

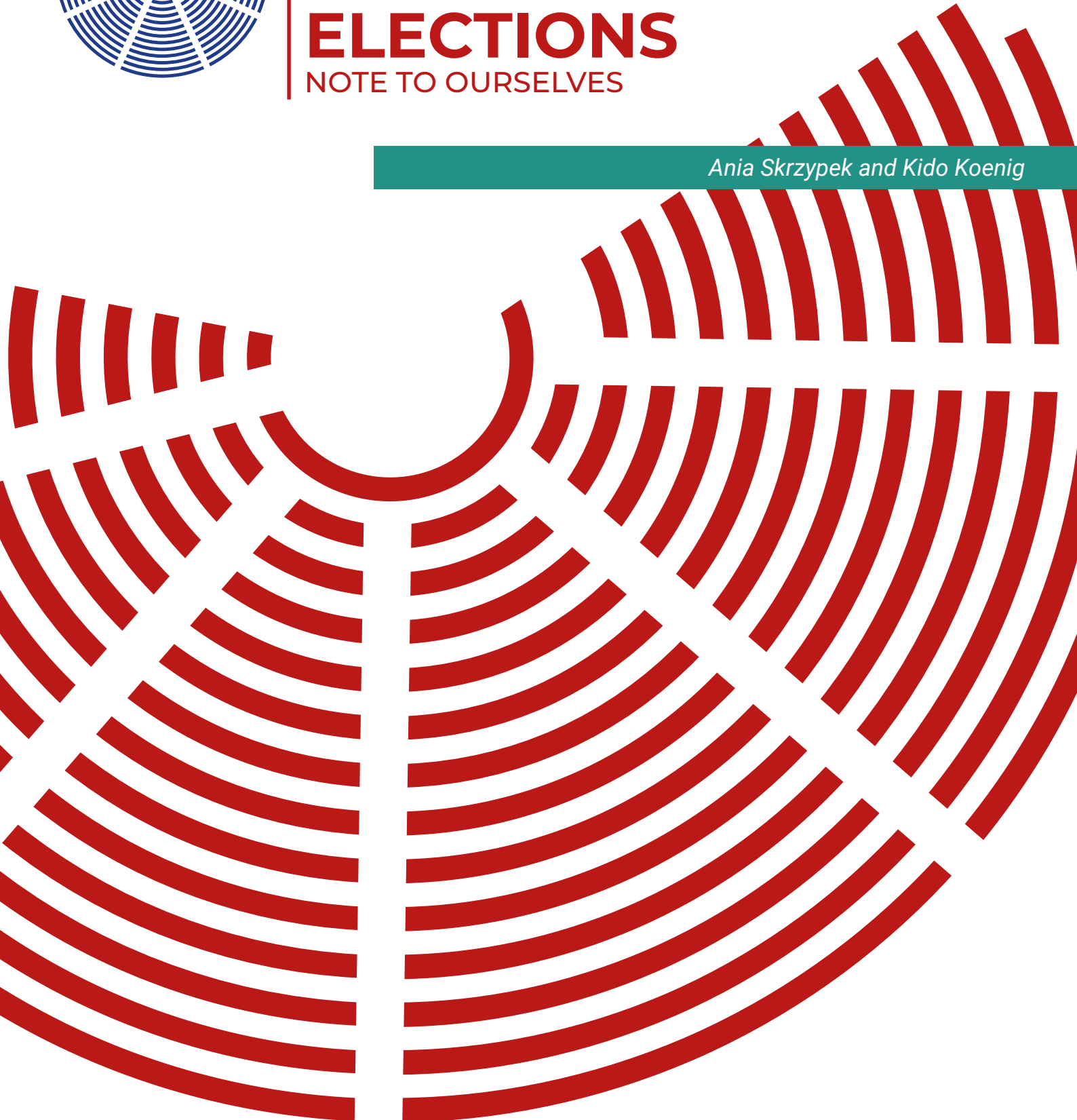
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AHEAD OF THE 2029 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

NOTE TO OURSELVES

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FEPS
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NOTE TO OURSELVES

1. IMPROVING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE IS A TRANSVERSAL EXERCISE	5
2. CREDIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY CREATE TRUST	7
3. THE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT DEMOCRACY IS, MUST BE EXPANDED	9
4. BELIEF IN PLURALISM MEANS AN ACCEPTANCE OF CONTESTATION	12
5. THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MUST BECOME MORE IMPACTFUL	15
6. YOUNG PEOPLE WILL SHOW UP IF THEY HAVE A SAY	18
7. CRITERIA OF REPRESENTATION CANNOT BE SELECTIVELY APPLIED	21
8. SPITZENKANDIDATINNEN REQUIRE A STAGE AND SPOTLIGHT	23
9. REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN REGULATIONS ON EUROPARTIES AND ELECTIONS IS LONG OVERDUE	25
10. GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY HAVE TO BE REFLECTED IN PRACTICE	27
11. THERE ARE STILL VALID LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE COFOE	29
12. THE CSOS' ROLE IN THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE CALLS FOR RESPECT AND RECOGNITION	32
ANNEX 1 – CONCEPT NOTE	34
THE ORIGINAL NOTE (MARCH 2023)	34
THE 2024 UPDATED NOTE (MAY 2024)	37
ANNEX 2 – ROUNDTABLES & LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	39
31ST OCTOBER 2023 - ACADEMIC ROUNDTABLE	39
10TH NOVEMBER 2023 - POLITICAL ROUNDTABLE – “LEADING, NOT LEANING” EVENT AT THE PES CONGRESS IN MALAGA	40
30TH NOVEMBER 2023 - YOUTH ROUNDTABLE	41
13TH DECEMBER 2023 - CIVIL ORGANISATION ROUNDTABLE	42

NOTE TO OURSELVES AHEAD OF THE 2029 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

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The campaign ahead of the next elections starts when the polling stations close in the preceding ones. This is a well-known truth that seems applicable regardless of the type of vote, result and even longevity of the mandate of the newly elected institutions. In other words, if you win, you must work hard to uphold and solidify your advantage. If you lose, you must have learned something, and you should prove it by successfully bouncing back. Either way, the new political season will unavoidably finish with citizens' proceeding to cast their verdict on what you did with the previous result. While you may not be able to predict the circumstances at the end of the legislative period, you must remain agile, active and prepared.

Awareness of the inevitability of standing up for another test is evidently greater at the national level, where there is always the chance of a crisis and snap elections. But it hasn't been absent in the context of the European Parliament (EP) either since 1979, when the Assembly was elected directly for the first time for a fixed five-year-long mandate. Amid the campaign, there is always a consideration of how different these next particular elections could be. And so, time after time, they prompt thinking about the still imperfect electoral law (reform of which has been stuck in an intra-institutional disagreement), the current powers of the EP (which some still consider too feeble, especially since Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) act upon direct mandates of the EU citizenry), and the role of diverse stakeholders in the campaign and post-electoral negotiations (including here the europarties, trade unions and civil society organisations (CSOs)). So, when the ballots are counted, there is a sense of obligation to change things. And this means the

MEPs somehow always remain in anticipation of the next EP elections, during which they will have to do better to reconnect European politics and the local public discourse, if they want to return. And if they want to see their own and the EP's legitimacy strengthened through mobilising more voters and raising the turnout.

The issue, though, is that the preoccupation with those rather regulatory matters is central to the thinking of institutionalists but is often considered *bureaucratic* or too *niche*. In this sense, the connotation that these deliberations are not about tools and gears of Brussels machinery but touch upon the core questions of the representative, deliberative and participatory democracy is perhaps still missing. And then, due to its absence, other matters, which are defined by the criteria of the policy deliverables and concern "problems of everyday life", often take precedence. So, when the minds are focused again on the next European elections and how to conduct them, there are only a few months (in the best-case scenario) left before the vote. This results in an assessment shared by both those more and less involved in the institutional debates that *this time around* it may be (again) *too late* to change anything profoundly. Indeed, at this stage of the process, there is usually no time left for modification of the regulations, which would require multilayer compromises involving not only EU institutions but also the member states. And if these were to be framed in a truly ambitious manner, there may even be calls for treaty changes. Hence, it is assumed that it's better to do the best one can under the circumstances given and postpone reforms until later.

But even if that *nextism* is defining, and may discourage implementing, too many pioneering ideas, the EP electoral campaigns always inspire these diverse reflections. They are never without educational moments, creative outbursts or inspiring concepts. This was also the case for the 2023-2024 period, within which FEPS and FES Brussels, with the support of many partners¹ held four round tables² within the project “*Living up to, not leaving aside – the progressive strategy towards the 2024 EU elections*”³ – meeting with scholars, politicians, youth and CSO representatives.

Each of the respective sessions was guided by the same set of five questions:

- a. Transnational campaign and its tools – what’s new?
- b. SpitzenKandidatInnen – *how can the process be improved?*
- c. *Transnational lists – can anything be done now?*
- d. Role of manifestoes and other documents ahead of post-electoral negotiations – can they be more significant?
- e. Post-electoral coordination and transparency of the process – how to improve and imprint the principles of representative democracy?

And the very rich outcomes of these debates may provide much-needed motivation to pick up *from where it was left off* and point to new opportunities. This especially concerns the discussion about the reform of the rules for European political parties and foundations, on one hand, and the reform of the European electoral code, on the other. Both saw many negotiations in the previous legislative period and were frequently at least a footnote in the deliberations on the state of European democracy during the *Conference on the Future of Europe* (CoFE) process.

Consequently, this *Note to Ourselves* is drafted to summarise the most valuable points and reiterate them now, when the EP has just been elected. It aims to preserve and cultivate some instructive thoughts and inspire ambition, innovation and higher ambition *ahead of the next European Elections in 2029*.



IMPROVING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE IS A TRANSVERSAL EXERCISE

1. IMPROVING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE IS A TRANSVERSAL EXERCISE

A preoccupation with democratic backsliding marked the legislative period 2019-2024. The reports and more academic literature on the subject point to various aspects, also focusing on the angles of representative democracy at the national level. These concern the declining levels of trust towards politics, politicians and institutions. This mistrust, alongside disenchantment and dissatisfaction, has been translating into citizens' behavioural patterns (which can include mobilising to contest or protest, as well as by withdrawal and electoral abstention). Heavily altering the participatory democracy, they have also been altering the spaces within which the civic deliberative processes should occur. These shrink by default if politics is affected by perpetual confrontation and polarisation.

