Pan-European Parties – Who Are They, What Do They Want and Can They Win Elections?

Policy Paper

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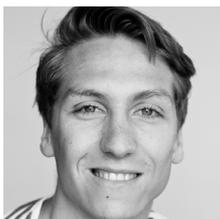
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In the past, European Parliament elections failed to mobilize a large part of the electorate and were often regarded as second-tier national elections. This year things might be different, however. Across Europe the political center is disintegrating and the European project itself is being put in question. The battle lines have shifted from the debt crisis and eurozone governance to a more profound challenge to current party systems, political discourse, and the functioning of democracies. Previously fringe anti-establishment parties now hold power at the national level in several EU member states. They have had arguably impact in areas such as migration, refugees and asylum, civic freedom, justice, and foreign policy. Meanwhile, the informal "grand coalition" between the center-right European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) party groups is widely expected to lose its majority in the European Parliament for the first time since 1979. For most of the existence of the parliament, the EPP and S&D decided on all legislative initiatives and on the top jobs in Brussels.

At the same time, Europe is witnessing a transnationalization of the parliamentary elections. They will be dominated by the first truly pan-European issue in migration, which has remained at the top of the list of citizens' concerns for the EU the across all member states since the last contest.[1] For the first time, Europeans will also have a chance to vote for very different visions for the EU championed by veritable pan-European parties. Across Europe, established parties are proposing moderate reform of the EU or emphasizing the benefits of the status quo. By contrast, the anti-establishment, mostly right-wing, parties that could gain up to one third of the seats seek to take power away from the EU institutions and hand it back to the national capitals. At the same time there is an entirely new type of parties that consider themselves "pan-European" or "transnational" and want to fundamentally reform the EU and democratize its decision-making powers. Their emergence stands for something remarkable: the fact that European politics is beginning to address a European

demos at a time when parties proposing the exact opposite – a return to national sovereignty – are riding a wave of success.

There have been pan-European parties before but they had no electoral success. Today, however, there are several competitors that might shake up the European Parliament elections. The leftist DiEM25/European Spring, led by Yannis Varoufakis, the former finance minister of Greece, strives for fundamental democratic reform of the EU; VOLT has managed to mobilize particularly younger activists across the continent with a simple, pro-European and "post-ideological" message; and the shaky alliance between French President Emmanuel Macron's En Marche and the centrist-liberal Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) campaigns on a progressive, pro-Europe platform. These new pan-European parties distinguish themselves from the traditional Europarties such as the EPP or S&D when it comes to their discourse and agenda setting, and to their party incentives and structures.

The new pan-European parties can raise the visibility of the European Parliament elections, for which voter turnout five years ago was 42 percent with a record low of 13 percent in Slovakia in 2014.[2] They have been hailed as a key step in giving political representation to a truly European electorate.[3] While their electoral chances are slim, except for the En Marche/ALDE alliance the key question is whether they can still perform well enough to shape the future of European politics.

This paper looks at the cases of DiEM25/European Spring, VOLT, and En Marche/ALDE. In particular, partly based on interviews with members of pan-European parties and movements, it considers the seeming paradox of their emergence at the same time as there is a nationalist trend in Europe and investigates what impact they could have on Europe's ailing democracy. The paper looks at why they are relevant, how are they organized, what political agenda are they pursuing, and what electoral strategy could see them win seats

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1 Kantar Public Brussels, "Standard Eurobarometer 90", Autumn 2018, p.12.

2 European Parliament, "Results of the European elections 2014".
3 Alberto Alemanno, "Time for Europe to embrace democracy", Politico, April 7, 2018.

this year and in future elections despite their obvious disadvantages vis-à-vis their established competitors.

Europarties and Pan-European Parties

There are fundamental differences between Europarties and pan-European parties or traditional national parties. Europarties have three layers: national constituent member parties, a transnational party organization, and a political group within the European Parliament. The Dutch political scientist Gerrit Voermann describes them as "not a homogenous organization, but a reticular conglomerate of [these] three structures."[4]

There are currently 10 registered Europarties (See Table 1).[5] In the European Parliament they organize themselves in "political groups" based on ideological affiliations. In only two cases, those of the EPP and the S&D, political groups correspond exactly with the actual Europarties. The other political groups consist of coalitions of Europarties, national parties, and individual members of the European Parliament. Political groups are the central organizing vehicle in the parliament. They elect their own chairs, receive EU funding for administrative and staff costs, and their members can be elected as committee chairs.

In early 2018, there were attempts to make the European Parliament and the Europarties more transnational by introducing transnational candidate lists and a single European constituency that those elected from lists would represent. There was a legislative proposal to replace after Brexit the 73 U.K. seats in the European Parliament with transnational seats. Thus, all European voters would have had the opportunity to vote directly for a member from their electoral district as well as for a transnational party list. European legislators rejected this proposal, however.[6] The EPP voted against having a transnational list, arguing that this represented "a centralist and elitist artificial construct."[7]

Overall, Europarties are thus fundamentally different from their national counterparts and are

not truly pan-European in their set-up either. This has been reflected in previous election campaigns with Europarties rarely competing or interacting with each other directly. Rather, the constitutent national parties do so.[8] As a study commissioned by the EU concluded, there is no "transnational or European party system in the electoral arena" and only a very limited European party system in the "legislative arena."[9]

What Are Pan-European Parties?

There have been several attempts to establish truly pan-European parties or movements before. For example, Europe-Democracy-Esperanto has been running in all European Parliament elections since 2004. Several were established for the 2009 elections, including the Newropeans, who ran in the Netherlands, Germany, and France, or Libertas, a transnational party that formed around a rejection of the Lisbon Treaty and won one seat in France's parliament. The best-known pan-European party project is the European Federalist Party (EFP), which resulted from the unification of the Federalist Party of France and the Europe United Movement in 2011. It participated in the 2014 elections and is doing so again this year, competing in six member states as well as in national and regional elections.

These attempts to form pan-European parties did not succeed. They did not gain seats in the European Parliament nor became a significant force in any member state. The reasons are twofold: interest in European Parliament elections haven't been relatively low in the past, and the European project has never been as contested previously as it is right now. Yet, with the growing contestation of the elections and the transnationalization of European politics and crises, the latest attempts to establish such parties look more promising.

