzenkandidat. The analysis of commitment levels shows that pro-

Spitzenkandidat actors demonstrated more commitment in the debate than their counterparts. Thus, if we measure positive and negative commitments to the concept of the lead candidate, we can see that positive commitment to Spitzenkandidat by the end of June 2014 – when the destiny of the reform was decided – was more than 1,5 times higher than negative.

It should be noted that the Spitzenkandidat concept and the debate around it are considered separately from other ideas as an issue network. Therefore, in the calculation of commitment, the share of positive/negative statements in the overall number of statements is considered rather than the share this concept takes in the overall repertoire of ideas.

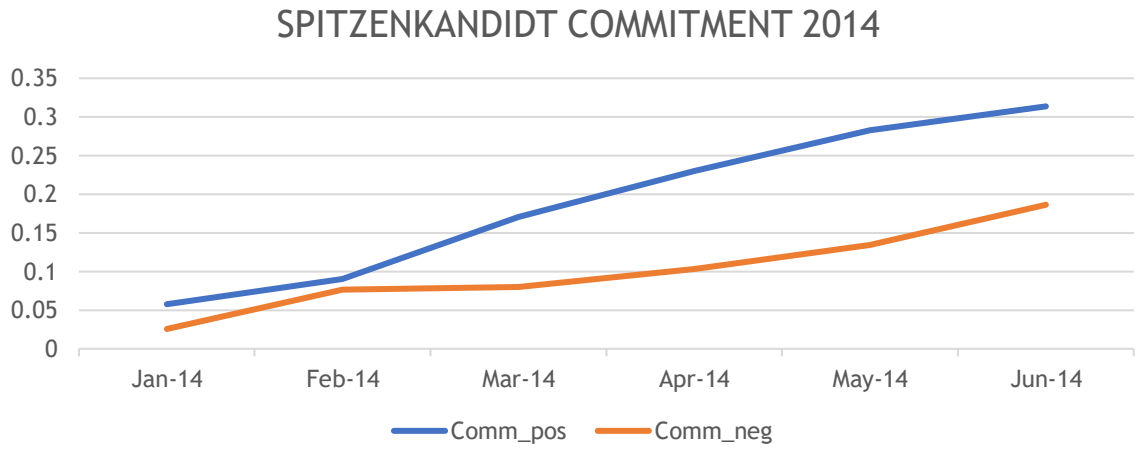


Figure 49. Levels of positive and negative commitment to the Spitzenkandidat reform between January and June 2014.

Figure 49 demonstrates an increasing commitment on both sides. Supporters and opponents of the lead candidate engaged in the debate consistently – at every time step. However, the commitment of supporters grew faster. Due to the fact that stability was equal for both positive and negative commitment to Spitzenkandidat, the intensity of engagement played a key role. Figure 51 shows that the aggregated share of positive statements about the reform was always larger than that of negative ones.

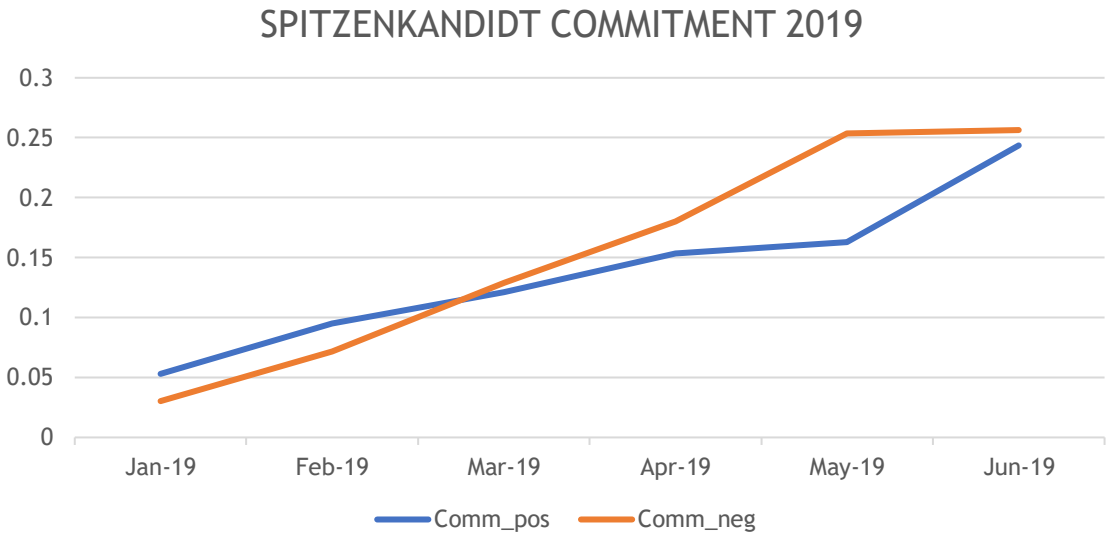
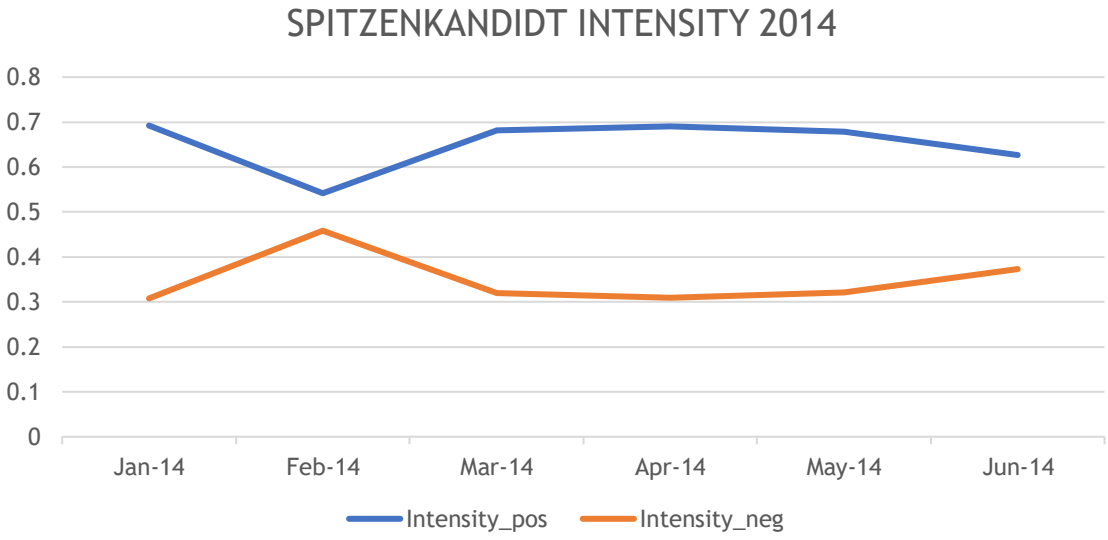


Figure 50. Levels of positive and negative commitment to the Spitzenkandidat reform idea between January and June 2019.



EpFigure 51. Levels of intensity with which positive and negative statements about the Spitzenkandidat reform idea were made between January and June 2014.

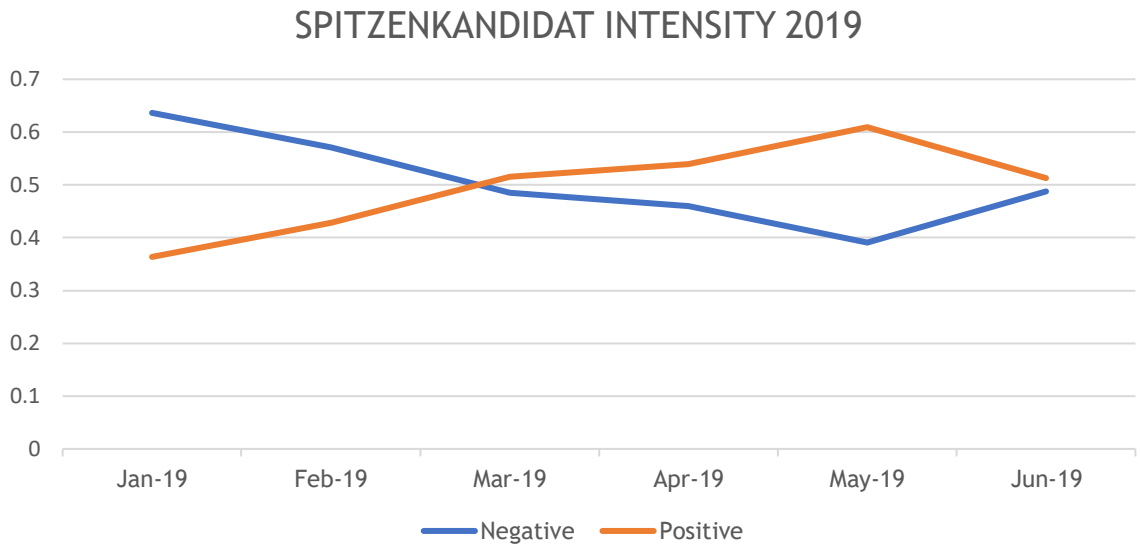


Figure 52. Levels of intensity with which positive and negative statements about the Spitzenkandidat reform idea were made between January and June 2019.

The situation was different in 2019 when, after the next European Parliamentary elections, Spitzenkandidat failed, and the Council selected the new president. Figure 50 shows that from March to June 2019, negative commitment to Spitzenkandidat was higher. In this case, the stability was also equal for both positive and negative commitments. Thus, intensity made the most significant contribution to the difference in commitment (Figure 52).

This example demonstrates a positive association between commitment to the idea and its success. However, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the success and failure of Spitzenkandidat could have been caused by various factors as well as their interplay. One of the key discursive factors was that Spitzenkandidat was strongly connected on the ideational level with the idea of democracy in 2014, while in 2019, Macron and his supporters managed to question that. It is possible that discursive pressure created by committed actors is a good complementary mechanism that allows a strong idea to become even stronger. In other words, I suggest that commitment of actors – expressed in the discourse – maybe not be enough to make an idea successful, while the structure of an idea – its meaning and (strengths of) connections with other ideas – play an equally important role.

Failure of the transnational lists initiative in 2018 demonstrates the point that higher commitment – and discursive pressure – is not always sufficient for success. As Figure 53 shows, the commitment of supporters of transnational lists

was much higher than of those who rejected the reform. In the case of transnational lists, the difference between the two coalitions was not only in intensity but also in the instability of engagement with the concept. At the final point of the active debate – in February 2018 – the stability of engagement of the pro-transnational lists coalition was almost two times higher than that of their opponents. These efforts, as well as the fact that the coalition supporting the idea of transnational lists, as was discussed in the previous chapter, was larger, did not lead to acceptance and enactment of the reform. What happened was that the largest party in the European Parliament – the EPP – voted down the proposal to introduce transnational lists. In essence, the pressure created by committed actors promoting the reform alone did not allow to change the EPP's position on it.

Change in the EPP's position happened in 2019 when they had to accept the idea of transnational lists because the credibility of Spitzenkandidat was called into question. This example once again shows the importance of the argument actors make. However, it is possible to assume that in line with Kingdon's (2013) idea of the necessity of 'softening' – preparing the environment for an idea to get more easily accepted – the commitment of actors and the pressure created by them in the previous years was an important component of its eventual discursive success.

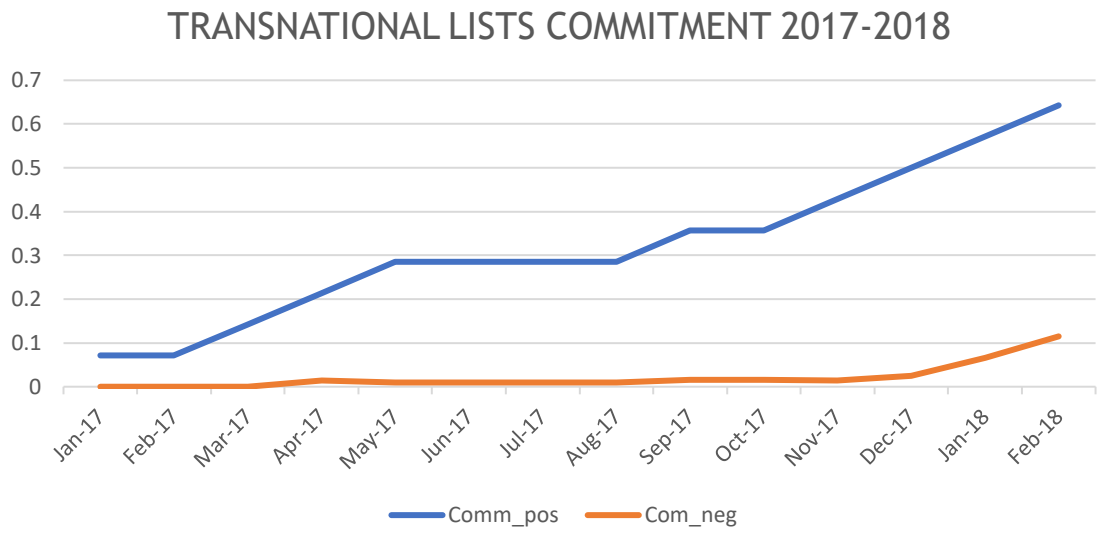


Figure 53. Levels of positive and negative commitment to the transnational lists reform idea between January 2017 and February 2018.