There is a complexity of issues, and one cannot fix one without improving another. The respective challenges constitute part of a spiral that elevates radical and extreme forces, paves the way to their electoral successes, and enables entry into government. And then, when they claim the democratic mandate, in the name of it, they pursue policies that are not only not democratic, but often straightforwardly authoritarian. Consequently, the European political map has been changing, and the EU has been faced with a fundamental task of defending the values that laid the foundations for the Community at its very beginning. In that mission it has been struggling, especially in an attempt to enact Article 7 (which required unanimity). A new opening has been created with a so-called "conditionality mechanism" around Next Generation EU, but it is not a panacea and will have an expiry date, after which it may be difficult to repeat. On one hand, the fact

that the, until now, fringe radical forces have managed to unite will change the dynamics inside of the European Council, and on the other, it looks like the years to come will see more attempts at undermining democratic values, the rule of law, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. The key question of what the EU can do persists and the challenge to make the Union more resilient and more democratic is one of the key ones articulated for the new legislative period 2024-2029.⁴

Listening to the exposé of the president-elect of the European Commission (EC), one, however, notices that **there is a link missing between the narrative to defend democracy within the member states and the democratic reform that the EU itself should still undertake, possibly in the form of treaty reform, to become more democratic itself.** This is a gap that has already too often caused the Union's vulnerability – and when there have been attempts to deal with the authoritarian regimes inside the Community, the response has been that it has neither legitimacy nor the credentials for it. And regardless of how far this argument is a valid one or appropriate in this context, it is definitely playing a role, and it is bound to be used by the radical or extreme forces. **Their narrative has been changing and the euroscepticism and/or anti-Europeanism that they manifest is of a different nature than the attitude labelled with these terms in the past.**

Consequently, within the deliberations on transnational politics, it has been argued that citizens generally tend to participate in a vote if they feel that it will make a difference and if they think that it symbolises their empowerment. If they

see the Union's democratic principles defied (in one country or another) and they tend to believe that the EU can do little to counteract it, they will continue to doubt if Europe is indeed the mighty stakeholder that it presents itself to be. This may further weigh on their decision of whether it is relevant to make an investment in the shape of mobilising for EU elections and if their voting is in vain. In that sense, there is a clear connection between the EU election's attendance and the EU's ability to remain a force, a beacon of hope and an embodiment of ideals. Hence, **discussions on how to reform the Union and what this implies in terms of needed EP electoral rule reform should not be compartmentalised but, on the contrary, should be articulated as threads of the same fabric that will underpin the strengthening of the Union as a whole.**

What's more, it would be high time to drop the claims that European voters are either not well informed about the functioning of the EU (and hence, the campaign ahead of the EP elections should be predominantly about *explaining how it works*) or not very interested in it. That perception does not seem to find evidence in recent surveys and studies. On the contrary, **Europeans seem to attach more and more importance to EU policies** and in that sense, **the 2023-2024 campaign was not prepared in a way in which the focus was on creating conditions for a much-needed conversation about the issues pertaining to the future of Europe. This is a hard conclusion, which should be instructive.** For the new reform to have a chance to gain recognition and the support that it needs to be conducted and implemented and to then see the results in a truly stronger democratic mandate for the EU's elected institutions (especially the EP), it needs to be deliberated upon with its citizens.





**CREDIBILITY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY
CREATE TRUST**

2. CREDIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY CREATE TRUST

The claim that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit is possibly as old as the Communities. Very often, it is overused manipulatively as an argument suggesting that the EU is less trusted by its citizens, who do not know enough about the procedures, who have no insights into the complex decision-making processes and who may be easily impressionable by the idea that the EU defines their living conditions while being detached from their daily problems. This hypothesis does not seem valid in the context of recent years and survey results, including the Eurobarometer,⁵ which point out that **citizens inside the member states trust the EU and its institutions more than they do their respective national governments**. If then the evidence in numbers wasn't enough to drop the previously explained way of thinking, one should perhaps also cross-check the literature on the subject, whereby several authoritative authors⁶ prove that **trust in politics isn't synonymous with trust in institutions to begin with**. Instead, citizens may have hopes in policy ideas and trust people (politicians) to deliver them – which is also why the EU democratic deficit has to be mended by ensuring that European political actors are credible, accountable and there is a space for real public scrutiny.

This understanding suggests that **the reform of the European electoral code and EU-level institutional reform would need to be considered as two sides of the same coin**. In other words, if the aim of the first is to empower and engage citizens' more, the institution to which they elect representatives has to have a stronger position. In the case of the **EP**, two aspects come directly to mind: (1) **the right to initiative** (which within the national context is natural, one could even say a birthright of the respective assemblies); and (2) **the power to decide on the nominee for the**

EC president (which would call for clarification of the current articles of the Lisbon Treaty). But these are just the first two among many, which should aim to make the EP stronger in the EU institutional architecture, and hence, its members more equipped to deliver.

The latter is a very relevant aspect of the MEPs' accountability towards voters, who, especially recently, have shown an appetite to discuss the grand, defining topics of contemporary times. The problem here is that, although the opportunity to engage in such a conversation is inseparably related to the campaign, the EP's role in diverse processes is still not a profound one, and all the MEP candidates can do is express their opinions without the possibility to promise delivery and then really be held accountable. To give an illustrative example, both enlargement and institutional reform will require unanimity inside the Council, which makes the latter, in reality, very clearly in charge.

Despite all these issues, **it would still have been important to use the campaign to show the political differences between the transnational families (seated in the EP and organised within the EP) on these grand questions**. There are significant differences between the centre right and the centre left on how to change the EU institutional architecture or when the EU should be considered ready for accepting new members, which did not manifest themselves at all in the 2023-2024 campaign. And that is a setback in terms of the **politicisation of Europe**. Should politicisation be more advanced in the future, it will allow an important criterion for the evaluation of MEPs to be introduced, and that is how far they have been able to keep their dual mandate intact as nationally elected delegates, who are united in ideological

transnational groups. This is not only a question of increasing transparency and accountability, but also an issue of ensuring a certain predictability of how MEPs will behave when it comes to call. It is not to be underestimated. Several elections, which saw the traditional parties bouncing back from unpopularity, have proved that in unstable times voters may opt out of backing the organisations that contest the circumstances or, equally well, those that provide them with some sense of reassurance by remaining faithful to a set of guiding principles. To that end, the clearer the differences among these traditional parties, the less vulnerable they are to the populist claim *they are just the elites; they are in fact all the same*. To that end, **politicisation is a way forward to prove that those aspiring to be elected are driven by ideals and not only believe in the future of the EU, but also have their values as guidelines underpinning a specific vision of how they want to contribute to shaping it.**





**THE UNDERSTANDING
OF WHAT
DEMOCRACY IS, MUST
BE EXPANDED**

3. THE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT DEMOCRACY IS, MUST BE EXPANDED

The classical understanding of democracy has been that it is an ideal, which derives from core values, frames the institutional system and defines the relations among the stakeholders, social groups and individual citizens.⁷ This is a very broad approach, which has then been frequently reduced to focus on the aspects connected with participation, representation and deliberative processes. And this is driving the discussion into a very narrow set of aspects within contemporary politics. **As such, the dominant approach has been to extend the risks that the debate on civic rights and liberties and the debate on social rights and standards have been seen as two separate questions, while, in fact, they should be one and the same preoccupation.**

The split has been even more profound within European politics. The Treaties speak about social rights (such as the right to the same pay for the same job, which has been there ever since the Treaty of Rome), and there has been a much clearer sense of obligation to consolidate the project of a Social Europe (including the Social Summits and the undaunted commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights). But still, **correctly or not, it is the economy and the rule of law that are seen as part of the so-called hard competences, and the strive for a social dimension remains within the area of soft policies.** This may partially explain why citizens feel that the EU falls shorter and shorter in delivering on the promise made at the beginning, namely, that it would become the Community ensuring improvement of living and working conditions for all. Citizens feel the EU still does too little and is too slow on the matters that are important to them, and this may, to some extent, explain the

mood around the recent EP elections and some of the results.

In the 2019-2024 mandate, much has happened to show that if there is a need and if there is a will, there is a way. Exemplary to that was the EU's actions during the COVID-19 crisis, even if the competences of the EU when it comes to the health policies are very meagre. And, **following the surveys, and the outcomes of the CoFE, there is an expectation that the EU would do more in the upcoming mandate – trying to reclaim its position as a future-oriented, hopeful project.**

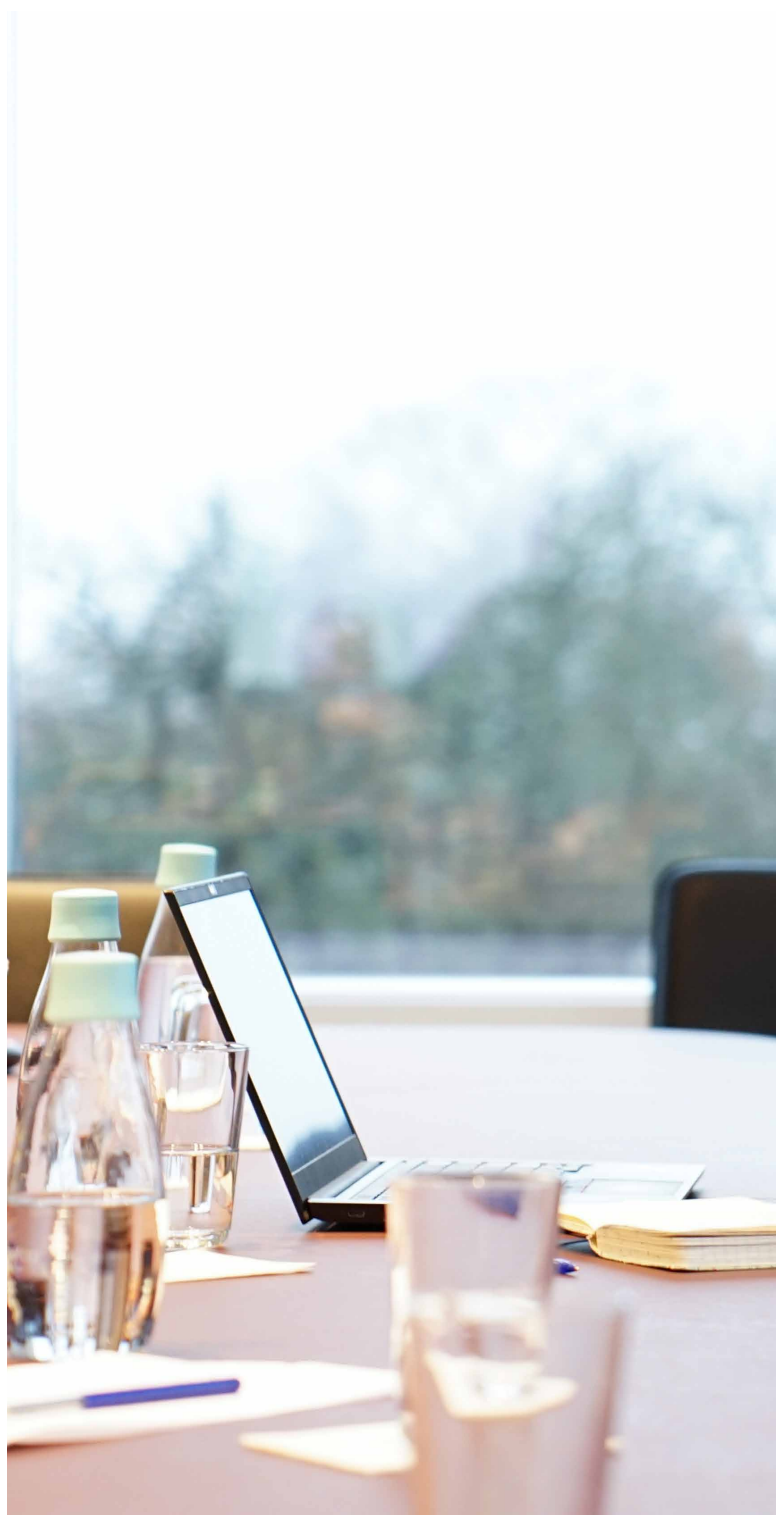
But to do that, it is key to recognise that the most important, transversal theme of the 2023-2024 campaign was the question of the cost-of-living crisis.⁸ It pointed to a sense of disempowerment and fear among Europeans. And to the feeling of being deprived of rights, among which voters consider (though it is not codified) a right to aspire and to plan for the future. Consequently, **to further the debate on democracy in the EU, one can no longer run it referring only to institutional issues, but instead, one must enlarge the debate to showcase that democratic renewal will also see an expansion of the understanding of individual rights.** These should include, with equally strong emphasis, civic rights, social and economic rights, as well as environmental and especially now digital ones.