The new pan-European parties have a centralized leadership at the European level and coordinate all their political work Europe-wide rather than nationally or through a coalition of parties that seek to run on one pan-European platform. In this strict sense, the En Marche/ALDE alliance does not qualify as pan-European party at this moment. Yet, President Macron's ambition was different at the outset. His initial plan was to build a pan-European version of his En Marche movement-party, but he eventually decided against this for strategic and legal obstacles to establish parties in every single member state. The current push for an alliance with ALDE has the added benefit of also equiping the new party

4 Gerrit Voerman, "The formation of political parties in the European Union", Montesquieu Institute, March 2009, pp. 1-2.
5 Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations, "List of registered European Political Parties", September 22, 2017.
6 Cecile Barbiere, "European Parliament votes against transnational lists", Euractiv, February 7, 2018.
7 European People's Party, "EPP Group votes down transnational lists", February 7, 2018.
8 Luciano Bardi et al., How to create a Transnational Party System, European Parliament, 2010, pp. 97-98.
9 Ibid.

Table 1. Europarties and Political Groups

Europarty	Political Group	Position
European People's Party	European People's Party Group (EPP)	Center-right, liberal conservatism, Christian Democracy
Party of European Socialists	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	Center-left, social democracy
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	Center, Liberalism
European Democratic Party		Center, Christian democracy, social liberalism, federalism
Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe	European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	Center-right to right, soft Euroskepticism, anti-federalism
European Christian Political Movement		Center-right to right, traditionalist conservatism
European Green Party	Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	Center-left to left
European Free Alliance		Big tent, ethnic-minority interest, autonomy for sub-national regions
Party of the European Left	European United Left—Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)	Left to far-left, soft Euroskepticism
Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom	Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)	Right to far-right, hard Euroskepticism
Former Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (closed in 2016), now mostly consisting of UKIP and Five Star Movement	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy	Right, national conservatism, Euroskepticism

family with significant representation in the Council.

Party registration procedures and candidate nomination entail different costs across EU member states (see Annex). A party needs to be founded in each country, since a pan-European party can legally only consist of member parties, not of individuals.[10]

With regard to their set-up and potential impact on European politics, the pan-European parties

distinguish themselves from the traditional Europarties in two dimensions set out below: party incentives and structures, and discourse and agenda setting.

Party Incentives and Structures

Political parties serve as organizers of voters into coalitions that have a chance of influencing the direction of the state, help inform citizens, and educate political personnel. The internal logic of parties is such that only aspiring politicians who show support for their superiors through discipline or who mobilize a critical mass of their own followers can ascend to the very top where offices and power await. Furthermore, centralized

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10 European Parliament, "Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations", April 24, 2018.

party finances can help to exert pressure on politicians to abide by the leadership's decisions. In larger or federal states, this internal logic also makes sure that regional politicians usually do not rebel against their party organization because that might hamper their careers and political successes at the national level. At the same time, the national party usually caters to the needs of its subnational structures to ensure cohesion.[11]

This party logic that applies nationally is not replicated in Europarties. They do not select the candidates for the European Parliament; their national constituent parties do. European politics is also dominated by national governments and the European Parliament has limited "hard" powers that even the comparatively lavish material benefits that come with its membership cannot make up for in the eyes of many career-minded politicians. Whereas national parliaments command substantial budgets and appoint governments, the European Parliament uses its influence through committee work, discussions, awareness campaigns, and commenting on proposals made by the Council of the European Commission. This is hard work usually rewarded with little public attention, which contributes to the fact that politicians who want to pursue European issues are still likely to prefer careers at the national level to maximize their influence and visibility, particularly when they come from large and influential member states. This might change somewhat after this election, however. If Manfred Weber, the EPP Leader in the parliament, is elected as the European Commission president, he will be the first EU politician to have made his career entirely in Brussels and reached the top position there.

> " *Pan-European parties distinguish themselves from Europarties in two dimensions: party incentives and structures, and discourse and agenda setting.*

Another challenge for Europarties is the lack of coherent objectives as well as the existence of opposing interests among their constituent parties. While members of the European Parliament

have the tendency to be "europeanized", i.e. to vote along party-political or ideological rather than national lines,[12] there is often a lack of coherence between the Europarties' objectives and those of their constituent parties. This is currently most obvious in the EPP's internal struggle over Hungary's Fidesz. Several constituent parties, led by Scandinavian ones, want to expel Fidesz from the EPP for the deterioration in the rule of law in the country as well as its anti-immigrant and anti-EU campaigns and policies. Yet, the EPP's European leadership as well as several other member parties are either hesitant or fundamentally opposed to this.

Pan-European parties, on the other hand, do not look at European politics from a national perspective but from a transnational one. Their national chapters are not equivalent to the constituent parties of Europarties since the latter remain independent parties with different profiles and ideological positions. From the outset, pan-European parties seek to overcome the national logic and agree on a pan-European platform. Their aspiration is representation in the European Parliament and ultimately fundamental reform of the EU. In some cases, they also run in national and sub-national elections, but their focus remains on reforming the EU from the European Parliament, because they see all problems as ultimately European ones. If their members are driven by the desire to gain power, they must thus try to win European elections. Internally, they need to be able to convince the party leadership that they will deliver good work on the agreed European policy objectives. Externally, they need to convince voters that they are the right person to take care of the European agenda that is at the core of their party. This ensures their loyalties, rhetoric, and issue focus remains on the European rather than the national level. Accordingly, it becomes a career interest of all politicians in the party to work on transnational topics.

Discourse and Agenda Setting

There is at least a perceived policy deadlock at the EU level that is caused by competing national interests, particularly when it comes to topics like migration and eurozone reform. Meanwhile, Europarties have so far relied on lowest-common-denominator manifestos for European Parliament elections,[13] which hardly make for inspiring

11 Lori Thorlakson, "Patterns of Party Integration, Influence and Autonomy in Seven Federations", Party Politics, 15: 2, 2009.