Commitment, priority, and success

According to the NPF hypothesis on the quality of coalition glue, prioritisation of beliefs contributes through cohesion to the ability of the coalition to influence policy outcomes (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011). In essence, the main idea is that it is not enough for actors to share the same beliefs. It is also important to prioritise ideas similarly. Cohesion would minimise potential disagreements on investing the resources and allow actors to act collectively.

As mentioned, prioritisation is an outcome or indicator of commitment. Thus, as Klein and Park (2016, 18) point out, a committed actor is willing to 'make trade-offs in favor of the target'. If we assume that commitment is measurable, prioritisation would mean a higher level of commitment to the target. Therefore, translated into the language of commitment, the NPF hypothesis would entail a higher chance for the coalition to affect the outcomes if their levels of commitment to ideas coincide.

This idea of the importance of congruence in priorities aligns with the vision of ideas as '*web[s] of interrelated elements of meaning*' (Carstensen 2011a, 600), where the meaning stems from the relative weights of and links between the elements in the system. It means that the actors' vision and understanding of the issue depend not only on the elements that constitute their belief systems but also on their weight. For example, imagine that two actors agree on three interconnected beliefs. If they perceive what is more important in this system of beliefs differently, this potentially could impede their cooperation and thus the realisation of their ideas.

It is also possible to consider prioritisation or similar levels of commitment through the lens of the idea of discursive pressure. In that sense, similar levels of commitment in discourse would indicate actors' discursive cooperation in promoting an idea. It seems intuitive that actors united in what ideas they prioritise and spend their resources of attention and publicity on would have better chances to succeed in their advocacy than actors whose priorities diverge.

Applied to the context of the success of ideas, prioritisation can contribute to our understanding of why specific ideas succeed while others do not. In particular, in the case of the partial success of coalitions, why certain ideas are translated into policies and practices, whereas others stay at the level of

discussions. As mentioned, it is not always the case that a coalition manages to realise all the ideas that its members share. I suggest that ideas that actors prioritise – the ones that have more weight in their discourse – have more potential to succeed than marginal ideas. The rationale behind this assumption is that if actors value the idea more, they, firstly, invest more resources in its promotion and, secondly, will not easily give up on it if trade-offs are needed.

Ideas of continued importance

The debate on democratic deficit and reform of the EU is both collective ideation and the discursive battle between different actors over the primacy of their ideas. Regardless of the perspective, better understanding the position of ideas in the debate is important, firstly, because policies and institutions are, in essence, ideas translated into reality (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994) and, secondly, because ideas exert influence over actors (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). The actors' commitment to ideas can be helpful in this regard because it allows identifying what I call ideas of continued importance.

Ideas of continued importance are the 'focal points' (Legro 2000) of ideation that preserve in the discourse over time. As mentioned, commitment to a certain focus manifests its importance and value for an actor. This means that actors' commitment to ideas can be used to identify ideas that are important for actors. Moreover, since commitment has a temporal dimension and continuance of relations is one of its components, studying commitment to ideas allows not only to determine salient ideas – the ones that were used intensively – but ideas that endure in the discourse.

Adding the temporal dimension allows us to distinguish the stable part of the ideational environment – the backbone of the discourse. The analysis of ideas of continued importance can be done on different levels – from individual actors to the overall debate. These ideas that actors engage with both actively and repeatedly can be sources of information on ideational trends and dynamics. In other words, studying them can help understand the immediate discursive environment in which actors operate better and make prognoses on dominant ideas and possible directions of change.

Ideas of continued importance – can be called successful because they gained a foothold in the discourse. Moreover, I suggest that with the support of actors, these ideas gain influence over them as flexible structures (an environment) that constrain and enable them.

When describing the power in ideas – the ability of ideas to affect what an actor perceives as thinkable and mentionable – Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) focus on the ideational environment created by ideas that are taken for granted or institutionalized and not often articulated in the debate. However, these ideas don't usually rise to prominence overnight. I suggest that ideas receive weight in the discourse through the behaviour of actors over time and that with this weight, they also influence actors. Put differently, actors empower ideas by keeping them in the debate and actively discussing them. The more ideas are present in the discourse – the more exposure actors have to these ideas and, therefore, it becomes more difficult to ignore them. Even if actors do not accept these ideas, they often have to consider them when building their arguments.

In the following sections, an analysis of ideas constituting the debate on EU's democratic reform through the prism of commitment will be presented.

Divergence in priorities

While in the previous chapters, different structural aspects were discussed, including multiple ideational cleavage lines, this section will look at actors' repertoires of ideas through the prism of commitment to investigate the disagreements and divergence that might have served as a factor impeding the EU democratic reform. This analysis aims to identify ideas that constitute the core of actors' repertoire of ideas and to see – by comparing their levels of commitment to different ideas – if the key actors in the debate share the same priorities. To do so, I will compare actors' repertoire of ideas on the level of organisations.

As mentioned, the NPF hypothesis suggests that a coalition's success in affecting policy outcomes may depend not only on the fact that the coalition shares the same beliefs but also prioritises them in a similar way (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011).

The network of actors participating in the debate on EU democratic reform was very large and included more than 500 actors. At the same time, the debate itself was also extremely diverse, covering a few interrelated subsystems of ideas with multiple cross-cutting coalitions. However, in this section, the debate will be considered as a unified system with focused attention on a small portion of the most committed actors as representative of broader meta-coalitions. These most committed actors are also powerful actors with considerable agenda-setting and decision-making power. The negative and positive commitment of these actors to all ideas, regardless of the level or the sub-debate they belong to, will be measured.

The rationale behind considering the overall debate is an assumption that the success or failure of coalitions and ideas may depend not only on how the discursive resources and actor's commitments are spread across the ideas in a particular subsystem but also between interrelated sub-debates. Moreover, it is possible to assume that it may be important for the reform dynamics at which level ideas with the highest level of commitment belong.

Figure 54 shows ten actors with the highest commitment levels to the overall debate by the end of the period under consideration. The commitment measure was applied to the overall debate to identify these actors. It means that the share of each actor's statements in the overall number of statements made from 2014 to 2019 was used to calculate the intensity of their engagement in the debate on the broad topic of EU's democratic reform.

To measure the stability of the actor's participation in the debate, engagement with any relevant concept was considered as participation. However, it should be noted that the attitude of actors to these ideas was not taken into consideration. Also, the period under consideration (2014-2019) was divided into 72 time steps. Monthly intervals were chosen for two reasons. First, larger intervals disproportionally increase commitment if ideas are used recurrently but not intensively. For instance, if an actor engaged with an idea once a year, this idea would get a very high stability score and increase the overall commitment level. Using smaller intervals allows avoiding such problems. The second reason is the frequency of the European Parliamentary plenary sessions. The European Parliament meets once a month for debates and votes (European Parliament n.d.).

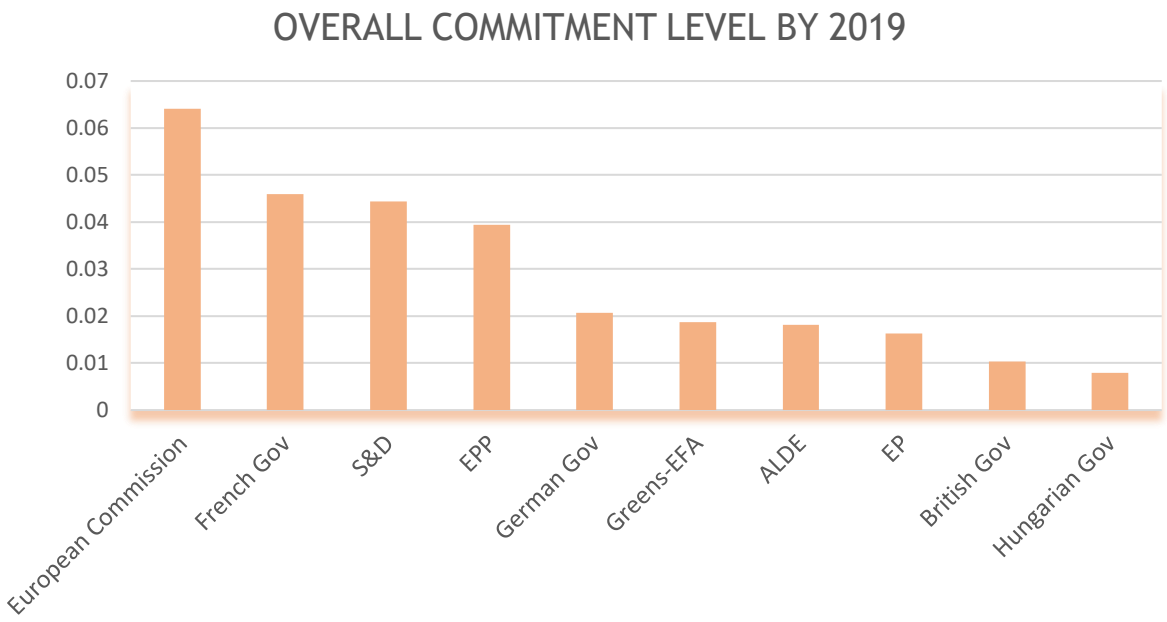


Figure 54. Actors with the highest level of commitment to the overall debate between 2014 and 2019.

In line with expectations, the group of actors with the highest level of commitment to the overall debate is constituted by the EU institutions, member states, and the European Parliamentary groups. It is not surprising because these actors are responsible for solving the EU-related problems and deficiencies. Thus, they are expected to speak about the reform options and their vision of the EU.

It is interesting, however, that the pro-European actors dominated the debate. Thus, Figure 54 shows that among Eurosceptic actors, only the British and Hungarian governments belonged to the group of the highly committed actors, and their levels of commitment were considerably (more than six times) lower than of the most committed advocates of 'more Europe'. This goes in line with the overall dominance of the pro-European subgroup of ideas described in Chapter 5. What is remarkable is that the position of Eurosceptic actors has changed quite dramatically since Brexit. Even though, before the Brexit vote, the share of pro-European actors in the group of the most committed was more significant; in the period between 2014 and 2016 (inclusive), the British government had the second-highest level of commitment to the debate (Figure 55). It means that it was very actively and stably engaged in the discussion of EU democratic reform.

Despite this continuous overall dominance of pro-European ideas, the reform dynamic was not active, and even the successful Spitzenkandidat procedure failed in 2019. In the previous chapters, structural characteristics such as multiple cross-cutting cleavage lines were discussed as potential impediments to reform. In the following subsections, I will compare the commitments of the key actors representing a pro-European meta-coalition and a meta-coalition of 'less-Europe' to see what ideas they prioritised and to what degree their visions of the required reforms and a more democratic EU coincided.

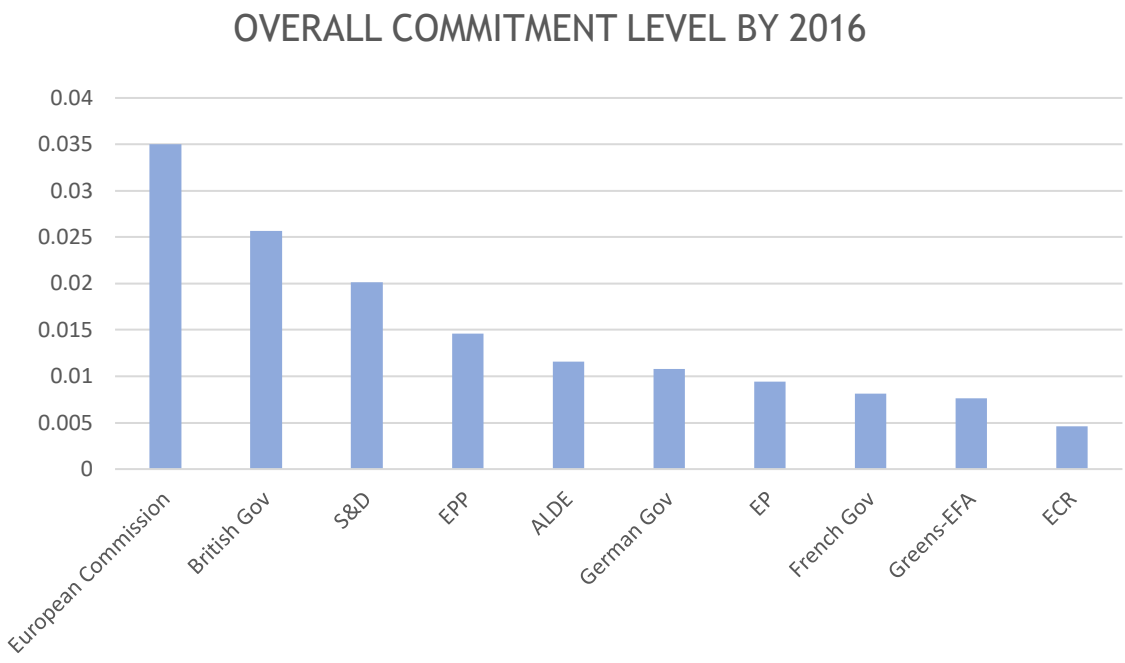


Figure 55. Actors with the highest level of commitment to the overall debate between 2014 and 2016 (inclusive).