The idea to look at democracy and rights in a broader sense is essential if the intention ahead of the next European elections is indeed not only to see a bigger turnout figure, but also to see that increased number represent the individuals and social groups that are currently reluctant

or rejecting to vote. It remains overlooked and underexamined that the levels of participation in the vote for the EP may vary even within the same agglomerations, whereby the communities inhabited by individuals with lower incomes see decisively smaller turnouts.⁹ These differences are also to be seen among the regions and may help to explain disparities that were particularly obvious between the turnouts in Western and in Eastern Europe in 2024.

Moreover, an updated, more encompassing approach to the definition of democratic civic rights can offer a further number of new openings. As indicated, **if the environmental aspects were to be added, it could be a way to seek a new compromise in debates such as the one about the future of Common Agriculture Policy**, in response to farmer protests and simultaneous EU commitments to fight climate change. It could help in reframing the very polarising and very tense debate to direct it towards the idea that there needs to be a new social settlement that works for all and will deliver on the ambitions for the future. And with that, the precarious situation can also be mended, avoiding a further escalation of the confrontation and protests seen as vehicles for many, who contest the contemporary reality (among some of whom challenge Brussels, the so-called elites etc.).

Finally, **while social (socio-economic) and environment rights are therefore key additions to understanding democratic rights, so are digital ones.** This is a time in which it is recognised and debated how to ensure more coherence for legislation ensuring rights to privacy on one hand, and the basic right to adequate information on the other.¹⁰ The quality of European campaigns in the future will heavily depend on these, along with the ability to protect citizens from misinformation campaigns (often launched as an act of foreign interference) and from artificial intelligence technology-related manipulations. In that sense, the role and legislative framework for the European media system is part of the debate on civic digital rights.





**BELIEF IN PLURALISM
MEANS AN ACCEPTANCE
OF CONTESTATION**

4. BELIEF IN PLURALISM MEANS AN ACCEPTANCE OF CONTESTATION

Before the 2019 and 2024 elections, there had been much preoccupation with the fact that the political map of Europe was changing and that it would translate into a shift within the existing majorities. The analysis has been pointing to the progressive fragmentation of the EP and a growing number of MEPs from within radical, extreme and other populist groupings. It was anticipated that it would translate into obstacles in decision-making processes, with anti-European forces aggressively grasping the momentum and chance to undermine the culture of consensus.

Until recently, there was an estimate that perhaps these forces would remain scattered enough – as in the past – and hence, they would not be able to unite within EP groups. That would mean that, aside from the power to shock and shake, they would hold limited influence in the end. But **now, with the Patriots for Europe and the Sovereignists, these forces constitute a very different type of opposition.**

At the same time, following the 2024 elections, the four so-called traditional parties entered into an alliance that European People's Party (EPP) representatives were already referring to during election night as the “pro-European majority”. In June and July 2024, constructing such a partnership was a strategic necessity. It was about moving forward, safeguarding the fundamentals and preventing destabilisation of the Union. But there was a lot of distrust, some of which was coming from past experiences – when, admittedly, the members of this new *majority* were often direct political opponents. Other reasons to be anxious for the centre left was whether this rather expedient alliance, resulting from political pragmatism, would only really last for the time of the votes in regard to key positions. Or would it also be sus-

tained for key votes on key issues? The latter was an essential condition and made social democrats, in particular, demand a clear declaration from the conservatives that they would obey the rule of *cor-don sanitaire* that would prevent them from creating a united front with right-wing radicals on the respective policies. This was agreed upon and the vote for the president-elect reflected it. However, the question remains: **what will this “pro-European majority” alliance mean for European political families and their distinctive ideological profiles, if block politics do not prove harmful to pluralism, thus reducing spaces for constructive contestation?**

This is a relevant preoccupation, especially for **social democrats** – who traditionally are in the system in two functions: in opposition; or, if in government, in opposition to what is socially unjust. Undoubtedly, for years now, **they have been proponents of the need to politicise European politics. So, they will need to solve the conundrum of how to keep the alliance intact (and hence, delivering on their expectations as well), while not allowing any kind of joint blending in.** But there are reasons to believe that it can be done.

Firstly, this indicates that the party programmatic documents (and here, especially the electoral manifesto and fundamental programs) shall continue to grow in importance. If one offers alternatives and creates a coherent narrative around them, they may as well accommodate some of the contestation in a productive manner. Noting this is of crucial relevance because, as noted already earlier, the euroscepticism and anti-Europeanism of today are very different from the attitudes labelled with these exact terms in the past. And **there is a danger in allowing (broad perception-wise) the *pro-European majority* to become**

an umbrella for those who define themselves as being for Europe, without specifying what Europe this may be. It could make everyone participating in it play defence by default and be perceived as *all the same, all conservative* in fact.

Secondly, **this may indicate that there is a need for a reflection on the processes through which the key political documents are drafted.** While this subject is given further reflection later in this document, it is key to underline here that there needs to be a way to find a good balance between what is and should be an inner-party process (within which the members of the European party family feel empowered by having a say), and what could be an opportunity for an opening to external others. It is not only about offering a space to discuss the issues that are raised outside or in opposition to the party in question, but also about exploring if the contesting arguments are perhaps expressions of attitudes that the party should consider as genuinely constructive and corrective. **Each time brings new challenges, every election sees a set of different patterns for political participation, and a drafting process may be a way of anticipating and consequently embracing and benefiting from them as well.**

Thirdly, it is of strategic importance to give the europarties' key documents (manifestos etc.) some further exposure in the post-election context. In that sense, **the practice of 2019, when the groups in the EP addressed the European Commission's president-designate with letters, was a step in the right direction.** These documents outlined the essential conditions for the respective groups to consider to support her candidacy. Those requirements that came directly from the europarties' manifestos and their abstracts were a guarantee of the respective group's MEPs aligning themselves behind them. This was an interesting method to link the negotiations around posts (so-called top jobs) with the negotiations around the EC Work Plan. It also created an impression that there was a commitment to transparency,¹¹ and herewith, an ambition to step away from *backdoor, unclear deals*. Not everything worked out in that

direction within the process that followed, but it was a good start. That practice – if sustained and given more attention in the future – can convince citizens that their votes, their political choices and their mandates truly matter.

Then, perhaps even more clearly articulating the link between hearings of the Commissioners' candidates, the approval of the EC Work Plan and the role of the EP in these endeavours could make another difference. **And if there were an ambition, in fact, to accelerate this – the europarties, especially, could think about designing the process resembling, in part, the ones known around the drafting of Grand Coalition Agreements.** This would mean that there would be bipartisan working groups established to negotiate the content, and the final outcome would still return to the parties for the final vote by their members. Currently, a comparison between what is in the europarties' manifestos (hence supported by their members – the sister parties) and what is in the Commission Work Plan undergoes no such scrutiny. But if the character of the negotiations were to change and there were a more official role for the europarties (at least theoretically those in charge of the election campaign), they could also return to all of those asked for support ahead of the elections.

The example of such groups are the CSOs, to which several of the europarties have issued invitations to be part of hearings or consultations in pre-campaign times (they did so in 2019 and 2024 especially). **Having a way for the europarties to then report back to those with whom they engaged in such exchanges, about what they managed to accomplish having acted as their respective policy agents, would also enhance the dimensions of European deliberative and participatory democracy. Without it, the CSOs feel that they are being very much courted in the pre-campaign for lending support, but after the elections, they are no longer contacted back. While their Brussels representatives face the questions within their own structures in case the issues they raised are being side-lined or even abandoned by europarties they respectively supported.**



THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MUST BECOME MORE IMPACTFUL

5. THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS MUST BECOME MORE IMPACTFUL

The literature concerning European elections often describes them as a *vote of the second order*.¹² This term refers to a number of characteristics, among which features the fact that the European elections are usually considered by voters as being less relevant than general elections. And that is reflected in the substantial differences in turnouts. Another aspect is the themes, whereby it has been argued that the topics framing the campaigns are hardly ever pan-European or connected with Europe. Instead, the political debates are taking place amid either a disagreement on a policy proposal that currently is being discussed on the national level, or as a chance to express views on the current government's performance. But while this may have been the case in the past, **the trends have been changing. Already in 2014 some common threads were observed (in Western Europe, these were referenced to plans to agree on the TTIP¹³), and from 2019 the turnout started slightly increasing (though predominantly in Western Europe as well). Just these two, among other reflections, suggest that there is a window of opportunity.** This could be a chance to reinvigorate the spirit that there was when direct elections were fought for and organised for the first time in 1979.

First of all, **there is a need for political stakeholders to address the question that many citizens ask themselves, namely, *what happens to my vote?*** It should be clear by now that this is not about embarking on explaining how the EU works, but about showcasing that a vote can mean much more than defining who a state *sends to Brussels for five years*. For that to be the case, there is a need for innovations that would correlate the elections of the EP more strongly with what is taking place just after. An example of this is the idea (discussed elsewhere in this paper) that national lists

are led by those who are aspiring to assume the office of Commissioner. But there are also other avenues, the pursuit of which could be instrumental to prepare the ground for rebalancing of the situation – if, like in the case of 2024, the ratio of seats inside of the EP after the elections does not reflect the composition of the Council. And consequently, the new political colours of those who will assume the top jobs and top portfolios are more likely to represent the political map of governments in Europe than they are the outcome of 6-11 June.

Secondly, **should there indeed be more space for the European political families in the post-election process, there would have to be even stronger coordination within them.** The discussions point to the fact that there is clarity about how the pre-campaign periods, election congresses (councils) and (s)elections of the top candidates are organised. But because there is much less transparency after, and even within the europarties and among their members (especially those not leading the respective governments), there are doubts about who is in charge. And there is no institutional moment to summarise the campaign, aside from the leaders' meeting ahead of the Council. Some suggest that more could be done and if an internal reform were to take place, one could ask for a post-election Council or Congress (like the ones often taking place within the sister parties at the national level).

This is not only a matter of inner-party democracy and the relations between the europarties and the EP groups to get it straight, but it is a question of consequence in pursuit of a greater politicisation of the EU. The way it is done at the moment, even though there have been attempts to change the previous patterns, makes the electoral aftermath

a little bit of a grey area. The advocates of what is written in the Treaties could now say that it is obvious that it is the moment of shift, and it is the intra-governmental dimension that overshadows the federal one. The problem with that claim is that, ever since the Lisbon Treaty was agreed upon, and within that the prerogative in regard to the Top Candidate, it is not that obvious at all.