12 Roger Scully, Simon Hix, and David. M. Farrell, "National or European Parliamentarians? Evidence from a New Survey of the Members of the European Parliament", Journal of Common Market Studies, 50: 4, 2012.
13 Simon Lightfoot, "The 2009 European Parliamentary Elections and Party Groups", in Juliet Lodge (eds), "The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament", Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.34.

campaigns. Unsurprisingly, their constituent parties then often revert to running national campaigns that do not refer to EU policy very much and tend to be very light on actual policy.[14] So far, this has not hurt the Europarties as none of the previous European Parliament elections was dominated by pan-European issues and they were treated more as "second-tier" national elections. However, this year there seems to be for the first time a truly pan-European issue in migration[15] and there are new parties running pan-European campaigns. According to the Italian political scientist Alberto Alemanno, pan-European parties, "stand out from traditional political parties [thanks to] their ability to speak with one voice on major European issues—like migration or the economy—to electorates across Europe."[16]

> " *The pan-European parties compete on European policy issues themselves rather than national positions toward them.*

The effect of this difference is that the pan-European parties compete on European policy issues themselves rather than national positions toward them. In short, they help to synthesize new interest groups across borders. This has the potential to significantly affect which issues make it onto the political agenda in the EU and thus to refocus public attention and political debates. As Alemanno argues, the "mere presence [of transnational parties] may eventually nudge all political parties to compete for ideas, votes, and seats on a pan-EU scale. As such, their continuation must be encouraged. Transnational parties are the fertilizer for a truly European polity."[17] It is all the more surprising that they emerge at a time when national sovereignty has made a comeback as a favorite topic of many political campaigners.

Why Now?

Pan-European parties share the belief that the EU is no longer working and needs substantial reform. They see the current EU as fundamentally flawed

and doomed to disintegrate. The existential crisis of the EU is the common narrative of pan-European parties. VOLT, for instance, established its first Facebook page on the day that the United Kingdom triggered Article 50 to leave the EU. The VOLT founders were deeply shocked by Brexit and feared that it might have a spillover effect in other member states. DiEM25/European Spring has its roots in the eurozone crisis and the EU's inability to fundamentally reform the single currency. DiEM25 and VOLT believe that transnationalization is the only way to save the EU and to overcome the obstacle of national interests blocking major reforms. President Macron's motivation has a different focus; he wanted to build a pan-European movement and later alliance because he believes that France can only thrive in a reformed Europe. This is why he seeks to forge a new alliance within the European Parliament and among governments to advance his reform agenda. Moreover, the EU's democratic deficit is a shared concern of pan-European parties. As the European Spring manifesto states, "The EU, which began as a project for peace and unity, has become a maze of institutions where technocrats make decisions from behind closed doors. We must reclaim it."[18] At the same time, member-state governments and parliaments have increasingly seen their margin of maneuver in decision-making limited by European integration, especially within the Eurozone.[19]

Since the eurozone crisis, the criticism of the EU for its lack of democratic procedures has intensified, becoming a politically salient topic. The 2008 financial crisis seems to have turbocharged the rise of anti-EU parties all across the continent.[20] Some scholars view what Yascha Mounk calls the EU's "undemocratic liberalism"[21] as one of the major causes for the rise of the anti-establishment and illiberal parties across Europe. Pan-European parties can be considered as a counter-movement to these parties, similarly born out of dissatisfaction with democratic processes in the EU but seeking to improve them through more rather than less European cooperation.

The pan-European parties view themselves as the direct answer to the anti-establishment across Europe. They believe that a retreat behind national borders will only worsen the political and economic crisis. In particular, VOLT's mostly young membership is energized by Brexit and

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14 Robert Ladrech, "Party Change and Europeanisation: Elements of an Integrated Approach", West European Politics, 35:3, 2012.
15 Standard Eurobarometer 90.
16 Alberto Alemanno, "Time for Europe to embrace democracy".
17 Ibid.

18 European Spring, A New Deal for Europe, p. 2.
19 Peter Mair, "The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems", West European Politics, 23, 2007.
20 Yann Algan et al., "The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism", Brookings Institution, Fall 2017.
21 Yascha Mounk, "Illiberal Democracy or Undemocratic Liberalism?", Project Syndicate, June 9, 2016.

Table 2. Pan-European Parties and Movements

	DiEM25/European Spring	VOLT	En Marche/ALDE
Type	Pan-European movement. European spring is its electoral vehicle, which incorporates existing national, regional and municipal political forces.	Pan-European party with national chapters.	Pan-European movement with national chapters and cooperating parties.
Founded	February 2016, in Berlin.	March 2017 set up of Facebook page.	Cooperation between the two sides announced in November 2018.
Members	113,000 members in 195 countries as of April 2019	25,000+ as of March 2019	N/A; 37 member parties.
Political profile	Left-progressive.	Progressive/center-left, but portrays itself as post-ideological.	Centrist, centered around President Macron's person.
Key policies	Democratize Europe. Build shared, green prosperity. Fight poverty and exploitation. Deepen international solidarity.	EU reform. Smart state. Economic renaissance. Social equality. Global balance. Citizen empowerment.	Not yet formulated.
Membership composition	Mostly male, university-educated. European/international.	Young, mostly university-educated.	N/A; national parties with diverse memberships.
Electoral Goals	Win seats in 7 different member states and at least 25 seats to establish first truly transnational party	Win seats in 7 different member states and at least 25 seats to establish first truly transnational party	Become the third- or second-largest European Parliament group
Post-European Parliament elections perspective	No electoral ambitions beyond the European Parliament elections.	Currently mapping national and regional elections where VOLT can run.	Respective goals of constituent parties.

growing nationalism, and believes that only a more democratic and federal Europe is the way forward. The urgency and gravity of the current EU crisis is arguably the strongest driver for the establishment of pan-European parties.

The New Pan-European Parties

DiEM25/European Spring

DiEM25/European Spring is a mix of traditional Europarty and truly new pan-European movement. It has managed to attract well-known faces and is applying highly democratic, if complex, internal processes. Despite its expressly distributed power structures, former Greek finance minister Varoufakis is the most prominent party figure.