All the actors analysed are either perceived to be major drivers of EU's integration or its major opponents.

The European Commission and the French government

The European Commission and the French government were the two most committed actors in the overall debate (Figure 54) and the key actors of the pro-European coalition. Although there was a certain similarity in the core ideas of both actors, it is clear that the focal points of their discourses were different. Thus, Figure 56 shows that the Commission focused on transparency and ideas of gender equality, solidarity, and Social Europe. Instead, the French government's

discursive priorities lay in institutional transformations of the Eurozone, the idea of multi-speed Europe and deeper integration of core members (Figure 57). France also promoted ideas of European sovereignty, transnational lists (discussed in the previous chapter), and democratic conventions on the EU's future.

The European Commission and the French government agreed on the need for further deepening and broadening integration and showed high commitment to this idea in discourse. However, they seem to disagree on how to manage integration. As mentioned, the French government, and especially Emmanuel Macron, promoted differentiated integration and the concept of multi-speed Europe. The European Commission made contradictory statements regarding multi-speed integration. On the one hand, the Commission supported the possibility of enhanced cooperation; on the other hand, it rejected the idea of the 'Europe of two circles'.

The analysis of the Commission's repertoire of ideas showed that, in particular, the idea of institutionalisation of differentiation did not appeal to the Commission. This is clear from its position on changes in the Eurozone government and the establishment of separate institutions for it. Although the comparison of Figures 56 and 57 shows that the French government and the Commission seem to agree on the need for a Eurozone finance minister, in reality, the position of the European Commission was more complex. Even though Jean-Claud Juncker supported the idea of a Eurozone finance minister in some of his statements, he was more enthusiastic about a European finance or even economic minister. At the same time, Figure 56 shows the Commission rejected the idea of a separate Eurozone Parliament (except for one statement of support from a French Commissioner, Pierre Moscovici). This can be interpreted as an indication of unwillingness to support differentiation at the level of institutions.

In sum, analysis of the core ideas of the Commission and French government discourses showed a variety of programmatic and instrumental ideas. However, it revealed a divergence between what actors prioritised on a programmatic level as well as in their attitude to some instrumental ideas.

Franco-German alliance?

Agreement and cooperation between France and Germany have been 'often viewed as one of the key drivers of EU decision-making' (Degner 2018), while their tandem has been referred to as an engine of European integration. This is not to say that French and German state actors have not had disagreements. On the contrary, these countries manage to lead the integration forward despite conflicting views (Mourlon-Druol 2017).

One observation that can be made based on a comparison of Figures 57 and 58 depicting the core of France's and Germany's repertoires of ideas is there was an overlap in their understanding of EU's integration. Thus, both countries showed high levels of commitment to ideas of deeper integration and multi-speed Europe. They even agreed on such reforms as the establishment of a Eurozone Parliament and Eurozone finance minister. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the idea of multi-speed Europe, in particular, was a matter of heated debate not only across coalitions but also within, which may have impeded any developments related to further differentiation despite the alignment of views between France and Germany on that matter. As Mourlon-Druol (2017, 1) points out, 'Franco-German tandem alone cannot lead the EU27 in the twenty-first century'.

Another interesting observation that can be made is that both actors prioritised the reform of the European Parliament. However, they did not agree on suggested reform options. Both Germany and France made contradictory statements on Spitzenkandidat, but the ratio between positive and negative commitments for this initiative was different. While France was one of the leading opponents of the reform after the failure of transnational lists, Germany eventually supported the Spitzenkandidat process.

It is also remarkable that, unlike France, Germany did not initiate any major debate on institutional or other democracy-related reforms or ideas on its vision. Although Macron preserved the core of France's repertoire of ideas – such as deeper integration for core members and a focus on Eurozone transformations – he also initiated a debate on transnational lists and European sovereignty, ideas Germany was reluctant to embrace.

Old and new Eurosceptic governments

This section will talk about the repertoire of ideas of the leading Eurosceptic actors who were the most active participants in the debate and showed the highest levels of commitment to it. As mentioned, supporters of 'less Europe' or Eurosceptic actors were less prominent in the debate, with the British government being the most actively engaged in the discourse. The Brexit vote, however, shifted the centre of Euroscepticism towards the so-called new Eurosceptic governments of the Visegrad group. These governments were quite actively engaged in the debate; however, they did not reach similar levels of commitment as pre-Brexit Britain (Figure 55).

Looking comparatively at Figures 59, 60, and 61 depicting the main positive and negative commitments of Britain, Hungary, and Poland, one can make an important observation. Not only were Hungary and Poland less active than Britain, but their core ideas did not include specific reform options. While engaging with and emphasising ideas of higher level – such as national sovereignty and integration, the British government was also putting very specific ideas on the agenda. Thus, for instance, when in their pre-Brexit EU reform proposal, and arguably in response to Spitzenkandidat, the British government advocated for the idea of empowerment of national parliaments (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6), they also suggested and actively supported a particular reform option of a 'red card' procedure.

The situation with the new Eurosceptic governments was different. Figures 60 and 61 show no specific instruments among the ideas both Polish and Hungarian governments were most committed to, except ideas of Spitzenkandidat and transnational lists that they opposed. Although both Poland and Hungary were committed to strengthening the role of national parliaments, the only specific reform option they supported, the 'red card' procedure, did not take a prominent place in their repertoire of ideas. It was instead dominated by broader empirical ideas, programmatic ideas, and philosophical ideas. The latter were the focal points of the Hungarian government discourse, in particular.

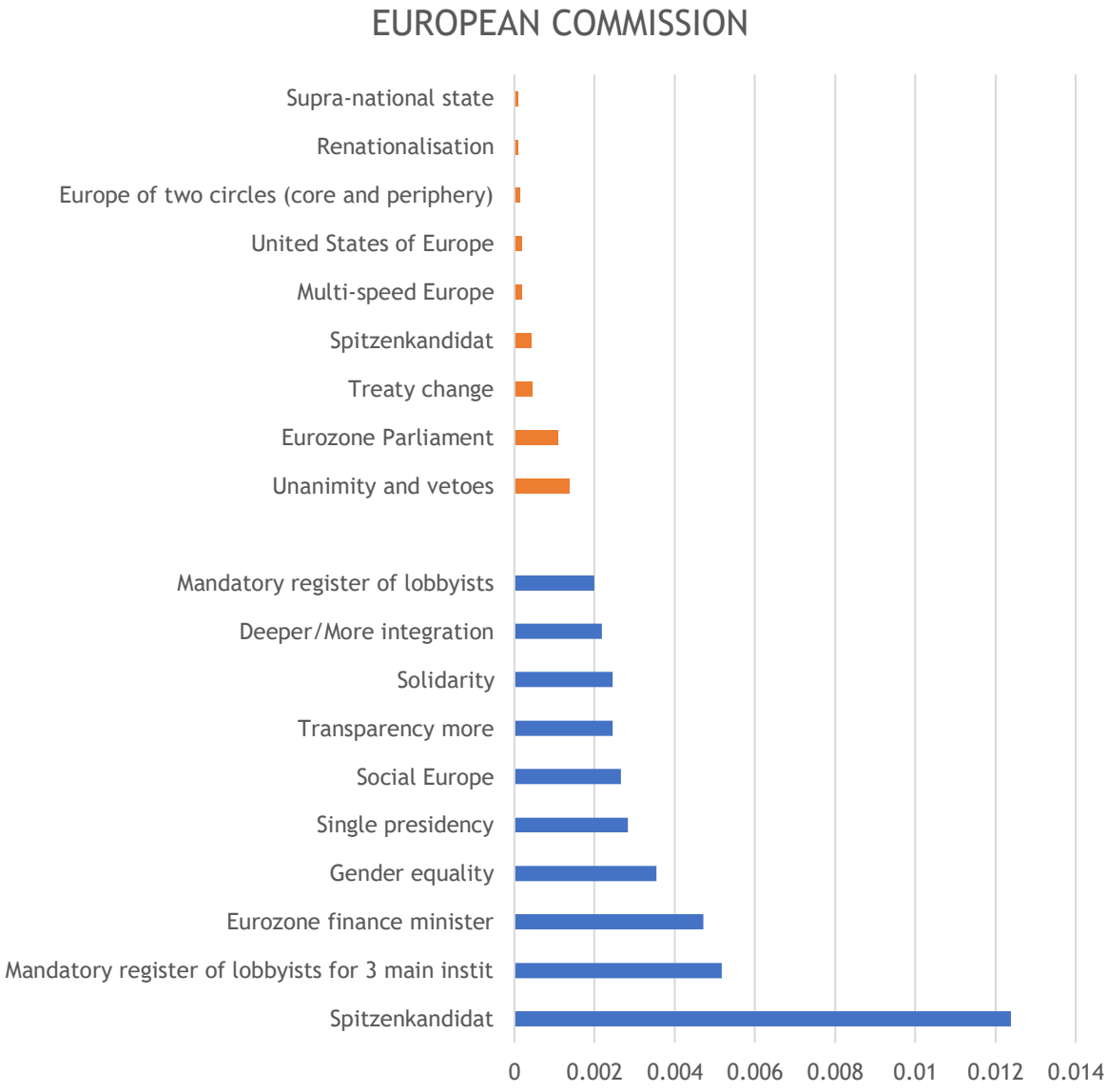


Figure 56. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the European Commission's repertoire of ideas (by 2019).

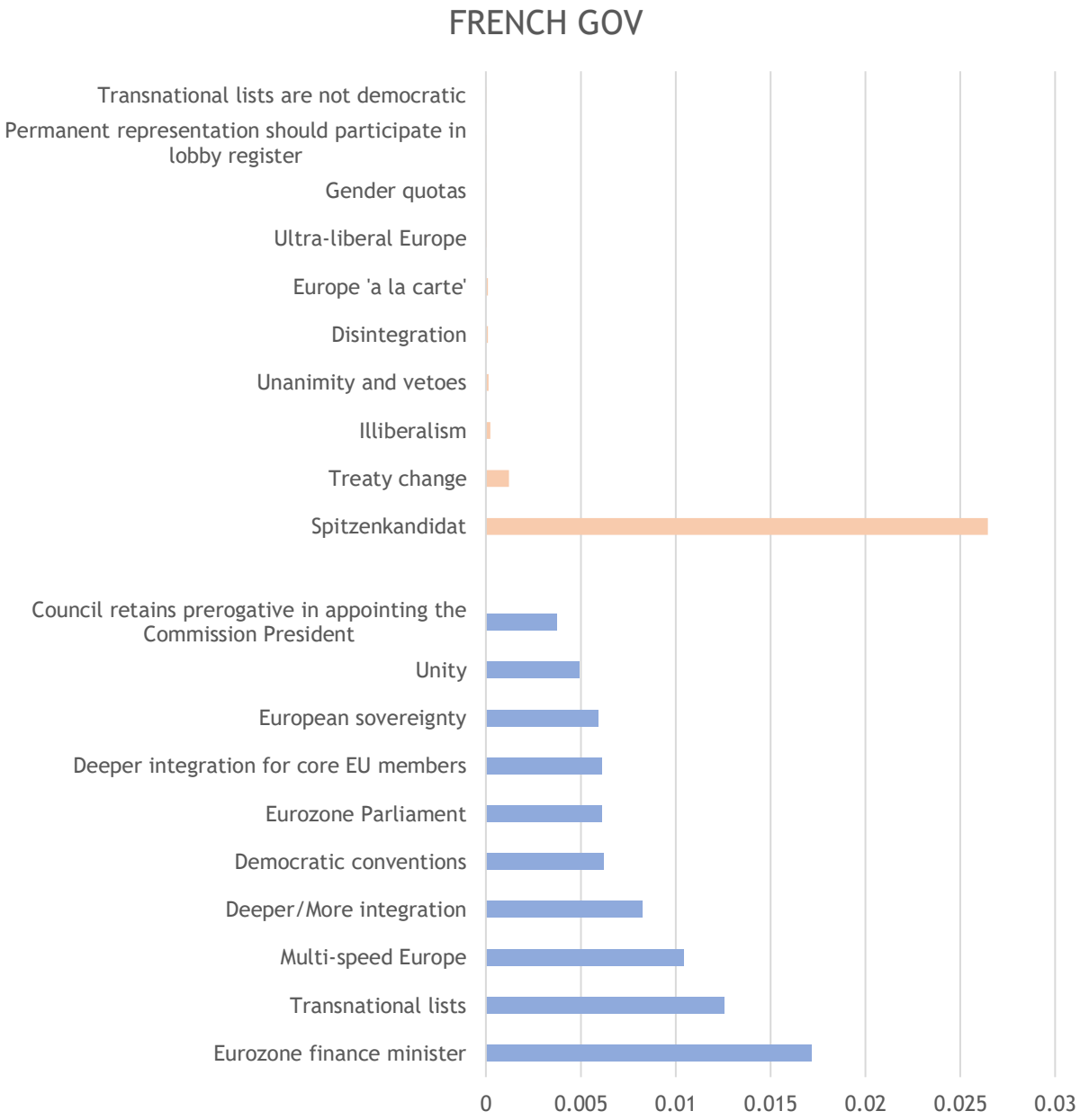


Figure 57. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the French government's repertoire of ideas (by 2019).