Thirdly, while in the post-electoral circumstances attention is focused on the top jobs and the Commission portfolios, with the nomination of the Commissioners being a prerogative of the member states, there is a tendency to see the process of defining the portfolios as bargaining. Again, legalistic argument would here be that, according to the Treaties, the Commissioners are independent and serve the interests of the entire EU. But the reality is that the nomination and negotiations between the Commission president-elect, the head of state and the candidate has become somewhat judged from the national level as proof of the leverage of the respective prime minister in Brussels. In 2024, the most telling examples were the comments about the choice and standing of Prime Ministers Tusk and Meloni. But then, if this were the case, **there would seem to be no obstacle to insist that there was also a recognition of the dual-mandate with which the Commission members are nominated – with the second layer here being the partisan one. This would also allow it to be ensured that the final setup better reflects the EP elections.**

Fourthly, while the European elections mean that there will be changes across the European institutions, it does not necessarily mean that there will be adjustments when it comes to the instruments that they have at their disposal. **In an effort to respond to the leading question of this section, namely, the voters' preoccupation with *what happens to my vote* – one option could be to adjust the period for which the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is being adopted.** One proposal would be to shorten the period from seven to five years and have the new one adopted in autumn, in parallel to the adoption of the Commission Work

Plan, or at least to ensure that there is a possibility for rewriting it for the remaining period the moment the new institutions are in place. The rationale behind this is that it seems illogical that there is an election, there are new priorities and there may be no resources available to implement any of these adjustments in the near future.

Fifthly, **there is also another issue that would require closer examination and an answer on how to do better in the future. And that is the criterion of representativeness, and especially the need to ensure that there is a better gender balance within the European institutions.** From election to election, the situation seems to be improving, but still (as noted earlier), within the EP, women constitute slightly more than only one third of seated MEPs. And in the context of the EC, it has been painfully proven that gender balance neither happens by default nor can an understanding of all the member states that the composition of the EC is their common responsibility be counted on. Though not enshrined in Treaties, perhaps the requirement for parity in the two-person nominations is a small step in a right direction; however, this doesn't solve the issue that women remain underrepresented. And that is discouraging for women voters too.



**YOUNG PEOPLE
WILL SHOW UP IF
THEY HAVE A SAY**

6. YOUNG PEOPLE WILL SHOW UP IF THEY HAVE A SAY

The data collected from past elections indicate that the turnout among young people during the European elections is lower than the already low European average. That is, even if between 2014 and 2019 this was the group within which the participation rate grew most rapidly, one should remember that it was from 28% to 42% among voters under 24 years of age, and from 35% to 47% among voters between 25 and 39 years of age.¹⁴

There have been several explanations for why this disparity among age groups persists. Some have been anchored in an observation that young people may be opting for other forms of political participation than the traditional ones. The others referred to the question of the relationship between the EU and EU-level politics and young people, whereby several studies have pointed to the feeling among the latter that European politicians (and hence, institutions) do not speak their language and do not raise the issues that they consider the most relevant for their generation. Partially responding to that criticism, EC President Ursula von der Leyen promised to create a new consultative body that would help her overcome the existing gap and avoid similar criticism in the future (especially that the next years will see drafting of the new youth strategy, which will guide the EU beyond 2027). Evidently, such a promise can be seen as a reason for optimism, but it is also a bit concerning – since there is an organisation representing youth in Europe already, namely, the European Youth Forum.

What is undeniable is that the youngest generation of eligible voters is interested in politics and aware of current affairs. This is great potential to build on and the longer the focus remains on youth radicalisation, the more difficult it will

be to (re)build bridges and engage in a conversation with these cohorts.

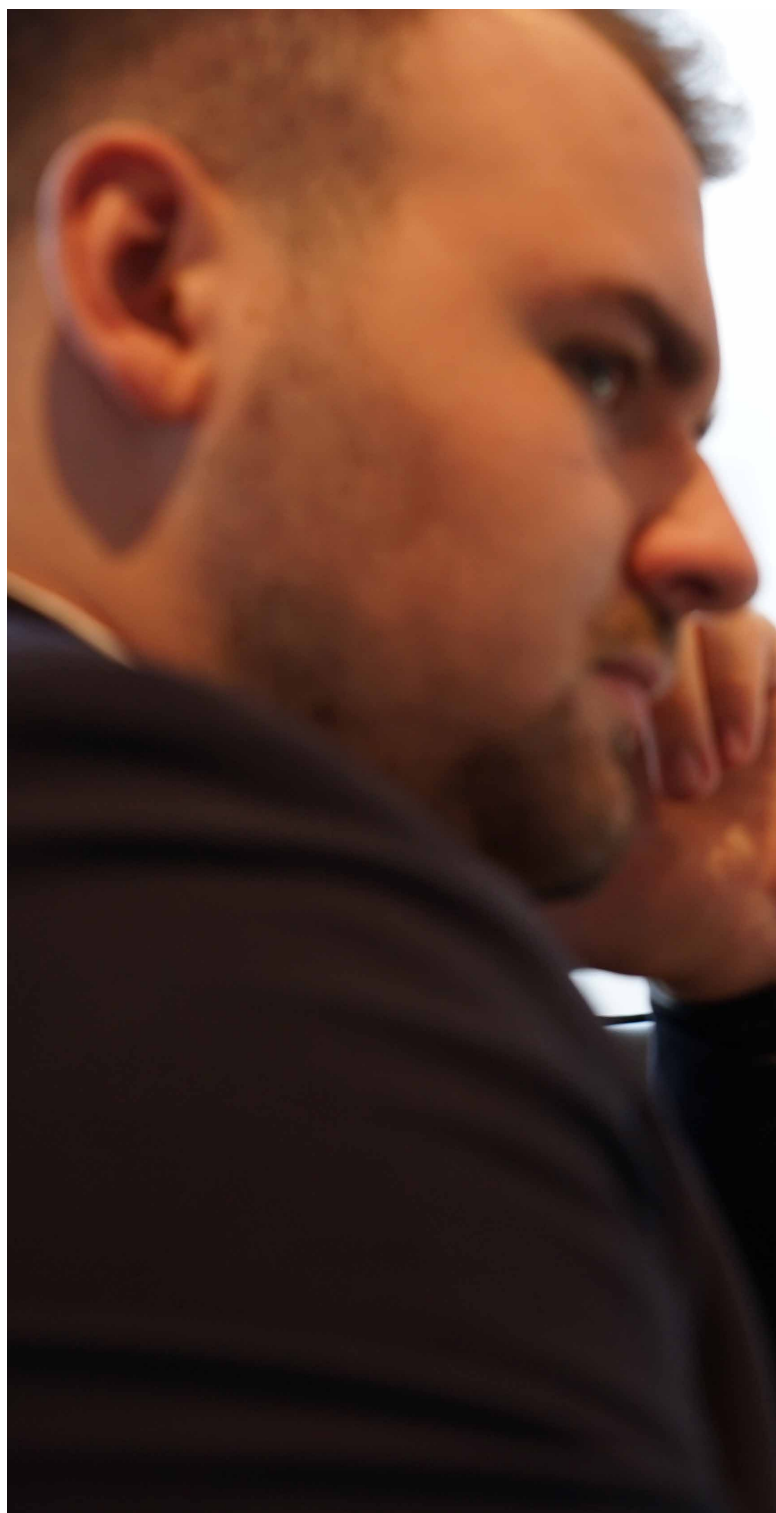
To begin with, **there is a need for more inter-generational solidarity in practice, which means youth proofing of the programmes and policy proposals. It is often considered that a special chapter focusing on youth in the respective documents is symbolic enough to underline the commitment of the parties to the youth cause, but paradoxically this is what young people often treat with distrust. They do not want to see one specific policy to buy their votes, but a broader consideration for the shape of the future that they will inherit.** They fear the notion of “progress”, having been raised amid the narrative “this will be the first generation that will have it worse off than their ancestors” and have directly experienced the impact of the poly-crisis. The issues that young people would like to see addressed more are the socio-economic ones, including here working and salary conditions. **And, when it comes to youth organisations, they would like to be more systematically involved in the working groups drafting the documents, to share their expertise and the right to co-share responsibility for the outcome (as opposed to entering only at the level of amendments).**

Furthermore, next to feeling heard, respected and seeing the reflection of their generation’s priorities in the policy proposals, **young people would like to be sure that they have the same chance to stand for elected positions and to co-frame the campaign.** The reflection here is that it is very hard to pierce the glass ceiling and the European partisan (electoral) systems seem especially stagnant, seldom apt for renewals. There are many paths to accomplish better representation on the lists and within the campaign head-

quarters, which all come down to the demand of opening up the parties, processes and making the electoral teams (running and supportive) more inclusive.

This relates to the demand to equalise, and hence, lower the voting age across the EU to 16, which is an idea that is part of the electoral reform package and is stuck at the impasse. Just as a note, the current average age of MEPs in the 2024-2029 mandate is 50.¹⁵

Additionally, there is also a question of **language and communication**. The politics of today is meant to be about connections, and hence, it is relevant that young people do not feel that they are being addressed as “they” and “the future”, but become the part of “us” and “we”, and hence, have the power to co-create, co-articulate and co-argue. This is a greater shift in the way of thinking about how to design the campaign, to find a better balance between being perfectionists in political professionalism and being authentic; between being decisive and being open-minded; between proposing and explaining and engaging in a critical exchange. It is very clear that the previous style of broadcasting is out of date, and it does not fit into the framing of any social media. Though young people want to see the continuation of personal contact in the campaign, it is and it will be social media that infiltrates their initial impressions.





**CRITERIA OF
REPRESENTATION
CANNOT BE
SELECTIVELY APPLIED**

7. CRITERIA OF REPRESENTATION CANNOT BE SELECTIVELY APPLIED

The introduction of the institution of the *SpitzenKandidatInnen* within the Lisbon Treaty has been rather revolutionary. There was a hope that it would allow for more personalisation of European politics, whereby the practice would allow to work out the details how to frame the new type of a campaign and what the role of the Top Candidates would be.