DiEM25, which is short for Democracy in Europe Movement 2025, was founded in 2016 in Berlin. It does not consider itself to be a traditional political party but a pan-European "hybrid-movement." Hybrid in this context is a synonym for the complexity of its political project. The movement is split into three different layers. First, DiEM25 is registered in Belgium as an NGO that promotes its ideas and agenda within European society. Second, in 2017 DiEM25 co-founded the electoral alliance European Spring with other political parties from across the continent, such as Alternativet from Denmark or Razem from Poland. European Spring is simulating a transnational list and is in fact a coalition of national, regional and municipal political forces running with one political program in the European Parliament elections. Third, DiEM25 is also registered as political party in several EU member states, including Greece and Belgium, and is itself running under the umbrella of European Spring in the elections. For instance, in Germany DiEM25 is running with the progressive fringe party Demokratie in Bewegung (Democracy in Motion) on a common list under the name Demokratie in Europa. Varoufakis and seven other non-Germans are running as candidates for the list in Germany.[22]

> **"** *DiEM25/European Spring is a mix of traditional Europarty and truly new pan-European movement.*

In sum, DiEM25 has sought a mixed strategy to build a pan-European party, establishing party chapters in several member states and founding a coalition of national, regional and political forces through European Spring. This means that DiEM25 national chapters can run in the European Parliament elections as well DiEM25 partners under the umbrella of the European Spring.

DiEM25 combines traditional party structures with innovative elements. For instance, all internal votes are always pan-European, meaning that even the votes for national representatives are by all members via online voting. The main executive body of DiEM25 is the coordinating collective, which is elected in a pan-European all-members vote every six months. Another important body is the validating council, which consists of 100 DiEM25 members (evenly divided between women and men) who have been chosen on a lottery-based system. This body was established to substitute for an all-members vote when a quick party decision is needed. There is also an advisory panel of well-known figures from academia, media, the arts, and politics that provides advice on certain policies.

The national chapters of DiEM25 are overseen by the national collectives, which are also elected in an all-members vote. These are mirrored by regional and municipal collectives as well as "democratic spontaneous collectives" (DSCs), issue-centered groups that can take almost any form. In Berlin, for example, the DSC is focusing on housing issues. The different national collectives have also different foci.

The main slogan of DiEM25 is "The EU will democratize. Or it will disintegrate." Its main political objective is the democratization of the EU, including through the strengthening of the European Parliament, full transparency of all decision-making processes within the EU, and a constitutional assembly to establish a "full-fledged democracy with a sovereign parliament" in the EU. With respect to DiEM25's policies, the platform is a green-left platform, including policies such as the New Green Deal, a 35-hour working week, and a common EU tax system.

VOLT

VOLT might be the most genuinely pan-European of the parties and movements looked at here. Additionally, it has mobilized a large number of highly motivated, young, and skilled individuals who may be more willing and able to work all the extra hours and run better online campaigns necessary to make its push into the European Parliament successful. The fact that VOLT has no

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22 Demokratie in Europa, "Doing it the European way".

famous individual figureheads may be intentional or simply due to its recent establishment. Either way, this could turn out to be a disadvantage in the elections.

VOLT, as DiEM25/European Spring, and the European Federalists before, claims to be the first real European party. The two founders, Andrea Venzon of Italy and Colombe Cahen-Salvador of France, were frustrated by the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and decided to establish a pan-European party as a result. In early 2017, Damian Boeselager of Germany joined them. On the same day as the United Kingdom triggered Article 50 to officially start the process of leaving the EU, they established the Facebook page VOLT. This was the starting point for the party, which has grown to a membership of over 25,000 across almost all member states.[23]

VOLT has been innovative and is arguably the most coherently pan-European of the new parties. Its set-up is decidedly distinct from that of many existing parties. From the outset, its founders decided that they wanted to establish a "true" pan-European party. Given the current legal provisions in the EU, this meant that they had to establish VOLT as a party in every single member state. So far, they have activist groups in all of them except Slovakia. All VOLT national chapters will then run with the same program. Yet, the national chapters can decide on the emphasis of their respective electoral campaign depending on the national context. The candidates of the national chapters are voted on by the national chapters themselves rather than the wider party. Nonetheless, if VOLT candidates manage to win seats in the European Parliament, its legislators would then have to vote on the basis of the pan-European VOLT program and not according to national preferences. In order to manage the balance between flexibility based on local groups and pan-European cohesion, there is a strong emphasis on participatory and collaborative policy drafting. The local groups are well connected through messaging and internet-based tools. A "matrix-structure" is meant to ensure a non-hierarchical functioning of the organization despite the complexities of running a pan-European platform.

VOLT is a movement of young, educated people with expertise in business management, communications, information technology, and politics, and who are keen to apply their knowledge in the movement. They have learned from other successful initiatives. For instance,

23 Forlitoday, "Volt Forli al congreso paneuropeo di Roma 2019", March 24, 2019.

they do not call themselves a "party," preferring the word "movement," which evokes the successful campaigns of Emmanuel Macron in France and Sebastian Kurz in Austria. VOLT's decentralized groups and ad hoc membership is in clear contrast with the long-term membership systems of other parties.

> " *VOLT galvanizes different interests that previously would have been hard to imagine coexisting in one party.*

While its members describe themselves as non-ideological and open to all audiences, VOLT caters to a new blend of young, educated, activist, green, pro-business, and pro-redistribution people. To an extent, its program is a testament to the fact that it has not yet had to forge a single political compromise with opponents and is free of financial or other constraints in developing its ideas. The upside to this level of freedom is that VOLT's program is based on a clear vision, sets out ambitious goals, and is easy to understand.

VOLT's electoral platform, which was ratified in September 2018, lists detailed proposals to achieve the party's six major goals: EU reform, a smart state, an economic renaissance, social equality, global balance, and citizen empowerment. The policies range from better conditions for start-ups to a European minimum wage and a digital state. They are often based on successful experiments waiting to be scaled up or on studies by international organizations. The draft manifesto is, rather atypically, full of footnotes and references.