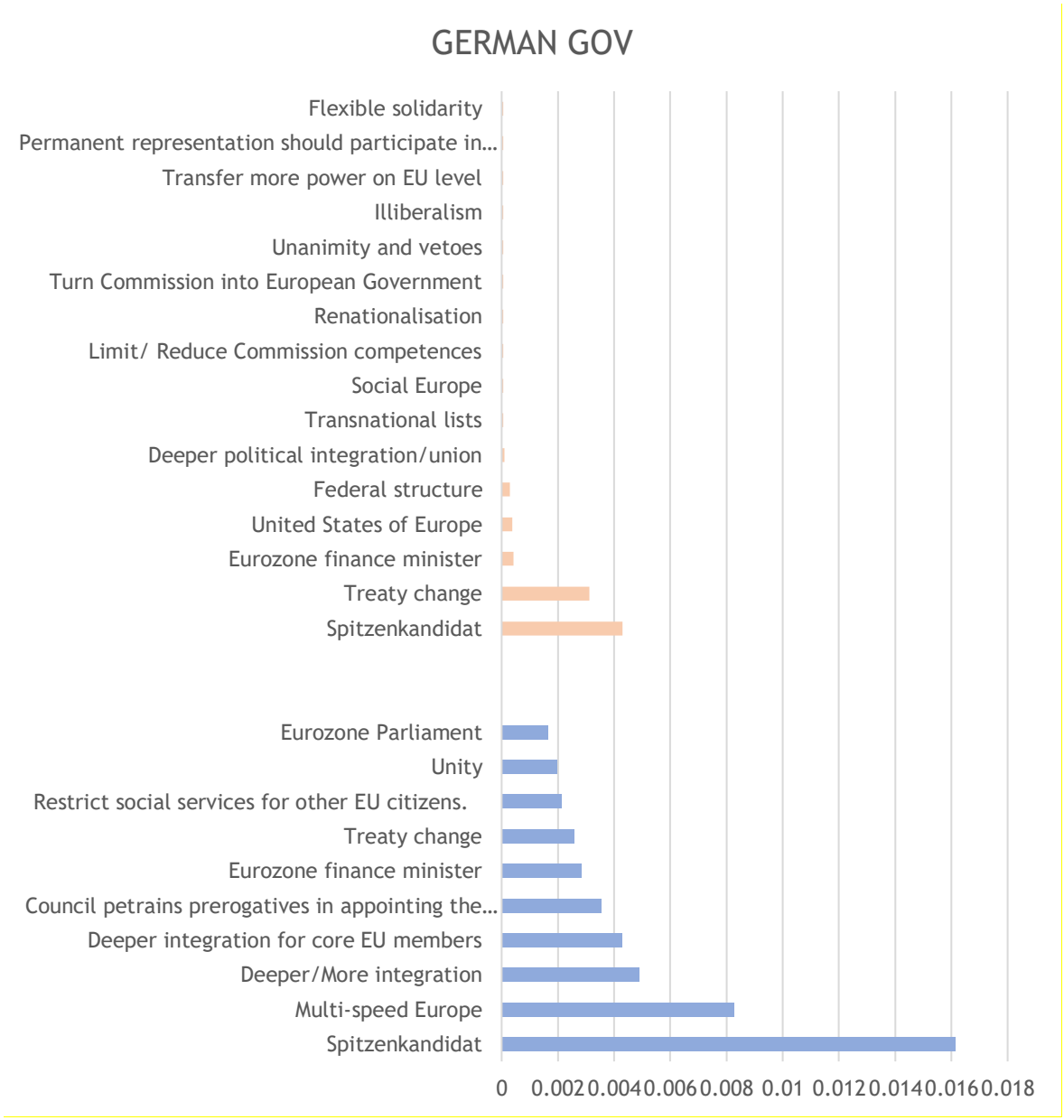


Figure 58. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the German government's repertoire of ideas (by 2019)

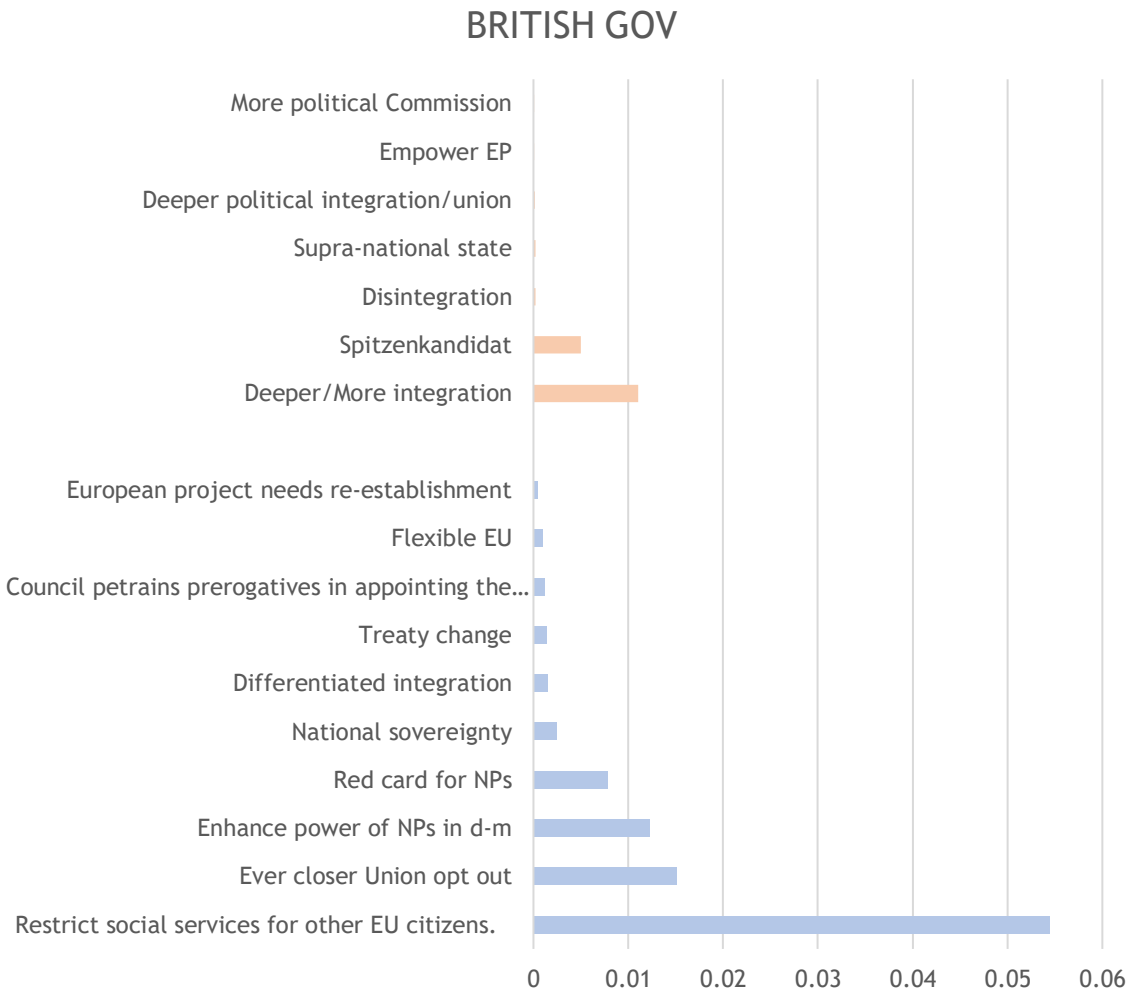


Figure 59. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the British government's repertoire of ideas (by 2019).

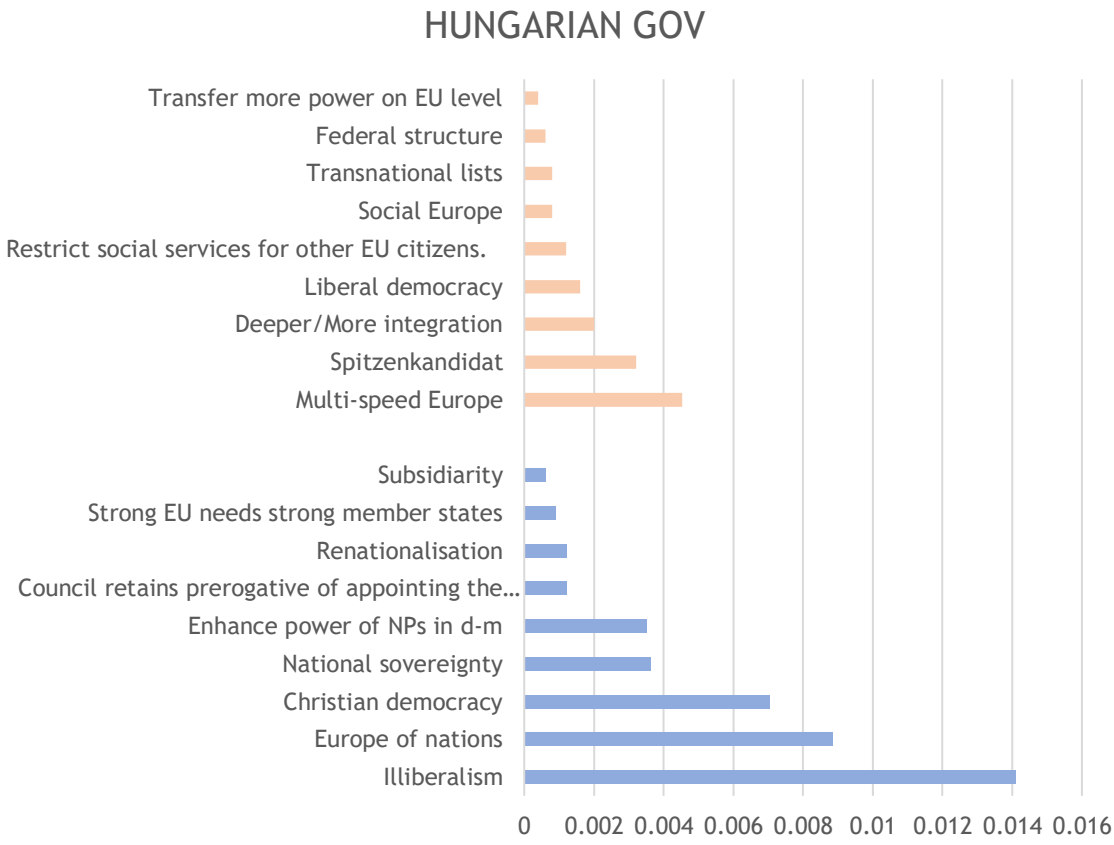


Figure 60. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the Hungarian government's repertoire of ideas (by 2019).

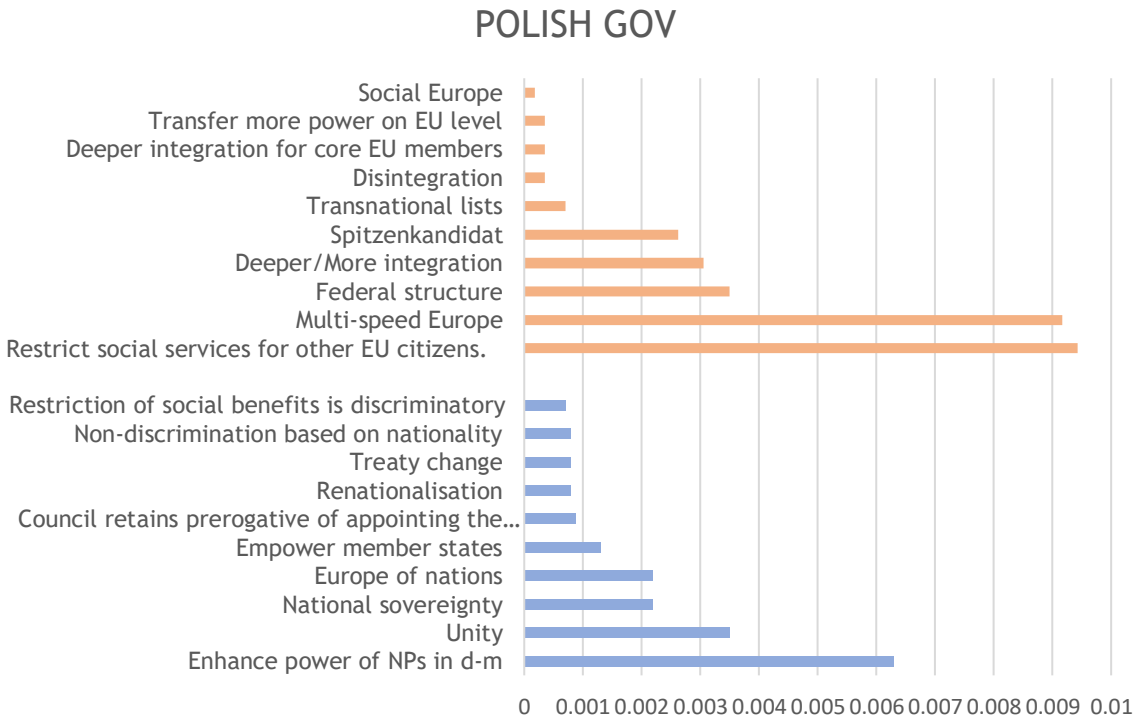


Figure 61. Ideas with the highest positive (blue) and negative (orange) commitment in the Polish government's repertoire of ideas by 2019.