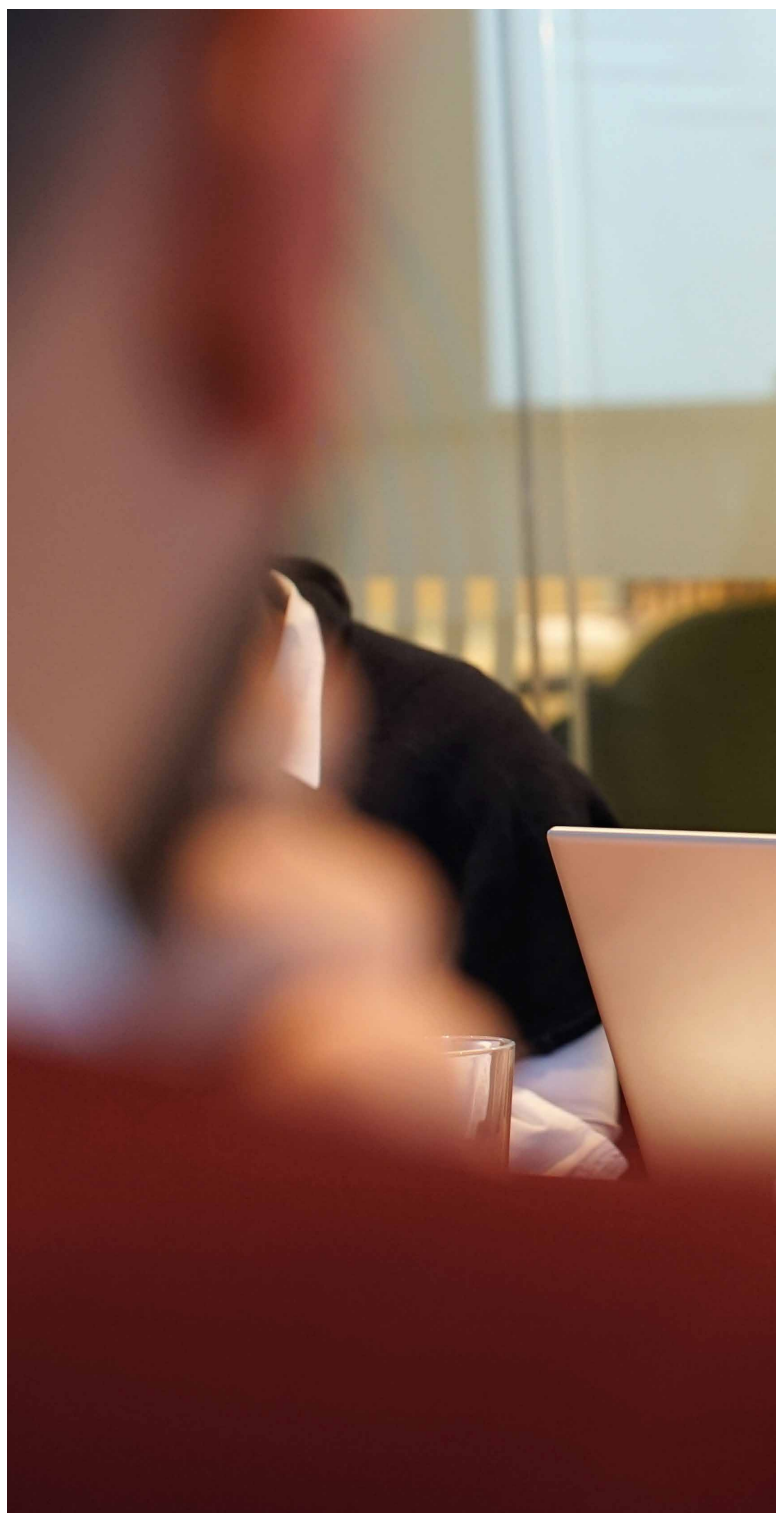
Then the europarties have been left with three choices at least: (1) whether to nominate such a Top Candidate; (2) what the nomination process should look like; and (3) whether to proceed with one Top Candidate or opt for a double nomination that would ensure parity of the two genders. The modalities have varied, depending on the internal culture of the europarties – which then also defined the standing of such Top Candidates, the roles they played during the campaign and the chances they had to become the EC's president. The perpetual debate around the interpretation of the Lisbon Treaty (whether it is to be a nominee from the largest group or the majority, and if the EP nomination is definitive or just consultative with regard to the power that the European Council holds) has meant that there has been much space for manoeuvre. The experience of 2019, in particular, left many disheartened that the principle was more a theory, whereby, in practice, someone not presented during the campaign could be endowed with the mission to lead the EC in the end.

There are a few lessons to be drawn from the four recent European elections. First of all, **the *SpitzenKandidatInnen* play an important role – as those who mobilise in the pre-campaign and lead during the campaign, as the symbols of unity of the sister parties inside of the europarties and as the spokespersons of the programme**

(which in this case should also be seen as binding for the Top Candidates, ruling out the practice of, for example, Jean Claude Juncker, who ran as the EPP Top Candidate and presented his own electoral platform, outside of the EPP manifesto). **But for as long as they are the only ones nominated clearly for a Commission position ahead of the elections, their exposure on the national level remains limited – even if they travel permanently. This would speak additionally in favour of europarties opting for double top candidates (with men and women), as well as considering presenting a more pan-European Team that could become a Team of Commissioners in the subsequent college.** This is a bold proposal, since the Treaties state clearly that the Commissioners serve the interests of the entire EU and are not subordinates of anyone (country or party). But within the last two legislative periods, politicisation was a fact (as described earlier) – perhaps it is time to openly admit to it and even anticipate it.

To that end, there are also those who may point out that European electoral law doesn't foresee the provisions regarding *SpitzenKandidatInnen* – and so there is no legal base for the europarties to make further steps and speak about the other Commissioners before the EC president-elect sends letters to the heads of member states after their own vote of approval by the new EP. This is correct, but as with the *SpitzenKandidatInnen* there is also a question of principles and cultures. There are strong opinions that nothing can prevent the potential future Commission designates from standing at the top of national lists.¹⁶ Such a practice¹⁷ would allow the strengthening of the link between the europarties and the national parties; the European-level campaign and the domestic ones; the European program

and the national priorities. In future, this could mean that the lead of the national lists would also get hearings at the europarty level (i.e., at the europarty's electoral congress), which could be the way to overcome the criticism that the europarties, in fact, have no influence on the lists at the national level (which usually national parties do, even if they have federal characters).¹⁸ These potential Commissioner candidates could campaign across national borders, supporting the Top Candidate (making it easier to further imagine potential paths to the transnational lists) and familiarising themselves directly with the issues close to the voters' hearts across the EU; this would possibly make the process of forming the future Commissions more meaningful for citizens across the Union.





SPITZENKANDIDATINNEN REQUIRE A STAGE AND SPOTLIGHT

8. SPITZENKANDIDATINNEN REQUIRE A STAGE AND SPOTLIGHT

The previous section touched upon the ambiguity or lack of provisions, which make the institution of a *SpitzenKandidatInnen* vulnerable. Proof of this is the entire period of hesitation ahead of the 2024 European elections, within which europarties (and many analysts too) were deliberating whether it was sensible to try again at all, after what happened in 2019. Part of the existing problems can be solved if the europarties and stakeholders remain convinced by the sense of having a common candidate within a political family, and subsequently create an internal process to endow the potential candidates with an adequately strong mandate to run and speak on their behalf. This does not require European legal provisions, but more establishment of the internal rules and culture of a party. There is enough practice from previous years to attempt a sound evaluation and aim for adjustments that will make the internal procedures to select a Top Candidate more participatory and inclusive. All it would take is the will, creativity and a modernisation strategy. But part of the solution requires more than that – and lies in creating conditions for the real European campaigns of the European political families to be possible.

A more pan-European campaign requires an update of the legislation (especially concerning the European political parties and foundations) and a discussion about the conditions that define how to engage in campaigns at the national level. There are still many barriers in existence, including financial limitations. The europarties have been pointing out that they do not have the resources they would need to face the challenge of running activities across the continent for at least half a year. And as long as there is an understanding that European stakeholders cannot interfere in national campaigns (electoral or referenda-relat-

ed ones) and cannot financially support national sister parties, the campaign is bound to be imbalanced with differences in intensity and other aspects among the regions.

What's more, if the campaign were predominantly to rest on what is considered "a European level" – then **there would also be a necessity to ask about the ways in which the European public sphere should then be expanded. And here, the first that comes to mind is a question of media.** The past three campaigns saw a developing tradition of debates among the Top Candidates, which were organised with the strong involvement of European media. But even though these debates were meant to be streamed by the national media, it did not always happen – as there were immediately obstacles connected to transmission and translation. In some cases, they weren't broadcast or were broadcast very late – wasting an opportunity to attract diverse audiences.

Finally, it has also been pointed out that, although from campaign to campaign there is a clear leap forward in the development of social media, in general, the traditional europarties have found it difficult, if not even impossible, to create successful online campaigns. This may be astonishing, taking into account that they must have been aware and potentially even inspired by the internet activism of citizens during the *CoFE*. This is an opening that, so far, has not really been built upon to bring innovations in political communication. The suggestion is that logic would also need to change – with the new patterns of political participation being much more about conversation and mutual learning and much less about socialisation by one-sided broadcasting of content.

REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN REGULATIONS ON EUROPARTIES AND ELECTIONS IS LONG OVERDUE

9. REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN REGULATIONS ON EUROPARTIES AND ELECTIONS IS LONG OVERDUE

The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 brought forward the concept of the Political Union and the recognition of the space for European political parties. Before that time, the organisations coordinating the sister parties within the same political family existed, but had a rather looser form of confederations. The new era meant that these initial organisms would have to transform themselves, and subsequently, the europarties (of the so-called traditional political families) were established. Firstly, they were functioning more as additions to the EP groups, even if they themselves were an anchoring point for further organisations (such as women and youth). But then the regulations were changed and the role of the europarties became clearer and, alongside this, they moved out of the EP in 2004 – starting to live more of an independent life. The necessity for further reforms was outlined in the EP report completed by Jo Leinen in 2005,¹⁹ and in the report by Jo Leinen and Dantura Hübner from 2015.^{20,21} This was, one could say, the last big leap²² – as recent attempts to reform have been considered controversial and have not arrived at the point of becoming adoptable. The polemics have been spinning around many questions – from financial to organizational – but, above all, have hindered chances for both simplification and clarification, as well as much-needed innovations. Subsequently, at the time when there was a new attempt at the reform – with the report of Domenèc Ruiz Devesa – further obstacles emerged. And the idea of transnational lists²³ has also become a hostage of these disputes.

It is unlikely that there will be a breakthrough anytime soon, looking both at the priorities listed for the mandate so far and at the political map;

this would suggest that those political forces who either prefer the status quo or would use any opening to push back jointly have a majority in the Council. In that sense, **this upcoming time may be a period for more of a reflection on what the electoral reform should deliver, in terms of answering some fundamental questions, and proceed with those changes that do not require a change of legislation without further delay.**

To begin with, **the europarties should find ways to strengthen themselves.** In the case of the PES (the Party of European Socialists), the last grand organisational/statutory reform was announced at the PES Council in Vienna in 2005 and adopted at the PES Council in Porto in 2006. The main focus was to adapt the europarty to function effectively outside of the EP and manage political cooperation within the intra-governmental dimension of the EU. This is why the calendar of statutory meetings was made coherent with the EU's political cycle. It's been almost two decades since then, and this is a time for profound reflection when there are crucial questions to discuss.

To start with, **the sister parties should reflect on what sort of competences they want the europarties to have and in which context they expect the europarties to lead.**²⁴ This will call for some concessions and the transfer of powers, but it would then perhaps also be coherent with the spirit of institutional reform of the EU that they themselves demand.

Currently, there are also many more levels on which political cooperation is and could be taking place. While building more connections with social democrats in the national parliaments

would fall within the competences of the EP groups, enhancing the relations with sister parties' politicians in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe would already be more applicable to the europarties. This is how they could expand their influence and understanding of multilayer governance.

What's more, the europarties' internal reform should also be a way to showcase that they may be *traditional* parties but are not *old-fashioned* ones. In that sense, there must be a reflection on how to enable greater participation and greater co-ownership – and where, in this case, there is a need for more of cooperative leadership with strong access to the sister parties' leaders, and where there are (new) openings for delegates (of congresses and councils) and activists to take part. The mediatisation of politics often imposes the framework of a televised debate onto statutory meetings, whereby there are many options for how to organise both the plenary and fringes of the gatherings to boost the deliberative and creative functions that the europarties should have.