In the long run, VOLT wants to establish a federal Europe. Their policies include a harmonized corporate tax rate across member states, expanding the mandate for the European Central Bank to support employment and growth, the right for the European Parliament to propose legislation, an electronic identity for all EU citizens, participatory EU budgets, an investment program to foster jobs in disadvantaged regions and boost research and development, and a minimum income across the continent.

Overall, VOLT's electoral program is a collection of known policy proposals that have been discussed for a while, such as an EU army or a carbon tax, enriched with new ideas such as the European Sector Skill Council, which is supposed to help the

European labor market to become better prepared for future challenges, or the integration of social and shared housing in EU cohesion policy. To these, VOLT adds a layer of proposals to improve politics and administration procedurally. This is not atypical for a European Parliament campaign, where entire party groups have formed around the issue of direct democracy, for example, but its concrete proposals for system corrections for the EU are far-reaching for a party that is in essence pro-European.

Overall, VOLT seems to represent a voter group that is less broad than it advertises, but it certainly galvanizes different interests that previously would have been hard to imagine coexisting in one party.

En Marche/ALDE Alliance

> *Liberals across the continent are eager to seize the opportunity the alliance gives them to become kingmakers in the European Parliament.*

What started as an attempt to create a pan-European version of France's En Marche has been transformed into something almost structurally identical to a Europarty. The factor that will determine cohesion within the new En Marche/ALDE alliance, and that makes its ambitions more pan-European than those of other Europarties, is President Macron and his credibility as a European visionary.

L'Europe en Marche was the first attempt of Macron's domestic movement to turn its success into a European phenomenon. Driven by its electoral mandate in France and possibly also the perspective of fading support from the movement's volunteer base after the election of Macron, it went about setting up a European arm in 2017 already. In May 2018, it set out to survey French citizens about their political priorities for Europe in what was termed "La grande marche pour l'Europe," replicating what had been done ahead of the French election. With time, this highly ambitious plan to establish a pan-European movement was replaced by another approach. First, Macron's party reached bilateral agreements with other pro-European liberal parties from across the continent. Then, it sought an alliance with the ALDE grouping. Macron's first attempt

resulted only in agreements with the nationalist-liberal Ciudadanos in Spain[24] and talks with the liberal-progressive D66 in the Netherlands.[25]

At the ALDE convention in Madrid in November 2018, the electoral alliance with En Marche was announced. Yet, they did not manage to nominate a Spitzenkandidat for the elections; rather, a team of leading candidates, such as Guy Verhofstadt and Margrethe Vestager, will run as "Team Europe"[26] This could be as much a concession to Macron, who is opposed to the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, as it could be due to an ongoing leadership struggle within ALDE. In March 2019 En Marche distanced itself again from ALDE after it became public that the latter had received money from private companies, such as Monsanto. It appears that Macron will wait until after the elections to decide whether En Marche should join ALDE or another political group or even a Europarty. En Marche may not want any "exclusive cooperation" with ALDE.[27] It remains to be seen how this cooperation will play out after the elections.

Yet, liberals across the continent are eager to seize the opportunity the alliance gives them to become kingmakers in the European Parliament.[28] Whether an alliance will turn into something more than just ALDE with different members depends on whether En Marche can win a large number of seats in France and thus influence the alliance's agenda with its pro-integration policies. What is more, the new alliance would have significance in the Council.

En Marche and ALDE do not have a common manifesto. ALDE's manifesto for the elections contains very few concrete policy proposals.[29] Most points are declarations of ambition rather than precise proposals.[30] En Marche is even less precise with regard to policy proposals. It is unclear if this is a question of continuity—given that Macron was elected with a political agenda that barely filled two sheets of paper—or a strategic choice to remain compatible with ALDE until after the elections and address potential

24 Maïa de la Baume, "Macron's En Marche, Spain's Ciudadanos working on joint 2019 platform", Politico, June 25, 2018.
25 Stephane Alonso and Tijn Sadee, "Rutte neemt leiding in Europees machtsspeel om steun Macron binnen te hengelen", NRC, September 4, 2018.
26 Maia de la Baume, "Liberals to present slate of candidates for top EU jobs", Politico, September 11, 2018.
27 Leo Klimm and Nadia Pantel, "Macrons Partei will neue Bündnisse im Europaparlament", Süddeutsche Zeitung, April 14, 2019.
28 Valentin Kreilinger, "Looking ahead to the 2019 European elections", Jacques Delors Institute, November 15, 2018, p.10.
29 Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, "Political Programme and European Elections Manifesto," 2019.
30 Ibid.

Table 3. Electoral Systems in EU Member States (European Parliaments seats in 2019)

List Representation			Single Transferable Vote	
Open List		Closed List		
Single District:	Multi-District:	Single District:	Single District:	Multi-District:
Austria (19), Bulgaria (17), Cyprus (6), Czech Republic (21), Denmark (14), Estonia (7), Greece (21), Finland (14), Croatia (12), Lithuania (13), Latvia (8), Netherlands (29), Sweden (21), Slovenia (11), Slovakia (14)	Poland (52), Belgium (21), Italy (76)	Germany (96), Spain (59), France (79), Hungary (21), Portugal (21), Romania (33)	Malta (6)	Ireland (13)

differences once a party group has been formed. The key electoral goal for now seems to be making liberals the third or even second-largest European Parliament group.

HowCouldPan-EuropeanParties Win Seats?

Beyond simply winning as many seats as possible in the European Parliament, there are two further electoral goals for the new pan-European parties: securing Europarty status by winning 3 percent of the vote in at least seven member states, and securing the status of European political group in the parliament by winning at least 25 seats from at least one-quarter of the member states. The latter is particularly important as this gives access to significant EU funding. It would also strengthen their institutional status given that the EU legal framework did not foresee the existence of pan-European parties as such. However, these parties face considerable odds to achieve even minimal electoral success, and they suffer from many disadvantages in competing with the long established, well known, and well-resourced national parties and Europarties. Nonetheless they could take advantage of the particularities of

European Parliament elections and of the variation in electoral systems across member states to enhance their chances of winning seats.