Ideas of continued importance in EU's democratic reform debate

While the previous section was insightful in terms of understanding the EU's democratic reform dynamics, this section's primary aim is to help answer the question of the reform direction. To do so, the commitment measure is applied to the overall debate to find the ideas of continued importance that constitute the backbone of the overall discourse.

The discourse was analysed as a unified environment, and commitment was measured with no reference to specific actors. In other words, the engagement of all actors as a whole was used to assess commitment to ideas. The overall debate was considered, like the analysis presented in the previous section.

Figure 62 demonstrates ten ideas with the highest commitment of actors. It means that actors engaged with these ideas actively – made many statements about them – and repeatedly. It should be noted that the attitude of actors to these ideas was not taken into consideration. Regardless of being positive or negative, all statements contributed to the level of commitment. To evaluate stability, the period under consideration (2014-2019) was divided into 72 time steps.

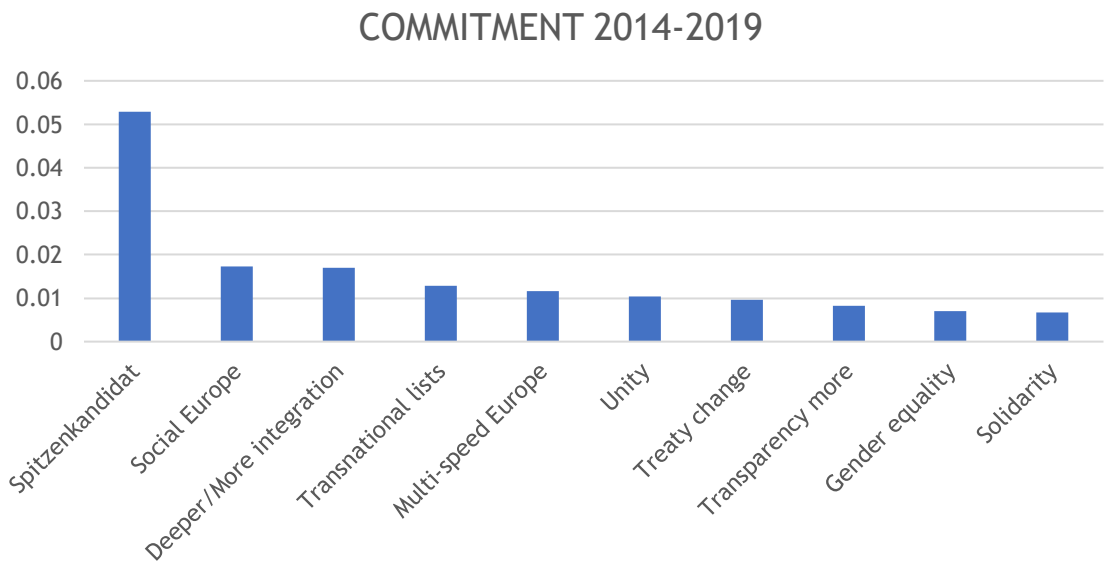


Figure 62. Ten ideas actors were most committed to between 2014 and 2019.

Notes: Stability is calculated by month.

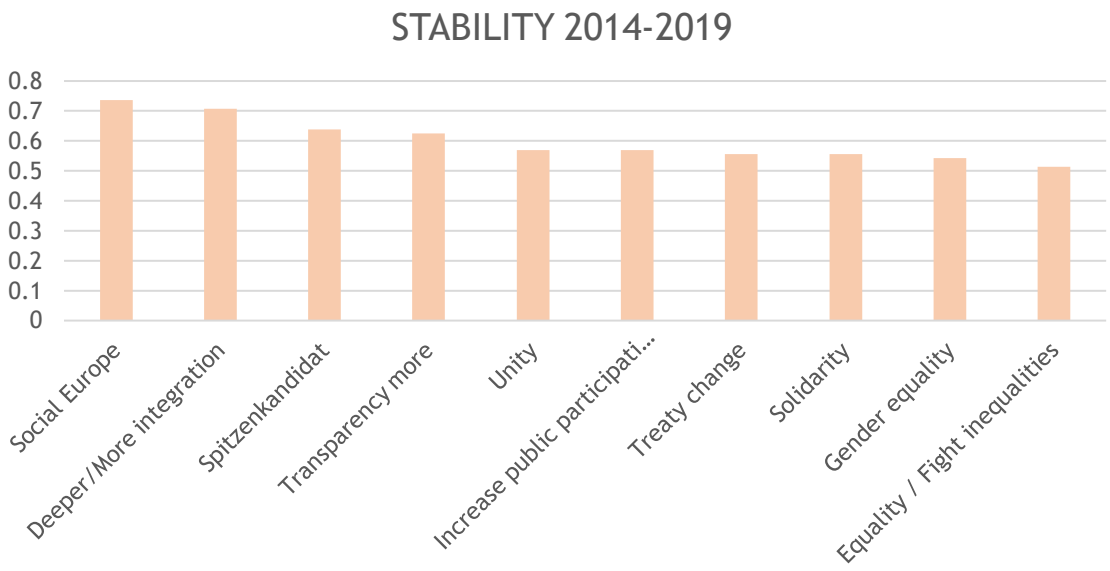


Figure 63. Ideas with the highest levels of stability between 2014 and 2019.

Notes: Stability is calculated by month.

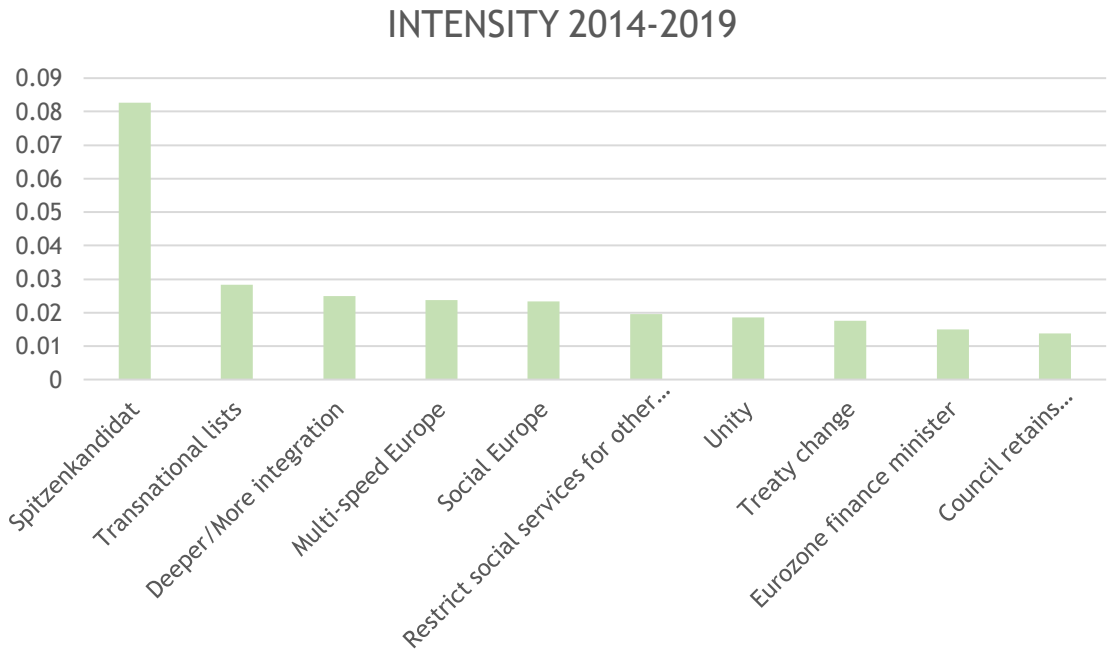


Figure 64. Ten most intensively used ideas between 2014 and 2019.

Notes: These are ideas with the largest share of statements in the debate.

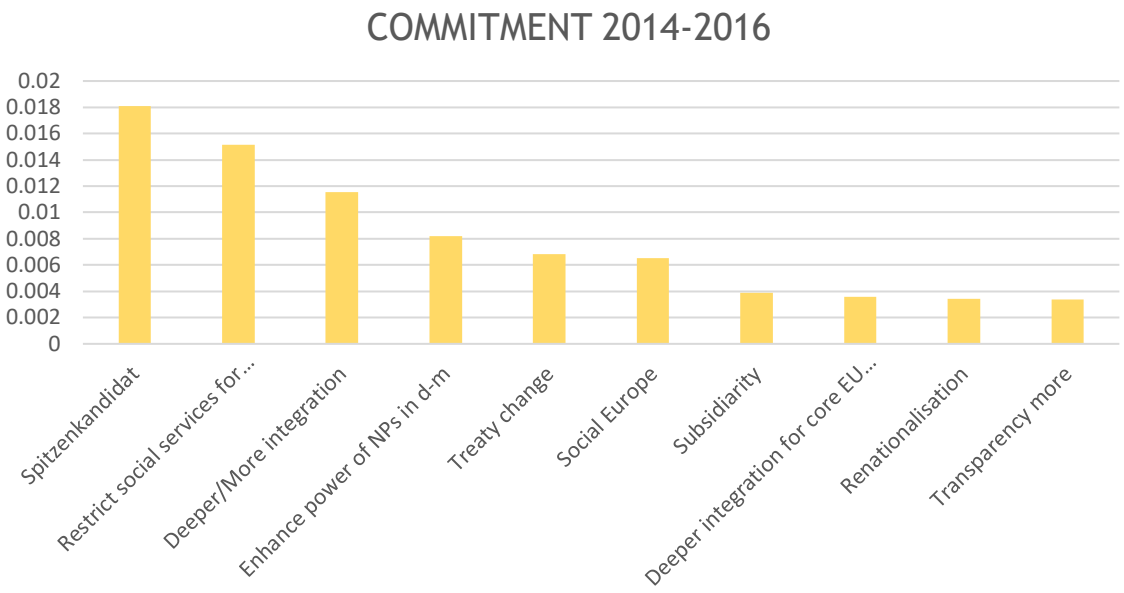


Figure 65. Ten ideas actors were most committed to between 2014 and 2016.

Notes: Stability is calculated by month.

Although many of the ideas in Figure 62 took prominent positions in the networks of ideas presented in Chapter 5, comparison of figures 62, 63, and 64 shows that the two-component commitment measure provides a slightly different set of ideas than one-component measures, both in terms of the substance and the position of concepts.

It is interesting to note that all the most stably used concepts showed a similar level of stability. In contrast, in terms of intensity, the concept of Spitzenkandidat stands out considerably compared to all other actively used ideas. Thus, over 8% of all statements were made to refer to the lead candidate reform.

Intensive engagement with the idea of Spitzenkandidat coupled with high levels of stability – the concept was present in the debate more than 60% of the time – leant it an extraordinary weight in the debate. Thus, Figure 62 demonstrates that all other ideas enjoyed a considerably lower level of actors' commitment to them. This position of the concept of Spitzenkandidat is not unexpected. In a way, it can be interpreted as confirmation of the continued importance of parliamentarisation and the EP, in particular, in the EU's democratic reform.

Many of the ideas with high commitment to them, including deepening integration and multi-speed Europe, were discussed in the previous chapters. The prominent position of these ideas in the debate is in line with what is present in the academic literature as central themes of the discussion on the EU's future. The high level of importance of the idea of transparency is also not surprising since the EU has been critiqued for the opaqueness of its decision-making processes (Héritier 2003) and is known for relying on transparency as a source of its legitimacy (Sternberg 2013; Schmidt 2013).

What may be more interesting is the very high level of importance of the idea of social Europe. Along with the idea of deepening integration, 'Social Europe' was present in the debate more than 70% of the time (Figure 63), and it was the fifth most actively used concept overall (Figure 64). It is worth noting that while the debate on 'Social Europe' is not only a debate on whether or not to harmonise the social sphere between member states, it is also a part of a broader debate on people-centred Europe that empowers its citizens. This is a part of a broader discussion about a new social contract and a new thicker understanding of democracy.