Finally, there is the question of transnational lists.²⁵ It seems that the topic is still considered to be mostly a Brussels-bubble type of deliberation and, indeed, there may be little known about the mechanisms and benefits of it at the national/regional/local level. **There are a few ways of creating a better foundation to return to this debate in a more informed manner, and it perhaps starts with some simpler ways that could create a sense of identity. The presence of the logos of the europarties on campaign materials and on the sister parties' materials, more transparent ways of selecting delegates for the europarties' congresses and councils, and enabling the creation of europarty (PES) activists' groups could be possible ways forward.**





**GENDER EQUALITY AND
DIVERSITY HAVE TO BE
REFLECTED IN PRACTICE**

10. GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY HAVE TO BE REFLECTED IN PRACTICE

Throughout subsequent mandates, the EP has seen a growing number of women MEPs, but, nevertheless, within the 2014-2019 mandate they constituted 36.1%⁻²⁶ with the S&D having the largest amount at 45%. Similarly, in the new legislative period, 38.5% of the MEPs are women. Although women hold three of the key top positions – President of the EC, High Representative and the President of the EP – it looks like the member states have ignored the request to provide a two-person ticket for the future EC. There may be further imbalances in the College (which were already touched upon earlier) and in the EP, if the overall number of chairs of committees are considered. To this end, **gender forms part of an intersectional discrimination and if EU politics are to become more democratic, and hence, more representative, there is much to do to improve the situation. The drafting and adopting of the new Gender Equality Strategy beyond 2025 can offer the right moment to assess the situation** and identify concrete measures that can bring much needed corrections.

There is much in this context that the social democratic family can do, starting from internal review and mapping the ways through which it can be more open, inclusive and empowering for all. To begin with, since their establishment, neither the PES' predecessors nor the PES have had a woman as a leader (president or secretary general). In the case of the S&D Group, there have only been two: Pauline Green and the current president, Iraxte García Perez. Furthermore, there has also never been a woman presented as a *Spitzen-KandidatInnen* of the social democratic family. This has also been pointed out by scholars²⁷ as an issue, especially because the social demo-

cratic family is outspoken when it comes to the fight for (gender) equality and women's rights. It is a complex issue, as it doesn't seem to result from procedures or the lack of rules, but is more an issue of practice. The latter may be changed with double tickets, quotas or simply a commitment for the next time.

Whichever it is, it is high time that it is openly discussed inside of the structures. This raises another aspect, **there is a question of whether more could be done to promote the women candidates that stand on the sister parties' electoral lists, often as their leaders.** This is not only a matter of showcasing that social democrats have many strong, excellent women of diverse profiles and expertise running, but also to offer them further support in creating or consolidating profiles as EU-level politicians.

What's more, **while inside of the PES structures there are quotas that define the delegations for the party councils and congresses, there is a tradition of gender-balanced presidiums of those gatherings, and there is generally an applied guideline of the zip-list of speakers, so the same principles should apply at other events, including at national-level conferences and rallies.** It has been pointed out that it has been hard to achieve, especially for the situation in which the leader of the hosting party and the leader of the europarty, as well as *Spitzen* candidates, are all men. That said, here again, there are, of course, political protocols, but there must also always be the possibility to find a creative solution – and the gender-balance principle should always be abided by. These changes should not be done for appearance, but for the sake of principles, and

therefore, should not only apply at the communication and organisational levels. On the contrary, it is relevant that the europarty applies them to the content of documents, making gender mainstreaming a clear guideline for all manifestos, declarations and resolutions.

Finally, **should, as suggested elsewhere in the text, this be the time for launching a grander reform process of the europarty, the eventual statutory or other working groups should be gender balanced and possibly see dual chairing.** The agenda of such a debate should involve the pivotal role that women's organisations (in this case, PES Women) have been playing and ways to further support this (politically, financially, organisationally etc.). It is also perhaps time to return to the practice from a preceding decade, when the definition of party leadership was wider – involving presidents of women's, youth and other full member organisations.





**THERE ARE STILL VALID
LESSONS TO BE DRAWN
FROM THE COFOE**

11. THERE ARE STILL VALID LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE COFOE

The CoFoE was announced at the beginning of the 2019-2024 mandate. It was advertised as the most inclusive pan-European conversation about the future of the Union, which would involve all stakeholders at all levels of governance and would be a space to articulate new ideas about how to shape the trajectory of European integration. The launch was long overdue, with, on one hand, disagreements around the mandate and mechanics of the CoFoE, and challenges related to the pandemic, on the other (which evidently pushed everything to the side). Finally, the signing ceremony took place on 10 March 2021 with the presidents of the EP, Council and the Commission.

The CoFoE came to an end on the Day of Europe a year later, with a final report that encompassed 49 proposals and 326 measures.²⁸ This included proposals on how to improve European democracy (especially when it comes to rules on political advertising, European citizens' panels and the role of civic space) and on how to strengthen values, rights, rule of law and security (by tackling discrimination, countering foreign information manipulation and interference, ensuring better information exchange in terrorism cases). The CoFoE evolved around four main pillars: multilingual digital platform; European citizens' panels; national citizens' panels and events; and conference plenaries. As such, and by refraining from judging it and its outcomes alongside other criteria, **the CoFoE was an extraordinary example of participatory democracy.** The problem has been, however, that there is no clarity on how it is supposed to be built upon – with options varying from repetition to more permanent consultations and calls for the new Inter-governmental Conference.

It is true that CoFoE has not become a reference point for the European electorate in general. But

for those involved and those who were somewhat aware that it took place, there is a danger of it becoming one of those short-lived initiatives that were rich in content, but very poor when it comes to impact – leaving many disenchanted behind it. **This is the point which connects strongly with the discussion about what needs to change when it comes to the role of European stakeholders and when it comes to assuming responsibility for having mobilised, involved and engaged citizens.**

To begin with, **representatives of the political families who have taken part in CoFoE should consider a question of accountability for also using the European elections to refer to the CoFoE, its legacy and what they were hoping to work on from within its conclusions.**

Then, there is also the necessity for clarity towards those from outside of the world of politics. There were so many CSOs, trade unions and individual citizens who joined with the hope of raising the issues that they feel strong about, strive for and try to represent in their activism. Evidently, it would never be possible or even desirable to simply treat them as a registry of causes and promise to fulfil them all. But it is essential to provide a follow-up political process, during the course of which they would be deliberated upon and, wherever applicable, translated into reports and legislative proposals and then voted on. Without it, CoFoE may soon turn into a project remembered for disappointment, instead of hope, and yet another factor contributing to *citizens' fatigue* with institutionalised politics. **CoFoE, as well as the imperfect European Citizens Initiative (ECI), are presented as a way of empowering citizens, but as long as they do not also offer these citizens a way to scrutinise the results – they may have the opposite effects to those intended.**

Last, but not least, there is a valid question of how exercises such as CoFoE should be organised in the future. It is particularly telling that, even if these types of mobilisations are about reconnecting with citizens and asking about their views on the future of the Union, an understanding of who should have a say about that has so far been limited to the voters of the EU and its 27 member states. In the discussions, it has been resonating strongly that amid neither CoFoE nor the EP election campaign was enough done to use this momentum to create deliberative spaces and dialogue with citizens coming from Ukraine or other applicant countries. While it has been considered that expanding the scope may go too far for some sceptics of enlargement and may not find direct rationale within how the EU works, it was suggested that **if CoFoE were to happen in one format or another, there could be a way for a youth equivalent to make one that is more encompassing and gives young people from all across the continent a way to define the future they want *us to create now* and for themselves in the years to come.**



**THE CSOS' ROLE
IN THE EUROPEAN
PUBLIC SPHERE CALLS
FOR RESPECT AND
RECOGNITION**

12. THE CSOS' ROLE IN THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE CALLS FOR RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

The trade unions and CSOs play an important role in democracy. They articulate issues of concern and raise awareness, they mobilise citizens for action and they represent diverse groups united by a common cause. As such, they are spaces in which deliberative democracy happens, and the networks that, by default, seek reform and innovation of contemporary politics.

In recent years, the role of CSOs within the European public sphere has grown. On one hand, they have been a major contributor and provided many pioneering inputs to initiatives such as Call to Europe, institutional consultations and have been key to gearing up ECIs from the ground. On the other hand, they have been the most powerful allies in the fight for the preservation and promotion of democracy and, in that sense, the rule of law. As such, they have also often been the first victims of cuts and discriminatory treatment in assigning funds from the side of authoritarian regimes. And while their roles, powers and resources have rarely been discussed in conjunction with the deliberation of political reform focused on empowering europarties, for example, it seems that the time has come to make the connection.

To begin with, as with many other already touched upon aspects, **should a reform of the Treaties be possible, there would need to be a revisiting (of Article 11) and understanding of the concept of (EU-level) civil society and a framework for civil dialogue.** The aim should be to enable further engagement through institutional accreditation and better financial provisions for the future. Part of the reform package should also be more effective anti-SLAPP²⁹ rules.

Furthermore, there is a challenge to ensure that the consultations are also diligently followed through on. Many of the CSOs take part in institutional conversations and there is also room for improvement. But along the same line, there is a feeling that, within the context of the EP campaign, CSOs are often invited by diverse europarties to contribute to the drafting of their respective manifestos (which can be completed in different ways) and herewith they are also encouraged to endorse one europarty or another (Top Candidate).³⁰ **The problem they see with the way it has been done until now is that, on one hand, the europarties treat them as a community of CSOs and try to fish for as many votes as they can, sometimes not even noticing that the hearings point to competition and even contradictory proposals by the CSO stakeholders in front of them.** And then, after the consultations are finished, there is no follow-up with the CSOs – ahead of or after the Commission Work Plan negotiations or when the EP Committee portfolios are assigned – to discuss if the discussed proposals will see an attempt for implementation, from which aspects and when. For some CSOs, this creates a sense of being taken for granted. The deliverables agreed upon with the CSOs should be considered more as commitments; otherwise, the europarties run the risk of appearing as the EC sometimes does, namely, repeating “yes, we support you” with little action to back this up.

Moreover, there is yet another angle that the europarties should consider when thinking about themselves as the stakeholders of transnational democracy. **The CSOs in Brussels are a networks of networks, constituting powerful allies for content-driven debates. They are possibly**

more internally converged than the europarties; they are experienced with running cause-focused campaigns and can be instrumental in expanding the debate on European issues towards regional and local levels, unless they are instrumentalised, of course. This is an important point for the europarties, should they think about running issue-based campaigns (again) – in which case, they should also become more aware of the relations between the CSOs’ members on the ground and their respective member parties. It has been suggested that being more attentive to the europarty-CSO relationships may be the key to unlocking the mobilisation potential, which is much needed if the EU does indeed want to expand its prerogatives with citizens’ informed endorsement. With enlargement not really being discussed amid the 2024 European election campaign, this missed opportunity may be recuperated by investing in a project with CSOs, especially those who have a strong membership base in the candidate countries. In particular, the youth CSOs can help by creating spaces for conversations about the future of Europe involving young people from current and future member states.



ANNEX 1 - CONCEPT NOTE

**LIVING UP TO,
NOT LEAVING ASIDE
THE PROGRESSIVE
STRATEGY TOWARDS
THE ELECTIONS 2024**

LIVING UP TO, NOT LEAVING ASIDE THE PROGRESSIVE STRATEGY TOWARDS THE ELECTIONS 2024

FEPS AND FES PROJECT ON TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS INSIDE OF THE EU

Objectives

The new FEPS and FES project “Living up to, not leaving aside” is meant to be an initiative focused on proposing the elements of a strategy for the Progressive family in Europe ahead of the elections 2024. The specific angle that the project would take concerns transnational politics, and more specifically the changes that have taken place or have been proposed in regard to the functioning of the representative and deliberative democracy on the EU level.