European Parliament elections are not strictly regulated by the EU. All member states must use proportional representation, but the shape this takes in different countries varies.[31] Voting is mandatory in four members states.[32] How seats are apportioned among parties based on their electoral performance also varies. As Table 3 shows, most member states have one of two kinds of party-list electoral system. In closed-list systems, voters can only cast their ballot for a party and have no influence on the place of individual candidates on the party list. In open-list systems, voters can cast their ballot for individual candidates on the party lists and thus influence their ranking in the final result. Only in Ireland and Malta are members of the European Parliament elected from district seats through a single-transferable-vote system instead, making the contest in these countries most candidate-centric.

31 Giulio Sabbati, Gianluca Sgueo, and Alina Dobreva, "2019 European elections: National rules", European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2019.
32 Luxembourg, Belgium, Malta, Greece, Bulgaria

The distribution of seats among member states is not strictly based on their population size. This favors smaller countries, so that—in general—the smaller the country, the fewer voters per seat there are (See Table 4). This ranges from Luxembourg with 6 seats and about 44,000 registered voters per seat to Italy with 76 seats and about 666,000 registered voters per seat.

Under proportional representation systems, the more seats a country has the lower the percentage of the national vote is needed for a party to win at least one since there are more seats to distribute among parties. Generally, therefore, securing the support of only a small percentage of voters is more likely to win a seat in a larger member state with more seats. For example, a little over one percent of the vote should ensure winning at least 1 seat in Germany, which has 96 seats for about 62 million registered voters, whereas about 17 percent will be needed to win at least 1 seat in Luxembourg, which has 6 seats for about 264,000 registered voters. In some countries, however, there is a percentage threshold for winning seats and this can be higher than the percentage of the vote needed to win one seat in a purely proportional system. For example, in France a party could win around 1.5 percent of the vote, which theoretically would be enough to win a seat but would still below the country's threshold of 5 percent.[33]

Thus, two particularities of European Parliament elections in combination give the new pan-European parties an opening to improve their chances of winning seats. On one hand, in small member states receiving very few votes can be enough to secure a seat but this represents a higher share of the population that needs convincing. On the other hand, in large member states the share of the vote needed to secure at least one seat is smaller but this represents a higher number of votes to be won over.

A Path to Electoral Gains

The new pan-European parties face considerable obstacles to winning seats in the European Parliament. They have fewer resources than their larger and more established competitors; they are virtually unknown among the voters; and they lack the exposure and known figures that other parties have. However, they can mitigate these by exploiting the disproportionality in the distribution of seats among member states and the differences in their electoral set-ups. In this they even have an advantage over the existing Europarties. Because their constituent parties usually pursue national

33 This is the case in Italy, France, Poland, and Romania. Sabbati, Sgueo, and Dobreva, "2019 European elections: National rules".

electoral goals, independently of their allies in other countries, Europarties cannot invest more of their campaigning resources strategically in selected countries. Pan-European parties, however, have more freedom to choose in which countries to focus their efforts because of their nature and organizational structure.

Traditional motivations for people to vote for a party—such as policy appeal, party loyalty, and candidate appeal—do not necessarily favor the new pan-European parties in competing with established parties. Their policy positions and manifestos have been discussed at the European level, and these should appeal to at least a section of the European electorate. But they cannot tweak their positions to convince more voters in individual member states; they can only try to promote their Europe-wide manifesto best they can to broaden their local appeal. At the same time, as new initiatives the pan-European parties by definition cannot (yet) rely on existing base on loyal voters, in the way that the established parties can. Furthermore, the more the electorate in a member state is composed of such die-hard party loyalists, the smaller the space in which new parties compete for the remaining "floating" voters. However, even if they may not have the same pool of known figures as their competitors, on this the new parties have a better chance of mitigating the disadvantage by finding appealing candidates within their ranks.

Given all of the above, while the pan-European parties have clear disadvantages relative to the established Europarties, they also have the opportunity to pursue a two-level approach that mitigates these. They can campaign in large member states by focusing on reaching a potential core audience—even if this means a large number of voters—at a relatively low cost per voter by using social media to secure the minimum percentage of the vote needed to win at least one seat. Using this relatively "cheap per voter" approach in selected large countries can then allow the new parties to shift more of their limited resources to campaigning in small countries where they need a higher percentage of the vote and this entails targeting a small number of voters through relatively "expensive per voter" traditional retail campaigning.

Exploiting social media bubbles in large countries

One path for the pan-European parties to improve their chances of success in a resource-efficient way is to promote their party list as whole in large member states through social media to a core audience of voters who agree with their policy positions. In the

largest countries, they may not need convince voters who are not already in broad agreement with their agenda—they may just need to reach those who are to make them aware of the party's existence and manifesto, and to convince them to turnout and vote for the party.

The fact that the manifestos of the pan-European parties are the result of inputs of members and activists from across the continent suggests that there should be at least a minimal core audience in most member states that is open to vote for them based on their policy positions. Even if this core group of voters is only a very small fraction of the population, it may be enough to win a seat in a large member state. In carefully selected countries, the new pan-European parties could target only this small share of the population by taking advantage of the fast spread of information through networks or "bubbles" of like-minded people on social media. For example, in Germany this could help the parties reach and convince the 1–5 percent of voters that could win them up to five seats.

In large member states where parties have to field a long list of candidates, the popularity or level of exposure of individual candidates is less salient; therefore, campaigning to promote the list as a whole does not put the pan-European parties at a disadvantage, especially where there is a single countrywide district and a closed-list system where voters cannot express a candidate preference. The pan-European parties thus do not need to spend more of their scarce resources there to promote individual candidates. Such countries provide the perfect conditions for an issue-based, list-focused, social media campaign. Spain, Germany, and France could be particularly promising: the former two do not have an electoral threshold; all are single-district, closed-list systems; and the vote share needed to win a seat is between 1 and 2 percent. In Italy and Poland, the necessary vote share is also low, but there are several electoral districts and open lists, which increases the salience of individual candidates and thus makes list campaigns less effective. Both also have electoral thresholds. Romania is similar to France in that it has a single district and a closed-list system but it also has a threshold of 5 percent, which is higher than the theoretical vote share needed to win one seat of around 3 percent.