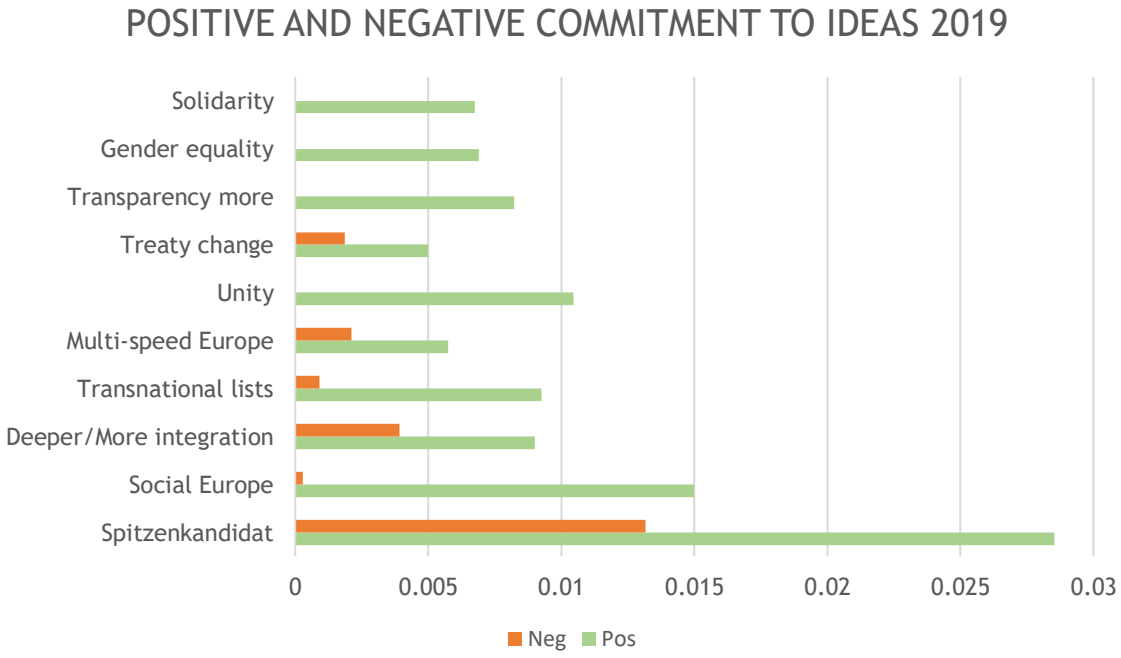


Figure 66. Ten ideas actors were most committed to between 2014 and 2019. Positive and negative commitment.

Notes: Stability is calculated by month.

It is noteworthy that there was a change in ideas of continued importance after the Brexit vote. Thus, while Figure 62 shows the overall dominance of the pro-European agenda from 2014 to 2019, Figure 65 demonstrates that before 2017 ideas of empowerment of national parliaments, renationalisation, and subsidiarity were among the ten ideas actors were most committed to. In other words, these ideas had a very high weight in the debate because they were intensively used by actors and regularly appeared in the debate. This can be interpreted as some weakening of the Eurosceptics' position as drivers of institutional changes. As mentioned in the previous section, so-called new Eurosceptic governments did not actively advocate for elaborated reform options. They also demonstrated less engagement with other instrumental ideas than the previous leader of this coalition – the British government.

Another interesting observation that can be made – in line with what has been discussed in Chapter 5 – is that there were very few instrumental ideas among the ideas of continued importance. On the one hand, it can be argued that programmatic and more abstract ideas should dominate the debate as ideas of continued importance since they tend to be more stable. In other words, one would expect instrumental ideas to appear and disappear after a short period of time when they either got accepted or rejected, whereas more fundamental ideas would be expected to have a more stable presence in the discourse. On the other hand, in the fairly short period of six years between 2014 and 2019, in a situation of multiple crises, it would be reasonable to assume that instruments could get relatively high levels of commitment from actors. As analysis of ideas networks on the level of instruments showed, actors were quite actively engaged in suggesting different solutions to reform the EU. However, only a small portion of these instrumental ideas was picked up by others and debated.

A remarkable example of this kind of situation is the idea of increasing public participation. Although it occupies one of the leading places among the stably used ideas (Figure 63), and has pretty high commitment levels, there was no active discussion, and almost no engagement from powerful actors (except for the debate on ECI) on how to translate it into reality. This position of the idea of public participation is interesting because it highlights that the struggle for the

EU's legitimacy represents an 'inescapable balancing act between bringing the people in and keeping them out' (Sternberg 2013, 192).

This brings us to the question of what ideas have higher chances to succeed based on commitment measurement. To assess that, I have added the dimension of attitude to the commitment measure to account for resistance to an idea that can impede its progress on towards being accepted and then implemented. Thus, Figure 66 shows positive and negative commitment to the ideas of continued importance identified earlier. It should be noted that it is important to consider commitment in the broader discursive context. What I mean is, for instance, the relations of an idea with ideas of different levels.

Figure 66 demonstrates that ideas that face no or almost no opposition are the ideas of higher level – programmatic ideas – such as Social Europe, transparency, unity, equality, solidarity, and 'increased public participation'. As discussed in Chapter 3, these ideas need to be linked with lower-level instrumental concepts to get to the actual decision-making stage and then to be implemented.

There is a lot of discussion around transparency and instrumental ideas, in particular, and quite a few minor changes have been happening (European Parliament 2019b). However, there is considerable resistance from the Council against the major reform of transparency in lobbying and access to its documents. At the same time, most of the discussion around equality and Social Europe remains on the programmatic level. There is no debate on equality instruments and very limited debate on what Social Europe should look like in practice.

Transnational lists, Spitzenkandidat, treaty change, multi-speed Europe, and deeper/more integration are the ideas that faced considerable opposition. However, all of them have higher levels of positive commitment compared to negative.

Further integration seems possible considering that, as discussed, resistance to integration was to a large extent resistance to transfer of power and its centralization in the hands of 'Brussels' as a supranational set of institutions or a group of core member states. Therefore, what is needed is agreement on the mode of integration. The concept of multi-speed Europe, as discussed in Chapter 5, faced opposition from both pro-European and pro-'nation-state' actors.

However, considering arguments used to oppose it, in particular, that it would create core-periphery structure, it seems reasonable to assume that there is a higher chance of multi-core rather than multi-speed Europe.

Conclusion

This chapter shifted the focus of analysis to the behaviour of actors towards ideas through affiliation networks. It started with a theoretical contribution, introducing the concept of commitment to ideas. Commitment is a bond between an actor and an idea that manifests itself in allocation of resources towards the idea and maintenance of the bond with it. Thus, the concept of commitment to ideas enables us to look at support and resistance to ideas from the agency perspective. However, commitment is more than support. It is continued support sustained over time. One of the key arguments developed in this thesis is that commitment to ideas (expressed in the discourse) could be linked to ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016), which is to say that commitment empowers both ideas and actors. This makes commitment one of the determinants of the success of both actors and ideas. Moreover, by studying commitment to ideas, one can also get a different perspective on disagreement and divergence. The difference in the levels of commitment to ideas is indicative of more subtle disagreements within coalitions that, however, can potentially lead to their failure to shape the outcomes of the political process.

The chapter also introduced a novel measure of commitment to ideas through discourse networks. This measure incorporates a critical component of the commitment construct – often overlooked in the analysis of textual data – the maintenance of the bond and non-switching. This means that along with the intensity, the temporal pattern of engagement is included in assessing the strength of the bond between an actor and an idea.

The commitment measure was applied to study divergence in the EU's democratic reform debate on the level of separate actors. To briefly summarise the empirical findings, the data analysis revealed characteristics that might have contributed to the lack of democratic reforms. In the pro-European coalition, there was a divergence between what key actors prioritised on a programmatic level and in their attitude to some instrumental ideas. In the Eurosceptic coalition,

the analysis demonstrated a lack of engagement with instrumental ideas by this group's new most prominent actors.

The measure was also applied to identify ideas of continued importance – ideas with the highest levels of commitment to them to inform our understanding of the EU's direction. The top ten ideas of continued importance included Spitzenkandidat, Social Europe, multi-speed Europe, transnational lists, deeper/broader integration, unity, transparency, gender equality, and solidarity. These ideas are influential and, therefore, successful in a certain way. However, high levels of actors' commitment to these ideas in the debate do not guarantee their adoption and further implementation.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This thesis studied the debate on the EU's democratic reform in an attempt to explain the most recent reform dynamics and elucidate potential directions of the EU's democratic transformation. The research was driven by a desire to understand what impedes the progress of the EU in improving its democratic qualities as little has been done in recent years, despite recent shocks highlighting the EU's need for further democratic reform. This lack of progress did not receive much attention in EU studies, notwithstanding its importance for the EU's future. While the number of normative studies suggesting how the EU should develop is large (e.g. Habermas 2015a; Fabbrini 2021; Nicolaïdis 2013; Schimmelfennig 2010; Bellamy 2013; Scharpf 2015), there was no research explaining the limited scope of change and exploring the direction the EU might be heading. This thesis aimed to address this gap. However, it should be noted that it did not seek to investigate which factors best explain the lack (or limited scope) of reform. Instead, it focused on discourse as a possible factor.

The second major driver for this research was a desire to better understand the mechanisms through which discourse affects the outcomes of the political process. While discourse is a multi-faceted concept, in this research, the attention was centred around the links between the elements of the debate. Several approaches theorise about the effects the structures created by the interaction between actors and between ideas have on the outcomes (e.g. Hall 1993; Sabatier 1988; Heclo 1978). However, the influence of agency, particularly of support and resistance to ideas expressed by actors, remains under-theorised. To fill this gap, this thesis developed a set of ideas linking actors' behaviour in the discourse, understood as the level and stability of their engagement with ideas, and ideational power and success.

Therefore, the research was guided by three main questions: i) What, in the structure of the debate and in actor's behaviour towards ideas in the discourse, can account for the EU's democratic reform dynamics? ii) What can (changes in) the structure and behaviour of actors tell us about the possible direction of the EU's future democratic reform? iii) In what ways does the link between actors and ideas in the discourse affect the outcomes, and what discursive mechanisms might stand behind these influences?

To answer these questions, this study collected data on the statements made by key political actors in the period between 2014 and 2019 from two online pan-European news outlets. It then applied the method of discourse network analysis to analyse these data. Based on the information about the statements, different types of networks were visualised and interpreted. The remainder of the chapter will summarise the main findings, contributions, and limitations of this research. It will also briefly describe the avenues for future research.

Main findings

Drawing on the analysis of (change in) the structural characteristics of and the behaviour of actors in the debate, this thesis provided a more systemic picture of the debate on EU's democratic reforms. It also offered insights into the possible directions of future democratic reform of the EU. The research showed that there was a consensus on the need to preserve the union. Actors, however, disagreed on the level at which the locus of power and democracy should be located. Addressing the lack of popular control in the debate, actors mainly engaged with ideas related to parliamentary institutions. It is, therefore, possible to assume that the EU will remain a polity in which the nation-state and national democracy are going to play a significant role. Parliamentarisation will also remain an important part of the EU's democratisation. At the same time, the continued importance of the idea of Social Europe and the salience of other social democratic ideas should also be noted and considered as a possible direction of the EU's democratic reform. In terms of explaining the dynamics, this thesis showed that almost all expectations regarding the characteristics of discourse that could help understand the limited scope of reforms discussed in Chapter 3 were confirmed.

In particular, lack of support for some ideas, resistance to other ideas, and divergence in the discourse could have impeded the EU's democratic transformation in the period under consideration.

Dynamics

The first important finding is that the EU's democratic reform debate is open and fluid, with many actors and ideas entering and leaving it chaotically. It means that the limited scope of reforms overall was not caused by the lack of (alternative) ideas. However, that said, many of the ideas failed to receive extensive support and even when ideas were supported by actors, they often faced considerable resistance. This leads us to the second important finding.

The second important finding is the two major cleavage lines that the application of DNA allowed to visualise. Both contestations are related to resistance to the concentration of power: on the one hand, vertically on the EU level in the hands of 'Brussels', and on the other hand, horizontally in the hands of some member states. The most prominent cleavage line identified in the debate was the line between the advocates of national sovereignty and national democracy and those who agree on the need for European democracy but not necessarily a state. The second conflict line lay between supporters of the idea of deeper integration for core members (and multi-speed Europe) and opponents of this idea.

This finding of two conflict lines that have to do with the concentration of power - goes in line with most current research speaking of the centre-periphery cleavage line (Treib 2020) and the democratic challenges of differentiated integration (Lord 2021; Schmidt 2019a). However, the insight brought by this research is in establishing the cross-cutting nature of these lines. The thesis showed that not only actors that opposed the transfer of authority at the EU level opposed horizontal centralisation of power (and, therefore, domination of some member states over others), but also those who wanted more Europe.

In addition to these cross-cutting cleavage lines, the research also demonstrated divergence within the group of ideas on European democracy. There was no consensus on where the locus of democracy should be located – at the national or European level or divided between them. In essence, it means that we can see a reflection of the academic debate on different types of sovereignty (Beetz 2019) in political debate. Although not clearly visible in the networks of higher-level ideas, this divergence revealed itself in the discussion on the lower-

level ideas of transnational lists and Spitzenkandidat in the second half of the period under consideration and impeded both reforms.

Another important finding has to do with the interplay between ideas of different levels. It should be noted that the overall debate on EU's democratic reform can be seen as a layered cake comprised of different interrelated sub-debates. Thus, there was a top layer of more abstract ideas on the EU as a polity, including ideas on the locus of democracy, the balance of power between different levels, and integration. This layer was followed by the layer of institutional debate, which, on the one hand, is a separate sub-system of ideas but, on the other hand, is a continuation of the debate about the EU as a polity, since institutions are the instrument that allows more abstract ideas to be translated into reality.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the interplay between different levels of ideas is important for their success (Kingdon 2013) and for the ability of actors to influence the outcomes of the political process. In particular, it has been discussed that disagreement on the ideas of the lower level – institution or procedure that would embody a more abstract ideal or model – could impede the reform. At the same time, agreement on instrumental ideas can lead to their acceptance. This happens when these instrumental ideas can be linked to different (sometimes even contradictory) program-level ideas.