Context

There is a tendency, especially inside of the so-called “Brussels-bubble” to consider the upcoming European elections as *the most important turning point*. While there is no doubt that every vote marks a moment in which history is being made, it is also true that every vote is organized in respectively different circumstances than the pre-deceasing ones. To illustrate this, it is enough to mention that for example 1979 was the first time ever that citizens were empowered to elect their European MPs, 1989 was taking place in the midst of a democratization wave that led to the reunification of the continent, 2004 was just after the biggest enlargement in the history. Hence after, understanding what kind of a context will frame the campaign and influence the results in 2024 is a condition *sine qua non* of having a chance to succeed.

Indeed, the last three and a half years of the current legislative period leave much to ponder regarding the state and quality of democracy in Europe. Just to name several elements:

- a. Launching the Commission Workplan, the President of the EC announced that there will be efforts made to promote and safeguard democracy. The fight for fundamental values and rule of law has been an integral part of the actions taken by the institutions, including especially the European Parliament (who even sued the European Commission in this context) and the European Commission. The use of the conditionality mechanism in the context of the Next Generation EU has been an unprecedented action.
- b. The Conference on the Future of Europe was an important opportunity, which was vastly used by the individual citizens and civil society to explain their hopes, expectations, and anxieties connected with the EU integration process. Though much criticism has been attached to the operational side, still the outcomes were impressive and the seriousness of the EU political stakeholders must manifest itself in taking the results into careful consideration.
- c. The report by S&D MEP Domenec Ruiz Devesa regarding the reform of the EU electoral system has been a breakthrough. Though it faces a set of profound hurdles and is unlikely to pass the European Council at this stage, still it is an im-

portant step that shows where the compromises among the representatives of the Member States inside of the federal institutions could be reached and what more could be done in order to both boost participatory democracy and strengthen the legitimacy of the representative one. To that end, the process of reforming the regulations regarding the functioning of the European political parties and foundations remains vastly important.

- d. The Russian aggression and war in Ukraine enhanced the understanding that the ongoing global conflict is about defending democracy. This is reflected in the way the EU officials' narrative, as also in shifts in the content of concepts such as European Strategic autonomy. It matters as it emphasizes the feature of democracy as an ideal and as a system that needs to work in a coordinated manner from the level of individual citizens, through local and regional, national, European, and global.
- e. Finally, since the beginning, the European elections were considered to be the "elections of the second order". There were several characteristics that would sustain such a claim. However, the pandemic, the energy and the cost of living crisis, and the war and its implications – all pointed to the importance of Europe and cooperation inside it. This inspired further Europeanisation of national politics, which process was further fueled by the fact that several Prime Ministers took time to bring up the European affairs internally and invest time in bilateral meetings with other heads of state to discuss the future of the EU.

While the elements mentioned above ensured new impetus for the discussions on how to boost the EU's democratic potential, and make its institutions more representative and more strongly connected with the individual citizens, there have been also a number of setbacks.

- a. The 2019 process that led to the appointment of the current President of the European Com-

mission was very discouraging and put into question a sense for trying to run a pan-European campaign with SpitzenkandidatInnen. Many stakeholders ponder if to try again in 2024.

- b. The rise of the turnout in the previous European elections injected some optimism, but still, there can be no illusion regarding the fragmentation of politics, radicalization, and polarization of political attitudes. Looking at the elections in countries such as Sweden and Italy – to name two among the recent ones – suggests that the upcoming campaign will see much abruptness and many manifestations of anti-Europeanism.
- c. The scandals (branded as "Qatar gate") seriously damaged the reputation of European politicians. And while the recent one has exposed corruption in the rank of social democrats, the previous revelations, such as the ones about the Commissioners not abiding by cooling periods, make it about all the political parties and all the European institutions. This will weigh heavily on the attempts to gain voters trust and engage in the elections in 2024.

These elements already show how complex the context ahead of 2024, as also how hard it will be to live up to the citizens' expectations and not leave aside all they would like Europe to aspire to.

Project in 2023

The project between FEPS and FES will narrow the angle to one question, which is the elements of the strategy that Progressives (inside of PES and sister parties, S&D Group) could have in order to be the protagonists of the representative and participatory democracy in the context of the campaign for the 2024 European elections.

The project will build on the previous initiatives that have been realized by both the partnering foundations, having as an objecting cross-fertiliz-

ing and mutually strengthening both the outreach and impact.

The goal of the project is to point to very practical aspects of the campaign and post-electoral process, which can make social democrats stand out and lead with the primacy of their ideas.

The practical recommendations can therefore be expected on issues such as:

- a. Transnational campaign and its tools – what is new?
- b. SpitzenKandidatInnen – how to improve the process?
- c. Transnational lists – anything that can be done now?
- d. Role of Manifesto and other documents ahead of the post-electoral negotiations
- e. Post-electoral coordination and transparency of the process

Tools and Milestones

The project will have three phases:

- a. Future Workshop phase
- b. Study drafting phase
- c. Dissemination phase

The Future Workshop (in accordance with the methodology) will be composed of 3 building blocks:

- a. Assessment stage (with the primary role played by politicians and stakeholders working with the questions concerning transnational parties and European campaigns)

- b. Creative stage (with the primary role being played by academics, who are experts in the field and could point to possibilities for innovation in the approach – both in the situation in which law would / wouldn't change)

- c. Proposals stage (with the primary role being played by the Heads of the national delegations and campaigns leaders on the national level, as also a selected group of pollsters)

The study would then be drafted to summarize the options and choices, providing at the end a manual “where we are – what we can do – what it would mean specifically”.

The dissemination phase would include at minimum one event in Brussels, as also the production of additional audio-visual materials that could be used in the pre-campaign period (also for knowledge sharing / capacity building). Both partners would also organize a special fringe meeting at the event of the PES Congress in the fall, to further promote the results.

Further discussions could also be embedded in other events by the partners, such as Annual Autumn Academy (September 2023), FEPS Young Academics Network, FEPS Open Progressive University, FES Hambach Democracy Dialogue etc.

THE 2024 UPDATED NOTE (MAY 2024)

**LIVING UP TO, NOT
LEAVING ASIDE THE
PROGRESSIVE STRATEGY
TOWARDS THE
ELECTIONS 2024**

EXTENSION OF THE CONTRACT INTO 2024

LIVING UP TO, NOT LEAVING ASIDE THE PROGRESSIVE STRATEGY TOWARDS THE ELECTIONS 2024

EXTENSION OF THE CONTRACT INTO 2024

Objectives

The FEPS and FES Brussel project “Living up to, not leaving aside” was constructed in 2023 with an objective to investigate, discuss and consequently propose innovations to the dimension of transnational politics on the EU level ahead of the European elections. The overall aim was to research those aspects, which Progressives could champion, being innovators and protagonists of both the representative and deliberative democracy.

The objective remain unchanged, however amid of the debates it became clear that the timeline, the milestones and the output need correcting. The rationale, the details of these corrections and the new list of deliverables in enclosed in this note.

Need for adjustments.

The first phase of the project, which was implemented in 2023, saw 4 working groups (with academics, with politicians at the fringe of the PES Congress in Malaga, with youth and YES, and with the civil society) and a draft of the report with the preliminary findings. Amid the very insightful and instructive debates, which reached out altogether a target group of 150 stakeholders – it became clear that the timeline and the final products would require adjusting.

When it comes to timeline, this was on one hand due to the clash in the agenda and necessity to

postpone 2 of the above mentioned 4 meetings. This meant that the reflection / research phase could start in the second half of a year. On the other hand, within the discussions, which were focused on 5 aspects:

- a. Transnational campaign and its tools – what is new?
- b. SpitzenKandidatInnen – how to improve the process?
- c. Transnational lists – anything that can be done now?
- d. Role of the Manifestoes and other documents of the post-electoral negotiations.
- e. Post-electoral coordination and transparency of the process

The experts were almost unanimous that it was more prudent to focus on the postelectoral context. So, while there have been many instructive suggestions, the sentiment was that with the blockage around the transnational lists, the fairly traditional process towards Spitzencandidates and the certain fatigue after the CoFoE (which had still been awaiting the follow up), there was a need to look beyond horizon of June 2024. Hence the extension.

ANNEX 2

**ROUNDTABLES &
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

ANNEX 2

ROUNDTABLES & LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

31ST OCTOBER 2023 - ACADEMIC ROUNDTABLE

List of speakers

1. Francesco Cerasani, Political Advisor, S&D Group
2. Jan Marinus Wiersma, Senior Research Associate at the Clingendael Institute
3. Maria João Rodrigues, President, FEPS
4. Sofie Amalie Stage, Secretary General, Young European Socialists

List of participants

1. Alvaro Oleart, FEPS YAN
2. Ania Skrzypek, Director for Research and Training, FEPS
3. Anna Paczesniak, Professor, Wroclaw University
4. Céline Guedes, Project Officer, FEPS
5. Cherry Miller, Dr, Visiting Lecturer, School of Social and Political Sciences, Glasgow University
6. Christine Verger, Vice President of Jacques Delors Institute
7. Christopher Lord, Professor, ARENA
8. Enrico Calossi, Professor, Political Science, Pisa University
9. Franca Maria Feisel, PhD researcher at the Law Department, European University Institute
10. Friedrich Pukelsheim, Professor, Institute for Mathematics, Augsburg University
11. Jessica Di Cocco, PhD, Max Weber Fellow, SPS Department, European University Institute
12. Jo Leinen, former MEP, S&D Group
13. Jowanka Jakubek-Lalik, Dr, Public Administration, Faculty of Law, Warsaw University
14. Julian Plottka, Jean Monet Lecturer, University of Passau
15. Kido Koenig, Director, FMS
16. Lara Martelli, Head of Communications, Jacques Delors Institute
17. Luciano Bardi, Luciano Bardi, President of the Observatory on Political Parties and Representation, University of Pisa, European University Institute
18. Manuel Müller, Dr, Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs
19. Marco Schwarz, policy office and project coordinator, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Brussels Office
20. Michael Keading, Visiting Professor, Collegue of Europe

21. Petra Ahrens, Academy of Finland Research Fellow, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University
22. Richard Corbet, former MEP, S&D Group
23. Robert Ladrech, Emeritus Professor of European Politics, School of Social, Political and Global Studies (SPGS), Keele University
24. Wouter Wolfs, Lecturer and Senior Researcher at the Public Governance Institute, KULeuven

10th November 2023 - Political Roundtable – “Leading, not leaning” event at the PES Congress in Malaga

List of speakers

1. Gabriele Bischoff, MEP, S&D Group
2. Hana Jalloul, Deputy President of the Socialist parliamentary group, Spain
3. Katarina Barley, MEP, S&D Group, PES Executive Vice-President
4. Sofie Amalie Stage, Secretary General of Young European Socialists

List of participants (non-exhaustive)

1. Andrzej Szejna, MP, Nowa Lewica, Poland
2. Anneliese Dodds, Chair of the Labour Party, UK
3. Ania Skrzypek, Director for Research and Training, FEPS, Poland
4. Anneliese Dodds, MP, Chair, Labour Party, United Kingdom