Promoting strong candidates in small countries

A second, parallel path to winning seats for the new pan-European parties is to run campaigns based on promoting strong candidates in the smallest member states, ideally those with open lists and single-transferable vote systems for maximum candidate salience.

As noted above, in the smallest EU countries a relatively large percentage of the vote is needed to win even one seat, but this entails convincing a smaller number of voters than winning 1 percent in a large country would. Therefore, the pan-European parties could also hope to pick up seats by focusing their efforts in these countries, where they can invest in more costly candidate-centered campaigns by shifting their resources from larger member states where they campaign mostly through relatively cheap social media. For example, even a small share of party funds available in France may go a long way in Malta, where all parties have less funding than in the larger member states.

It is very unlikely that the new pan-European parties could win the share of the vote needed in a small country—for example, at least 17 percent in Malta—solely on the appeal of their policy positions. This is because new policy positions are rarely mainstream enough to win such a large share of the vote—if they were they would likely have been adopted by an existing party—and, as noted above, pan-European parties cannot tailor their manifesto to each country. Therefore, they need to convince a significant number of voters who are not initially well disposed toward their policy positions. And, given that they have no loyal party base to rely on, they have a particular need to use very retail or personal campaign methods to do so.

In countries with open-list or single transferable systems, and in smaller countries, the appeal of individual candidates to voters becomes more salient. At the same time, in the small member states, it becomes more feasible for candidates to campaign directly in front of individual voters. For instance, less than 50,000 votes are needed to win one seat in Malta, compared to over 650,000 in Germany. Organizing personalized rallies and campaigning on the ground across the country is much more expensive than campaigning through social media, which poses a challenge to new parties, which rarely have the same resources as their established competitors. However, the funds and campaigning resources of the pan-European parties are not tied to any specific country, and they have a mandate to allocate these, which they collect across the continent, to any country where they can have the most effect. Their competitors, which rely mostly on national funding cannot do this, which reduces their competitive advantage vis-à-vis the newcomers.

If the new parties manage to find strong candidates to complement their manifesto, i.e. with personal characteristics that appeal to voters who do not initially support the policy positions, they may be able to reach beyond their "natural" voter base to

Table 4. Registered Voters and European Parliament Seats by Country

Country	Seats in 2019	Registered voters per seat**	Actual votes per seat in 2014**	Turnout in percent
Luxembourg*	6	**44,072**	37,704	85.55
Malta*	6	49,195	**36,798**	74.8
Cyprus	6	86,703	38,123	43.97
Estonia	7	128,982	47,104	36.52
Hungary	21	179,397	51,971	28.97
Latvia	8	184,060	55,660	30.24
Slovenia	11	213,857	52,502	24.55
Lithuania	13	232,541	110,108	47.35
Ireland°	13	230,914	-	52.44
Denmark	14	295,809	166,600	56.32
Croatia	12	313,945	79,240	25.24
Slovakia	14	315,317	41,149	**13.05**
Finland	14	317,164	124,011	39.1
Austria	19	337,400	153,146	45.39
Sweden	21	350,474	178,987	51.07
Belgium*	21	378,517	339,303	89.64
Bulgaria	17	384,907	137,951	35.84
Czech Republic	21	399,768	72,758	18.2
Netherlands	29	441,914	164,922	37.32
Portugal	21	464,456	156,382	33.67
Greece*	21	471,809	282,944	59.97
Romania	33	552,153	179,119	32.44
Poland	52	589,164	140,398	23.83
France	79	589,174	249,986	42.43
Spain	59	618,883	271,751	43.91
Germany	96	645,821	310,640	48.1
Italy	76	666,611	381,435	57.22

*countries with mandatory voting
** Based on 2019 seats and 2014 electoral data and assuming uniform turnout across districts
°assuming the smallest district has 4 seats and assuming uniform turnout across districts

achieve the necessary large share of votes in a small member state. While strategic choices would have to be made according to the requirements of each constituency, there is also some evidence that voters in European Parliament elections can be inclined to vote for candidates that are experienced in EU affairs.[34]

Candidate-centered campaigns make most sense in small member states. In Malta, Cyprus, and Luxembourg, a seat can be won with under 100,000 votes and all have either open lists or, in the case of Malta, a single-transferable-vote system (STV). This increases candidate salience. In Ireland, there are more registered voters to each seat (around 290,000), but there are three districts with a maximum of five candidates each and STV, making the country another attractive destination for a candidate-centered campaign.

In short, with such a two-pronged campaigning approach the pan-European parties could maximize their electoral prospects by targeting the largest and smallest member states at the same time. In the mid-sized states, the share of voters that motivated by the issues in the parties respective manifestos may be too small for winning one seat and the number of voters to be won over may be too large. It would therefore make sense for the parties to focus on the largest and smallest member states. However, while this may lead the pan-European parties to win some seats, the drawback in focusing only on the smallest and largest member states is that they could still fall short of winning 3 percent of the vote in at least seven countries (the criteria for Europarty status) or securing the status of European political group by winning at least 25 seats from at least one-quarter of the member states.

Conclusion

While across the continent, the narrative of renationalization of sovereignty is gaining influence, VOLT, DiEM25/European Spring and, to some extent, the En Marche/ALDE alliance look in the opposite direction for solutions to Europe's problems. However, these forces remain marginal and they face substantial obstacles in winning seats in the European Parliament and turning their goals into reality. VOLT and DiEM25/European Spring will most likely struggle to gain seats. The En Marche/ALDE alliance will win seats but it is still unclear whether En Marche will actually join ALDE or forge an entirely new political group. The structural

complexity of DiEM25/European Spring raises a lot of question marks about its sustainability. VOLT may have to decide if its culture is really suited to becoming a broad movement or if it should embrace the fact that it caters to a specific audience of young professionals and pro-Europeans.