This research demonstrated divergent interpretations of broader ideas that lead to additional divisions within coalitions. Thus, actors united around the importance and priority of national sovereignty differed considerably in their interpretations of what institutional implementation is needed to ensure this sovereignty. In other words, they connected their abstract ideas to different empirical concepts.

In the institutional sub-debate, however, the data analysis revealed a convergence between two opposing groups around the idea of empowerment of national parliaments. This happened due to compatibility of this idea with both European democracy and the EU as an intergovernmental organisation with the primacy of national sovereignty. However, this agreement that united actors across the conflict line did not lead to a significant change in the position of national parliaments. Despite partially successful attempts to introduce the

'green card' procedure by informal reinterpretation of the existing rules, the situation remained largely the same in terms of the balance of power between institutions. This research argues that one of the reasons may be that consensus on the need to enhance the role of national parliaments was coupled with disagreement over what this would imply. In particular, what kind of power national parliaments should receive and in what capacity: as an individual or collective actor. Moreover, this idea was ignored by such influential actors as the French and German governments.

The fourth important finding is the divergence in commitment levels and focus. Based on the hypothesis of the Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011) on the quality of coalition glue, in Chapter 3, I suggested that for the success of a coalition of actors, it is not only important to share the same ideas but also prioritise them similarly. In other words, actors should show similar levels of commitment to ideas. If actors perceive what is more important differently, it could impede their cooperation and thus the realisation of their ideas. Moreover, it signifies their lack of cooperation in the discourse. The application of the new commitment measure allowed for establishing differences in commitments of the most prominent actors such as France, Germany, and the European Commission and some of the most prominent Eurosceptic actors.

Direction

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the EU's democratic deficit is a matter of lack of popular sovereignty and the problem of the loss of national sovereignty (Brack, Coman, and Crespy 2019). One of the findings this thesis described is the dominance of the idea of national sovereignty in the discourse of pro-'nation-state' actors. This can be explained by the fact that for these actors, the very idea of getting sovereignty back from the EU level or ensuring no domination in the block is seen as a remedy for the problem of popular sovereignty.

At the same time, the set of ideas proposed by the pro-European actors was dominated by parliamentary solutions to the lack of popular sovereignty. While the concepts of people-centred Europe and the need to reconnect with citizens were salient, and the idea of the need to increase public involvement was among the ideas of continued importance, the debate on the instruments that would

allow more public engagement was limited. This emphasis on the parliamentary dimension can be explained by the fact that according to the EU's treaties, representative democracy is a foundation for the functioning of the European Union. Moreover, parliamentarisation – an increase in the role of parliamentary institutions – has become the habitual way for the EU to tackle the problem of democratic deficit.

However, it is interesting that the French government justified their opposition to the Spitzenkandidat in 2019 by saying that the EU is not a parliamentary democracy similar to parliamentary democracies of nation-states. Macron and his allies emphasised that there was no point in the lead candidate without transnational lists. What they did by engineering new links between ideas was making further empowerment of the European Parliament dependent on its Europeanisation.

Another important finding regarding the direction of the EU's democratic reform is the continued importance and saliency of the idea of 'Social Europe'. This research demonstrated the active engagement of actors with ideas that constitute the so-called 'thicker' ideal of democracy, according to which political equality is impossible without social equality (Busschaert 2016). Although this idea belonged to the group of pro-European ideas, the discussion on Social Europe was broader than the idea of social harmonisation or the EU's increased capacity in regulation. It was a part of a discussion about a new social contract.

Finally, the analysis has shown convergence in the sub-debate on the EU as a polity. After the Brexit vote, the idea of unity became dominant; even those actors who supported disintegration by leaving the EU or some areas of cooperation such as the Eurozone shifted their discourse to the ideas of a 'Europe of nations'. At the same time, Emmanuel Macron – the most active advocate of the concept of European sovereignty – articulated his vision of the EU as a federation of nation-states. This clarified that sovereignty was not necessarily linked with statehood, which means that the EU does not aim to become a supranational state. In other words, all actors agreed on the need to preserve the EU as a union. Moreover, the analysis showed that even when actors did not support the idea of further integration, they often objected not to the integration itself but the change in the balance of power between national and European levels.

Contributions

This thesis contributes to the existing knowledge in several ways. First, it presents a more comprehensive and systemic picture of the political debate on the EU's democratic reform. Compared to a large body of normative literature (e.g. Habermas 2015a; Fabbrini 2021; Nicolaïdis 2013; Schimmelfennig 2010; Bellamy 2013; Scharpf 2015), empirical studies of discourse on EU's democratic deficit and transformation are scarce and cover only fragments of the debate. This fragmentation is two-fold. On the one hand, the research is dedicated to different parts of the discourse – particular actors (Sternberg 2013; Biegoń 2016; Schmidt 2015) or particular ideas (Beetz 2015) – and thus lacks a nuanced understanding of connections between actors and between ideas.

On the other hand, there is fragmentation in terms of the substance of the debate covered in the research. As mentioned, the issue of the EU's democratic qualities is a complex one. Thus, apart from the discussion on institutional transformations, the EU democratic reform debate includes the debate on its nature as a political system and integration as well as the debate on the future of the European society. However, the focus of the previous research on the EU's democratic reform discourse was extremely narrow.

Application of discourse network analysis allowed for investigating the debate in its complexity, including ideas, actors, and their interrelations. Moreover, the analysis presented in this thesis covered different overlapping sub-debate. This enabled a novel set of empirical findings that contribute to the EU studies by providing a more comprehensive map of the debate and a possible explanation for the limited scope of the EU's democratic reform.

Second, this research contributes to the theoretical debate on the role of discourse as the communication of ideas in shaping the outcomes of the political process. This thesis emphasised the importance of actors' behaviour towards ideas in the debate, particularly that of expressing support or resistance. The research was preoccupied with two major questions: first, what characteristics of actors' support or opposition are important, and second, what mechanisms allow actors to affect the outcomes through their support and resistance as expressed in the discourse. To answer these questions, I introduced a few interrelated concepts, the main one of which is the concept of commitment to ideas.

This concept of commitment to ideas enables us to look at support and resistance to ideas from the agency perspective. Commitment is a bond between an actor and an idea that manifests itself in allocating resources towards the idea and maintenance of the bond with it. Most often, the quality of support and resistance has been associated with the number or quality of actors that express it (e.g. how powerful they are). The idea of commitment shifts the focus to how strong the connection between actors and ideas is or how dedicated actors in their advocacy (if expressed commitment is considered) are.

Commitment is more than support. It is continued support sustained over time, unaffected by situational influences. One of the key arguments developed in this thesis is that the strength of the link between an actor and an idea (and, thus, the quality of the actor's support) depends on the intensity and stability of engagement.

In essence, commitment to ideas is a resource that can be used in the discourse as a tool for change or opposition to it. It has been acknowledged that commitment benefits both an actor and the target of commitment and increases their chances for success (Campos 2000). This idea of the link between beneficial outcomes (success) and commitment is implicit in some existing theorisations, including Kingdon's (2013) multiple streams and the Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011) that describe commitment-induced behaviour but do not conceptualise it as commitment. The mechanisms that allow actors and ideas to succeed also remained under-theorised.

The thesis argued that commitment to ideas (expressed in the discourse) could be linked to the concept of ideational power (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). Commitment empowers both ideas and actors. I suggested that, on the one hand, actors empower (or bring power in) ideas by maintaining and strengthening links with them and that the temporal aspect is important in this empowerment. On an individual level, by repeatedly engaging with an idea in the discourse, actors tie themselves to it so that it becomes more difficult to switch or ignore it. On a collective level, the more an idea is present in the discourse – the more exposure actors have to it, and the more difficult it becomes to ignore it in communicating or thinking about the issue.

On the other hand, developing Kingdon (2013, 128) idea of 'softening up' or 'building acceptance for…proposals', I suggested that support for ideas expressed by committed actors in the discourse creates discursive pressure. This force can contribute to their ability to succeed in promoting ideas. This force allows actors to influence other actors' beliefs through the usage of ideational elements. While persuasion means that policy entrepreneurs convince the public 'through reasoning or argument' (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016) relying on the substance of the idea, the mechanism of discursive pressure is based on increasing the exposure of actors to an idea and increasing the weight of the idea in the discourse. Persuasion and discursive pressure can work in tandem and complement each other. Discursive pressure can be exercised both at the level of individual actors and at the coalition level.

The thesis has also introduced the concept of ideas of continued importance. These ideas are the 'focal points' (Legro 2000) of ideation. They constitute the backbone of the discourse. This thesis argued that commitment could be used to identify these ideas. As mentioned in Chapter 7, commitment of an actor to a particular target signifies that the actor perceives the target as important and valuable. Therefore, an actor's commitment to an idea can be interpreted as a manifestation of the importance and value of this idea.

Moreover, since commitment has a temporal dimension and continuance of relations is one of its components, studying commitment to ideas allows for determining not only salient ideas – the ones that were used intensively – but also ideas that endure in the discourse. The significance of ideas of continued importance stems from their ability to influence how actors think and communicate. These ideas are the ones that are the most empowered by actors' continuous engagement with them.

Furthermore, the thesis argued that differences in the levels and foci of commitment (priorities) could potentially be helpful in understanding and estimating the success and failure not only of coalitions (as suggested in NPF) but of ideas as well. In particular, in the case of coalitions' partial success, why specific ideas move further in their journey to adoption while others get dropped. As mentioned, it is not always the case that a coalition manages to realise all the ideas that its members share. It is possible to assume that ideas that actors prioritise – the ones that have more weight in their discourse – have more potential

to succeed than marginal ideas, ceteris paribus. The rationale behind this assumption is that if actors value the idea more, they invest more resources in its promotion and, secondly, will not easily give up on it if trade-offs are needed. However, to assess the chances for success, one should also consider how consistent an actor or a coalition is in supporting or rejecting an idea.

Finally, this research made a methodological contribution by developing a measure for commitment to ideas applicable to discourse networks. This measure incorporates a critical component of the commitment construct – often overlooked in the analysis of textual data – the maintenance of the bond and non-switching. It means that along with the intensity, the temporal pattern of engagement is included in assessing the strength of the bond between an actor and an idea.

Limitations and further research

This section will discuss a few limitations and avenues for further research. The first limitation of this study is related to the usage of newspapers as data sources. The main reason for choosing newspapers as the source of data for this thesis was that, unlike other text documents, they create a unique – relatively open – arena for an indirect interaction of actors. In addition to that, since 'newspapers are published regularly and frequently, they can generate a reliable base for systematic empirical investigations over time' (Markard, Rinscheid, and Widdel 2021, 318). Thus, newspapers are a good source of data needed for exploring the debate because they provide this uniquely broad perspective on both actors and ideas engaged in the debate. However, there are certain limitations connected with the usage of newspapers as data sources.

The main issue is that the media not only provide information but also serves as a mediator providing interpretations. Consequently, when studying the belief systems of actors through newspaper articles, one can only see their reflection in the media discourse. Even when actors' statements are reported without distortion, the very selection of what and how intensively to cover can create biases. Journalists and editors may put more emphasis on particular events, actors, and ideas while ignoring or underrepresenting others. This means that some relationships between actors and ideas may be exaggerated, and some could be absent. In other words, what one can measure is the construct built by

journalists. It has an important implication. The results of this research do not demonstrate 'actors' ideologies in the real world', neither do they assess as accurately as possible actions of actors in the public discourse, but rather measure and interpret 'media discourse as it is perceived by the actors' (Leifeld 2016, 129). However, media discourse – this construct created by journalists – is what the broader set of actors interested in the EU democratic reform see. They base their perception of reality on this construct, especially if they do not have direct access to other actors engaged in the debate.

As Leifeld (2016, 133) points out, it is difficult to measure the degree of distortion created by the media because we have 'no absolute reference point'; however, careful selection of sources is important to prevent biases. Thus, for this research, two newspapers that complement each other well, allowing a completer and more balanced picture of the debate, were chosen as data sources.

Another related issue is that not all actors that appear in the media are equally covered. This means that the amount of data across the range of actors can differ significantly. Hence for some actors, the picture of their relations with ideas would be quite comprehensive, while for others, it would be more fragmented. Therefore, meaningful analysis of commitment – relations with ideas – on a micro-level could be done for those actors who are active and appear in the news regularly. The only strategy to eliminate the problem would have been to collect data from sources other than newspapers. However, even self-reported or official data is not free from biases and can intentionally misrepresent actors' beliefs (Kirk 2006).

While a comprehensive picture of actors' interrelations with ideas on the micro-level was not the central goal of the research, further studies could address this limitation and dwell on a more detailed analysis of ideational structures and discursive activities of particular individual or organisational actors using different types of sources for data collection.

Another potential weakness is that the keywords used in the research are well suited for exploring the overall debate but are limited in how well they represent the debate on specific ideas. In other words, some statements made by actors in relation to particular ideas might not have been present in the final data set. Although this does not invalidate the thesis findings, there may be concerns

regarding the accuracy of the picture of the debate on specific ideas such as transnational lists and Spitzenkandidat. However, it should be noted that the keywords were chosen to capture as much data on EU's democratic reform as possible so that the final set of articles that a coder manually read was very extensive. This reduces the likelihood of any significant distortion. Moreover, keeping in mind that a detailed account of the debate on these ideas (Spitzenkandidat and Transnational lists) was not present in previous studies, this research could be seen as a first attempt to create a broad picture of these debates.