5. Céline Guedes, Project Officer, FEPS, Portugal/Belgium
6. Chiara Malagodi, Deputy Secretary-General, PES Group at Committee of the Regions
7. David Kitching, International Secretary, Irish Labour Party, Ireland
8. David Evans, Secretary General of the Labour Party, UK
9. Farid Othman-Bentria Ramos, Coordinator, Fundacion Pablo Iglesias, Spain
10. Gabor Harangozó, MP, International Secretary, MSZP, Hungary
11. Gabriele Bischoff, MEP, S&D Group, Germany
12. Hana Jalloul, Deputy President of the Socialist Parliamentary Group, Spain
13. Indrek Saar, Chairman of party, SOC, Estonia
14. Iveta Sers, International Secretary, Saskana,
15. Jamila Madeira, MP, International Secretary, Partido Socialista, Portugal
16. Janina Sitaru, State Secretary for Interinstitutional Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania
17. Jannis Jürgens, Internantional Secretary, SPD
18. Joe Corry-Roake, Senior International Policy Advisor and International Secretary, The Labour Party, United Kingdom
19. Katarina Barley, MEP, S&D Group, PES Executive Vice-President, Germany
20. Katarzyna Kotula, MP, Nowa Lewica
21. Kido Koenig, Director, FMS

22. Kristian Vigenin, Vice-President of the National Assembly, Socialist Party, Bulgaria
23. László Andor, Secretary General, FEPS, Hungary
24. Lia Quartapelle, MP, Partito Democratico, Italy
25. Lina Galvez, MEP, S&D Group, President of FEPS Scientific Council, Spain
26. Madis Roodla, International Secretary, Estonia
27. Marc Angel, Vice-President of the European Parliament and MEPS, Luxembourg
28. Marco Schwarz, Policy Officer, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Brussels Office, Germany
29. Marene Elgershuizen, Candidate, PvdA, Vice-President, Rainbow Rose
30. Maria João Rodrigues, FEPS President, Portugal
31. Maria Maltschnig, Director, Karl-Renner Institut, International Secretary, SPOE, FEPS Vice President, Austria
32. Michal Smarda, President, Socdem, Czech Republic
33. Nikolas Papazoglou, International Secretary, PASOK, Greece
34. Pia Locatelli, MP, PSI group leader in the Chamber, Italy
35. Sofie Amalie Stage, Secretary General of Young European Socialists, Denmark
36. Stelian Baragan, Stanga Democratica Foundation, Romania
37. Tero Shemeikka, International Secretary, SDP, Finland

38. Thomas Vaupel, International Secretary, SDP, Germany
39. Tomas Petricek, senior non-residential fellow at the Centre of Global Political Economy at the Institute of International Relations, former Foreign Affairs Minister, Czech Republic
40. Young European Socialists representatives

30th November 2023 - Youth Roundtable

List of speakers

1. Domenèc Ruiz Devesa, MEP, S&D Group
2. Francesco Cerasani, Advisor, S&D Group

List of participants

1. Alberto Bortolotti, YES
2. Aleksandra Iwanowska, YES
3. Ania Skrzypek, Director for Research and Training, FEPS
4. Beatrice Pedini, YES
5. Benjamin Shemeikka, YES
6. Céline Guedes, Project Officer, FEPS
7. Christopher Lindvall, YES
8. Dmytro Mamaiev, YES
9. Enric López Jurado, President, YES
10. George Tsoumas, YES
11. Jan Verovšek, YES

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| 12. João Martins Pereira, YES | 10. Antonio Argenziano, JEF |
| 13. Kido Koenig, Director, FMS | 11. Elisa Briga, European Federation for Intercultural Learning |
| 14. Marco Schwarz, FES | 12. Stefan Gran, ETUC |
| 15. Marko Mihailoski, YES | 13. Patrizia Heidegger, European Environmental Bureau |
| 16. Rachid Khenissi, YES | 14. Carlotta Besozzi, Civil Society Europe |
| 17. Robert O'Donnell, YES | 15. Özgecan Kara, Youth Forum |
| 18. Sofie Amalie Stage, Secretary General, YES | |
| 19. Szabolcs Nagy, YES | |
| 20. Walczak Jakub, YES | |
| 21. Yiğit Şafak Karip, YES | |

13th December 2023 - Civil organisation Roundtable

List of participants

1. Kido Koenig, Director, FMS
2. Ania Skrzypek, Director for Research and Training, FEPS
3. Marco Schwarz, Policy officer and project coordinator, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Brussels Office
4. Céline Guedes, Project Officer, FEPS
5. Clara Dassonville, SOLIDAR
6. Andrei Frank, Lifelong learning platform
7. Giada Negri, European Civic Forum
8. Benjamin Goodwin, European Civic Forum
9. Judit Lantai, JEF



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Ania Skrzypek, PhD, is Director for Research and Training at FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies.

Before joining FEPS, she worked at the Institute of Political Sciences at Warsaw University – where she also defended cum laude in 2009 her PhD “Cooperation of socialists and social democratic parties in uniting Europe. From Liaison Bureau to PES. 1957 – 2007”, as also she served as two consecutively elected Secretary General of ECOSY (Young European Socialists) – being the first woman and first Central-Eastern European on that position. Ania is an author of over 80 published articles, both academic and opinion pieces. Her research interests evolve around the European studies, history of and contemporary political thought, as also party systems. At FEPS, among several responsibilities connected with implementation of the new training strategy, she oversees the portfolios of Next Left (renewal of social democracy), fostering democracy and Political Union, as also she co-manages FEPS Young Academics Network and Ones to Watch Programme.



Kido Koenig is Director at the Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) and the Secretary General of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity.

Previously, he was the Vice President of the Dutch Labour Youth and President of the Dutch National Youth Council. He spent much of his career as a consultant at Capgemini, dealing with digital transformation, organisational culture and change management. Kido founded a small NGO named DEAL Foundation in Leiden and is currently the chairperson of PEKS, a foundation financing development projects aimed at children.

ABOUT THE FEPS & PARTNERS

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ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Its mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. FEPS works in close partnership with its 77 members and other partners – including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists – forging connections among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels.



ABOUT THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES)

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and headquartered in Bonn and Berlin. It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert. FES is committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy, through civic education, research, and international cooperation. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The EU Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was opened in 1973. It participates in the European integration process, backs and accompanies the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany in Europe and contributes to shaping the external relations of the European Union.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Including here especially Max van der Stoep Stichting (FMS), Pablo Iglesias Foundation, S&D Group, PES Group in the CoR, YES – Young European Socialists and SOLIDAR.
- 2 In Brussels and in Malaga, Spain (on the fringe of the PES Congress).
- 3 For more details about the project, please consult Annex 1 of this document.
- 4 Please see: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-european-parliament-plenary-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-candidate-second-mandate-2024-2024-07-18_en
- 5 Eurobarometer, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3292>
- 6 P. Norris, *Democratic Deficit. Critical Citizens Revisited.*, Cambridge University Press 2011, pp. 19 -23.
- 7 See: A. Skrzypek, *A FEPS Study – A comparative analyses of core values of PES member parties and the ideological evolution within PES/*, (in:) *Progressive Values for 21st century.*, FEPS / Karl Renner Institut 2011, pp. 190 – 339.
- 8 See also: B. Cautrès and Th. Chopin, *European elections: meeting the expectations of the fragmented public opinion in the age of uncertainty*”, *Notre Europe / Jacques Delors Institute, Policy Paper N°297*, February 2024, p. 6, https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PP297_Elections_europeenne_Opinion_publique_Chopin_EN.pdf
- 9 See: M. Kaeding, *Reforming the European Electoral Law: no political equality without social equality. Bringing the missing ‘social’ link.*, (in:) *Transforming the Political Union. Reinforcing europarties ahead of the European Elections.*, A. Skrzypek (ed.), FEPS 2022, pp. 253 – 278.
- 10 The right to adequate information is seen as a prerogative of social justice, as framed by Rawls. See/ J. Rawls, *Teoria sprawiedliwosci.*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009.
- 11 That is, even if perhaps the process was mostly noted among those who belong to the so-called Brussels bubble. The argument that is articulated here is that it was the first step and it should be built on.
- 12 K. Reif and H. Schmitt, *Nine second-order national elections – A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results.*, 1980, <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00737.x>
- 13 TTIP – Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which was meant to be an agreement between the EU and the USA.
- 14 Source: <https://datos.gob.es/en/blog/how-young-people-participate-european-politics-analysis-open-data>
- 15 Source: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2024/762356/EPRS_ATA\(2024\)762356_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2024/762356/EPRS_ATA(2024)762356_EN.pdf)
- 16 There is a dispute over how such a proposal would work in practice for countries that do not have one national list but several constituencies. The answer could be to ensure that these candidates run from regional capitals.
- 17 And was already the case, with Frans Timmermans leading the PvdA list in the EP elections in 2019, and more recently with Teresa Ribeira heading the PSOE list in 2024 – while being considered as the Commissioner candidate with an interest in the climate and environmental portfolio right from the start.
- 18 It was also suggested that it could be seen as a halfway step before there is a new opening in regard to the debate on EP electoral reform and transnational lists. The proposal to reach a compromise and way out of the deadlock is to offer two lists and two votes in future, whereby voters could decide if they cast the second in the national poll or for transnational lists. If the experiment succeeds, it could be an argument for installing transnational lists in future.
- 19 European Political Parties, *European Parliament Resolution on Political Parties*, 2005/2224NI, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2006-0114_EN.pdf
- 20 *Report on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union*, (2015/235INL), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0286_EN.pdf

- 21 The Reform of the Electoral Law of the European Union. European Added Value Assessment accompanying the legislative own-initiative Report, EPRS 2015, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/558775/EPRS_IDA\(2015\)558775_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/558775/EPRS_IDA(2015)558775_EN.pdf)
- 22 See: Towards the revision of the Regulation on the Statute and funding of the European political parties and foundations, Study requested by the AFCO Committee, EP March 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/729741/IPOL_STU\(2022\)729741_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/729741/IPOL_STU(2022)729741_EN.pdf)
- 23 The European Elections 2024, The European Parliament Resolution of 12 December 2023 on the European Elections 2024 (2023/2016(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0455_EN.pdf
- 24 For more, please see earlier sections.
- 25 See: Ch. Verger, A move towards transnational lists in 2024?, Notre Europe / Institut Jacques Delors, Policy Paper N°279, June 2022, https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PP279_Listes-transnationales_Verger_EN.pdf and Transnational lists. Ways to Europeanise elections to the European Parliament, ERPS Study, February 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/679084/EPRS_STU\(2021\)679084_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/679084/EPRS_STU(2021)679084_EN.pdf)
- 26 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-at-a-glance-599314-Women-in-parliaments%20Update_FINAL.pdf
- 27 I. Hertner, 'Doing feminism?' The feminisation of the Party of European Socialists., (in:) Transforming the Political Union. Reinforcing europarties ahead of the European Elections., A. Skrzypek (ed.), FEPS 2022, pp. 55 – 78.
- 28 Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/conference-on-the-future-of-europe/>
- 29 Safeguards against strategic lawsuits against public participation.
- 30 This point was also already touched upon earlier in the text.

The campaign ahead of the next elections starts when the polling stations close in the preceding ones. This is a well-known truth that seems applicable regardless of the type of vote, result and even longevity of the mandate of the newly elected institutions. In other words, if you win, you must work hard to uphold and solidify your advantage. If you lose, you must have learned something, and you should prove it by successfully bouncing back. Either way, the new political season will unavoidably finish with citizens' proceeding to cast their verdict on what you did with the previous result. While you may not be able to predict the circumstances at the end of the legislative period, you must remain agile, active and prepared.

Consequently, this *Note to Ourselves* is drafted to summarise the most valuable points and reiterate them now, when the EP has just been elected. It aims to preserve and cultivate some instructive thoughts and inspire ambition, innovation and higher ambition *ahead of the next European Elections in 2029*.

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