Meanwhile, there also signs that nationalist forces are attempting to build a pan-European alliance to push for their vision for the EU.[35] It is unclear whether a pan-European nationalist movement will or can materialize because of the differences in goals and expectations among their leading figures. Nevertheless, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Italy's Matteo Salvini have repeatedly signaled their interest in such a venture.[36] At a meeting of European far-right parties in Milan in April 2019, Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's Lega party, announced the plan to form a new political party group in the next European Parliament. In other words, even Euroskeptic parties are beginning to cooperate more closely on a pan-European and eventually in the European Parliament.[37]

Lack of EU funding is another key problem that pan-European parties, except En Marche/ALDE, face if they want to remain a credible different sort of construct than the Europarties. While Europarties also have only little financial resources, their constituent parties usually rely on substantial donations, membership fees, and state funding. This contributes to their decentralized nature. A new party that primarily exists at the European level could have a hard time ensuring its internal coherence if most of its funding was held and managed by its constituent parts.

Nonetheless, there are also good arguments in favor of these new players. All of the pan-European parties and movements have managed to mobilize substantial support, membership, and/or media attention, either through smart campaigns or cooperation with established actors. They have large numbers of highly motivated volunteers. And they present somewhat new answers to some of Europe's most pressing issues. One key argument in favor of the new pan-European parties is that they may be able to offer a package to counter the tendency of renationalization that has swept across the continent by using similar means at the latter have—cutting across known cleavages, introducing new methods of campaigning, and reaching inactive voters.[38]

34 European Commission, "Women and European Parliamentary Elections: Analytical Report", Flash Eurobarometer 266, The Gallup Organisation, February 2009.

35 Angela Giuffrida, "Italian minister aims to unite European nationalist parties", The Guardian, July 1, 2018.
36 Lorenzo Tondo, "Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orbán to form anti-migration front", The Guardian, August 28, 2018.
37 Maïa de la Baume, "Salvini aims high with populist alliance for Europe", Politico, April 8, 2019.
38 Sheri Berman, "Why identity politics benefits the right more than

Even though the new pan-European parties may not achieve electoral success this time around, they are introducing important new elements to European politics. Their structures, participatory decision-making processes, and internal communication can serve as examples for other parties that are increasingly encountering difficulties in perpetuating their usual methods. Their messages are explicitly pan-European, making it clear that groups of citizens can share interests across borders, and that European elections should be contests about shared European concerns rather than a continuation of national politics in a different arena. This, in turn, helps to more clearly distinguish the role of the European Parliament from that of the Council, which is in charge of representing national interests. Finally, the new pan-European parties entering the electoral arena may also result in the Europarties having to adjust their messaging in order to not seem outdated.

The new pan-European parties, particularly VOLT, are mobilizing young political activists. Young people have been largely uninterested in EU elections recently and whatever strategy motivates them to get more involved should be observed keenly by all other parties. Overall, the new pan-European parties are bringing into European politics the sorely needed democratic innovation that others have either failed or neglected to provide in the past decade.

the left", The Guardian, July 14, 2018.

Annex

Country	Requirements for Founding a Party	Requirements to Run in Elections
Austria*	N/A	Either 1 MEP's, 3 national MPs or 2,600 citizens' signatures.
Belgium	N/A	5,000 signatures from each district (Waloon, Flemish, Brussels), 200 from the German-speaking constituency. Alternatively: 5 MP endorsements from each district where the party intends to run.
Bulgaria	50 citizens with voting rights for preparatory committee, 500 founding members, 2,500 members total.	Deposit, returned only if 2 percent of vote are reached. Candidates required to not hold non-EU citizenship.
Croatia	Missing	5,000 signatures per list
Cyprus	300 signatures from citizens with the right to vote; €2,000 fee.	€600 administrative fee.
Czech Republic	3 members; 1,000 signatures.	Signatures equivalent to 2 percent of valid votes cast in last elections.
Denmark	Signatures equivalent to 1/75th of valid votes cast in last elections.	Deposit of five times the monthly minimum wage for each candidate.
Estonia	1,000 members.	N/A
Finland	Signatures from 5,000 citizens.	Deposit, only reimbursed if electoral threshold is cleared.

Country	Requirements for Founding a Party	Requirements to Run in Elections
France	N/A	4,000 signatures.
Germany	Three people; >50 percent of members Germans.	Deposit of €3,000 per party list, returned if electoral threshold is reached.
Greece	Missing	20,000 signatures from registered voters.
Hungary	N/A	€1,800 deposit, reimbursed only if 1/3 of Droop Quota is reached.
Ireland	Administrative fee.	30,000 signatures, representing at least 10 percent in each region of the separate constituencies.
Italy	Three founders.	Deposit, reimbursed if at least one seat is won.
Latvia	200 founding members.	Deposit of 10 times the average monthly wage per candidate, returned if at least one seat is won.
Lithuania**	2,000 founding members.	250 signatures or from 1 MEP/MP. Possible minimum residence requirements.
Luxemburg	N/A	€90 deposit
Malta	N/A	250 signatures. €11,250 deposit returned only if 0.75*Hare quota is reached.

Country	Requirements for Founding a Party	Requirements to Run in Elections
Netherlands	€450 deposit.	10,000 signatures from registered voters in each constituency.
Poland	15 founders; 1,000 citizens' signatures.	N/A
Portugal	7,500 signatures, 5,000 members.	N/A
Romania	25,000 signatures from at least 18 counties, no less than 7,000 from each.	N/A
Slovakia	10,000 signatures.	€1,200 deposit, returned if at least 2 percent of votes are won.
Slovenia	200 citizens as founding members.	Signatures from 4 national MPs or 1,000 voters.
Spain	3 founders, proof of affiliation from no less than 0.4 percent of the population.	15,000 signatures or from 50 elected representatives.
Sweden	N/A	1,500 signatures.

*Oesterreich.gv.at, "Passive Wahlberechtigung bei Europawahlen, " January 1, 2019.

** Republic of Lithuania, "Law on Political Parties," September 25, 1990.

Source: Jean-Benoit Pilet and Emilie Van Haute, "Criteria, conditions, and procedures for establishing a political party in the Member States of the European Union", European Parliament, October 2012; Wilhelm Lehmann, "The European Elections: EU Legislation, National Provisions and Civic Participation", European Parliament, April 2014.

Note: Incomplete data for Greece and Croatia. N/A means no provisions specified, "missing" indicates incomplete information.

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