Avenues for further research include applying the commitment measure presented in this study in different contexts and for different purposes. For instance, one of the possible ways to utilise the commitment measure is to identify the actor's type of agency. Although the role of ideas as constraining elements has been widely acknowledged, there is disagreement regarding the extent to which ideational structures determine the behaviour of actors – to what extent and when actors are strategic users of ideas rather than just 'passive bearers' (Blyth 1997). Studied in a dynamic way, commitment to separate ideational elements – can be used to differentiate between the types of agency exercised by an actor. This would help explain and predict the actors' decisions and, therefore, directions in which policies and institutions may develop.

Furthermore, theoretical ideas suggested in this study need validation and further development. In particular, the idea of discursive pressure. One of the possible avenues for research could be investigating how (or if) the type of actors applying the discursive pressure affects the outcomes. Finally, the discourse network analysis could benefit from developing a way to incorporate the temporal pattern of engagement with ideas into measuring the strength of the link between actors and between ideas. This would allow visualising and analysing of the patterns of interactions between the elements of discourse (actors and ideas) based on the stability of their participation in the debate.

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Appendix

List of concepts

Abolish the EESC
Abolish the EP
Abolish the European Commission
Active citizens
Associate membership
Autonomy
Balanced expert groups
Better cooperation between national and European parties
Bring the EU closer to its citizens
Budget for people
Centralise power in the EP
Centralisation
Chamber representing national parliaments
Change economic model for democracy
Christian democracy
Cities bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens
Citizen-cantered liberalism
Citizens' jury
Citizens' dialogues
Civil dialogue
Clear political alternatives/debate
Clear-cut responsibilities
Clusterisation of the Commission
Cohesion
Collect equality data
Combat/prevent social exclusion of young people
Commission needs to be more accountable
Commission president should be chosen by Commissioners
Commission's role is to implement the policies
Common good as a priority in democratic representation
Communicate added value of the EU to its citizens
Community method
Community of values
Competitiveness and economic growth as the ultimate goal
Comprehensive public record of lobbyists' influence
Compromise
Compulsory roll-call votes in EP committees
Concentration of powers in Commission (Vice-Presidents)
Consensus democracy
Continuous representation
Convention

Cooperation between EU institutions and regional and local authorities
Council as a legislative chamber
Council retains prerogative to appoint the Commission President
Counteract domination of some MS
Cover all Commission staff drafting laws by the mandatory register
Create politics that responds to young people
Crisis of democracy
Crisis/Reform of a nation state
Debate about the EU
Decentralisation
Decentralisation of the Commission
Decisions cannot be made on the nation-state level alone
Declare only direct lobby contacts
Deeper integration for the core EU members
Deeper political integration/union
Deeper/More integration
Defend European project
Defend European values
Deliberative democracy
Deliberative mini-publics
Democratic and transparent process to choose the Commission president
Democracy in digital world
Democracy is built on the middle class
Democracy needs independent journalism
Democracy should allow to contest ideas
Democracy takes into account interests of everyone
Democratic accountability
Democratic conventions
Democratic conventions are elitist
Democratic dialogue
Democratic front against populism
Democratisation of internal party procedures
Demoicracy/shared sovereignty
Demonstrate added value of the EU
Destructive power of nationalism/populism
Develop communication at local/regional level
Dialogue between institutions
Dialogued cooperation
Differentiated integration
Digital democracy
Dignity
Direct democracy
Direct election of the Commission President
Direct election to the top positions
Directly elect MEPs

Disintegration
Domination
Domination by eurozone countries
ECI
ECI generates Euroscepticism
EMF under parliamentary control
EP is a source of legitimacy
EP is transparent
EP lacks democratic legitimacy
EP should have a say on Commission's agenda
EU as a confederation of states
EU as a multi-level democracy
EU constitution
EU institutions and member states governments should work better together
EU institutions are anti-democratic
EU institutions need to be more open to citizens
EU is not a parliamentary system
EU is transparent
EU media industrial policy
EU needs democratisation
EU needs to reconnect with the citizens
EU should support media
EU-wide referenda
Economy of well-being
Education and information are key for democracy
Effective participation of people experiencing poverty in decision-making
Elected Commission
Elections are corruption of democracy
Electoral reform
Electoral thresholds in larger countries
Elements of direct democracy
Elements of participative democracy
Emergency brake
Empower the Commission with regards to the Council
Empower the EESC
Empower the EP
Empower the EP with regard to the Commission
Empower the EP with regard to the Council
Empower citizens
Empower member states
Empower the Council
Empower young people
Encourage greater media involvement in the EU
Enhance corporate accountability
Enhance interparliamentary coordination

Enhance power of national parliaments in decision-making
Ensure Commission's neutrality with growth of its political powers
Environmental democracy
Equality/Fight inequalities
Equality of treatment
Erasmus programme
Europe 'a la carte'
Europe needs a stronger narrative
Europe of nations
Europe of regions
Europe of two circles (core and periphery)
Europe should offer a new model of society
Europe should reshape globalisation
European agenda for the EP elections
European identity
European minimum wage
European parliamentary democracy
European project needs re-establishment
European public sphere
European republic
European sovereignty
Europeanisation of national politics
Europeanise national parties
Eurozone Parliament
Eurozone Parliament mostly of MPs
Eurozone finance minister
Eurozone government
Ever closer Union opt out
Extend transparency register to the Council
Federal structure
Federal structure for the core states
Federation of nation states
Fight inequalities for sustainable future
Fight inequalities to tackle the problem of populism
Fight populism on the national level
Flexible EU
Flexible solidarity
Fully-fledged European political parties
Gender balance
Gender equality
Gender quotas
Give citizens agenda-setting rights
Grassroots democracy
Greater participation of children in d-m
Green card for national parliaments

Harmonising social protection
Horizontal coordination between member states
Identity challenges
Illiberalism
Importance of the role of European leaders in communicating the value of the EU
Improve access to documents
Improve access to the Council documents
Improve citizens trust in politics
Improve communication with citizens
Improve female representation in politics/institutions
Improve involvement of civil society in d-m process
Improve transparency of the decision-making process
Improve transparency of impact assessment
Include social partners in the decision-making process
Include youth in decision-making more
Inclusion of cities in decision-making
Inclusion of minorities
Inclusive Europe
Inclusive European narrative
Inclusive cities
Inclusive civic nationalism
Inclusive development/growth
Inclusive globalisation
Inclusive leadership model
Inclusive media
Inclusive politics/institutions/decision-making
Inclusive society
Inconsistency in following its own values/criteria
Increase autonomy of the Commission President in choosing his team
Increase democratic legitimacy of the Commission
Increase involvement of regional and local representatives in the EU decision-making
Increase public participation
Increase public participation for sustainable development
Increase public participation in EIB decision-making
Increase the role of national parliaments towards national governments
Increase transparency of the economic government
Increase transparency of the Commission
Increase transparency of the decision-making in the EP
Increased transparency of advisory panel process
Independent Regulatory Scrutiny Board
Inequality threatens the EU
Inequality threatens democracy
Inequality threatens social cohesion
Institutionalize continuous public participation
Institutionalize Eurogroup

Intergovernmental EMS
Intergovernmental changes
Involve the EP in the economic governance
Involve stakeholders in impact assessment
Launch European political sphere
Legislative initiative to the EP
Legislative initiative to the Council
LGBTQ equality
Liberal democracy
Liberal democracy is about delivering results
Limit/Reduce Commission competences
Lobbying is an integral part of democracy
Lobbyist register for all levels of the EU institutions
Local media should be given a major role
Localism
Maintain a post of EC CSA
Majoritarian democracy for the EU
Make the EP the centre of European debate
Make election rules for the EP elections uniform
Make elections to the EP more European
Make elections to the EP more transparent
Make lobbying meetings in the Council public
Make trialogue talks more transparent
Mandatory legislative footprints
Mandatory register of lobbyists
Mandatory register of lobbyists for 3 main institutions
Mandatory register of lobbyists for MEPs
Meaningful participation
Media cooperation across borders
Media will bring the EU closer to its citizens
Member states are the source of EU's legitimacy
Minimum social standards for the EU
Mistrust of EU institutions
Model of inclusive cooperation
More accountable Council
More accountable Eurogroup
More accountable MEPs
More democracy means more efficiency
More democratic Europe
More democratic accountability of the European economic governance
More democratic control over the ECB
More democratic legitimacy via substantiating expertise
More diverse Europe
More political Commission
More senior posts to women

More transparency in the ECB d-m
More transparency in MEPs spending
More transparency in choosing the EP president
More transparency in contacts with lobbyists
More transparency in the Council d-m
More transparency increases legitimacy
More transparent Eurogroup
Multi-speed Europe
Multi-stakeholder conversations
Multiple-choice referendum
National parliaments are more legitimate
National parliaments for subsidiarity
National sovereignty
Negative framing in the media damages EU
Neoliberalism is killing Europe
New balanced model of development/growth
New forms of affiliation through social media
New model of flexibility for the EU
New social contract
New vision of Europe
No point in Spitzenkandidat without transnational lists
No transfer of social policy competences to the EU level
No-demos
Non-discrimination based on nationality
Online transparency
Only rapporteurs should meet registered lobbyists
Overrepresentation of smaller countries in the EP
Overuse of direct democracy is dangerous
Pan-European campaigns
Pan-European constituency
Pan-European movements
Pan-European transparency register
Participatory budgeting
Party programmes for European political parties
Pay more attention to youth rights
Pay transparency
People's sovereignty
People-centred Europe
Permanent representation should participate in lobby register
Pluralism
Political Commission should not be partisan
Political leadership
Political leadership from Eurozone
Political ownership of technical decisions
Political systems need change

Politicisation makes EU democratic
Prevent member-states from violating fundamental values
Primary elections
Proportionality
Proportionality check for legislation
Protect data
Protect democracies from cyberattacks and manipulation
Protect democratic decision-making against excessive corporate influence
Protection from globalisation side-effects
Public consultations
Publish all documents including trialogue negotiations
Publish expert groups meetings minutes
Rapporteurs should disclose their meetings with lobbyists
Record positions of member states in the Council
Red card for national parliaments
Redistribution of prosperity
Reduce the EU competences
Reduce the number of Commissioners
Referenda
Referenda on EU issues
Reform of the Commission
Reform of the EP
Reform of Spitzenkandidat
Reform of the ECI
Reform of comitology
Reform of party funding
Regions and cities are the central pillar of European democracy
Register listing all Eurogroup documents
Regulate social media
Renationalisation
Respect for national social models
Restrict social services for other EU citizens
Restriction of social benefits is discriminatory
Revised voluntary lobby register
Representation of minorities vital for democratic legitimacy
Sanctioned and monitored mandatory register
Self-determination
Single EU seat in the IMF
Single presidency
Social Europe
Social agenda
Social cohesion
Social commitment at the centre of the EU decision-making
Social convergence
Social democracy

Social dialogue
Social dimension of growth
Social dimension of the EMU
Social empowerment
Social equality
Social fairness
Social harmonisation in Eurozone
Social impact assessment
Social inclusion
Social inequality eroding the EU
Social innovations
Social investment
Social justice
Social market
Social pillar
Social progress
Social protection
Social rights
Social rights of children
Social security
Social welfare is a basic social democratic value
Socialist Europe
Solidarity
Sovereignty does not negate interdependence
Spitzenkandidat
Spitzenkandidat in electoral law
Spitzenkandidat is not democratic
Spitzenkandidat is the one who secures majority
Spitzenkandidat provides democratic legitimacy
Strengthen control of the EP over national governments
Strengthen representative democracy
Strengthen roles of parties in EP
Strengthen the role of NPs in EU Economic Governance
Strengthen trade unions/collective bargaining
Strong EU needs strong member states
Strong Europe guarantees sovereignty of the member states
Strong Europe needs strong and inclusive cities
Structural racism and discrimination
Subsidiarity
Subsidiarity as a way to introduce more democratic flexibility
Subsidiarity check for legislation
Subsidiarity in democratic control
Subsidiarity watchdog
Supra-national state
Supremacy of elections over other elements of a democratic system

Sustainable budget
Sustainability as a financial imperative
Sustainable Europe
Sustainable and independent media
Sustainable development/growth
Sustainable equality
Sustainable globalisation
Sustainable social model
Sustainable unity
Transfer more power on the EU level
Transnational European democracy
Transnational lists
Transnational lists are not democratic
Transnational lists have no meaning without Spitzenkandidat
Transnational politicians
Transparency crucial element of democracy
Transparency in EU financing NGOs
Transparency in internal party mechanisms
Transparency more
Transparency of media ownership
Transparency register improves trust
Transparency to restore trust
Transparent cross-border debate
Treaty change
Turn the Commission into European Government
Ultra-liberal Europe
Unanimity and vetoes
Unconditional basic income on the EU level
Underrepresentation of minorities
Unelected bodies should not hold more power than elected
United States of Europe
Unity
Variable geometry
Vision of the future
Voting right for Europeans living in a different member state
Welfare state
Women's inclusion in labour market
Working poor excluded from social participation
Workplace democracy
Young people withdraw from traditional politics