Toward EU-wide primary elections?
Political parties at European level and the introduction of candidate selection methods for the Presidency of the European Commission

Work in progress

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Abstract:

Among the various issues pertaining to the upcoming 2014 European elections, the selection of candidates for the office of the European Commission President has only recently attracted attention. This paper theoretically questions such selection processes at the supranational level: it asks how and why political parties at European level have endorsed this particular development in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty. To do so, it focuses in particular on the processes put in place by the Party of European Socialists and the European Green Party. By arguing that candidate selection at European level is largely under-conceptualised, and likely to remain so due to the peculiarities of the EU political and party systems, it sheds light on those elements of candidate selection methods which can be developed for analysing what ought to be the most powerful executive position in the EU political system. It then develops three neo-institutionalist explanations for their introduction. It finds that rational choice, historical and sociological institutionalism can be combined rather than contrasted in explaining the introduction of candidate selection at EU level. In sum, this paper offers a theoretical account of the causes of the introduction of intra-party democracy and more specifically candidate selection methods within political parties at the European level.
Introduction

In modern representative democracies, the linkage between political actors and citizens is being increasingly questioned. Over the past ten to fifteen years, this issue has been addressed through new methods targeted at reshaping political participation; changes in the electoral systems, more widespread consultation procedures (Newton and Geissel, 2012), or initiatives involving deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2002). “Democratic innovations” have also largely entered the sphere of political parties, whereby democratisation has often been used as a synonymous of more inclusive candidate and leader selection methods. Candidate selection, the methods through which political parties choose their candidates for elections, has in particular drawn much scholarly attention, not least because, upstream recruitment for governmental positions is often seen as a major function of political parties in view of the office-seeking aim of political parties (Schattschneider, 1942: 35; Epstein, 1967: 9; LaPalombara, 1974: 509; Janda, 1980: 5). A function from which political parties at European level (hereafter PPELs or Europarties) have up until now been largely excluded: there is no European government to be appointed and it is national parties rather than their European counterparts which control access to ballots for what ought to be considered as non-genuine European elections. In sum, where in general, parties are sought to link people to a government (Sartori, 1976: 25), Europarties constitute a “missing link” (Priestley, 2010). It is therefore of little surprise that candidate selection theorizing has never entered the realm of EU studies.

The upcoming months however represent a major turning point for these structures: on the one hand, a revision of their statutes should be enacted1, and on the other hand, the preparation of the 2014 European elections arguably constitutes an unprecedented opportunity for Europarties. The new institutional process enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty indeed provides for the results of the elections to be taken into account in the designation of the European Commission (EC) President, and that such designation should be followed by its election by the EP2, thus effectively linking EP elections with the designation of the Commission’s President. Prior to this institutional nomination, PPELs have de facto been entrusted with candidate selection3. The Party of European Socialists (PES) and the European Green Party (EGP) have in particular established mechanisms for selecting their respective

candidate(s)\(^4\). This paper precisely ambitious to examine the *rationale* of the emergence of candidate selection in the EU multi-level political system as set by the introduction of such “primaries systems”.

How to understand and conceptualise the emergence of candidate selection by the parties at European level? While explaining the rationale for the introduction of candidate selection in political parties at European level for the office of EC President, this paper questions the selection processes introduced by the Party of European Socialists and the European Green Party by framing them as cases of candidate selection methods (CSM). It argues that there is a number of limitations to the application of the concept, reflecting the specific nature of the EU multi-level governance system and of supranational party politics. It reads CSM as a new rule or “institution” within political parties at European level. Traditional neo-institutionalist explanations of this development are thus tested against the specificities of political parties at European level.

Section I analyses the candidate selection for the EC President office as a development within PPELs. It does so by questioning the application to Europarties of the conceptualisations and frameworks usually associated with CSM, as well as presenting the emergence of CSM within Europarties. After expounding elements of rational choice, historical and sociological institutionalisms to explain the introduction of CSM within political parties at large, section II applies this neo-institutionalist framework to CSM in Europarties, before a few concluding remarks are drawn.

I. Candidate selection within political parties at European level: a contradiction in terms?

The argument developed in this section is that candidate selection at European level portrays a non-conceptualised interface between on the one hand analyses of candidate selection within political parties at national level and on the other hand under-developed political parties at European level. Conceptual and methodological challenges therefore emerge from the applicability to the EU level of the literature on candidate selection in terms of definitions and typologies. Their appropriateness to grasp the specificities of the in-between nature of the EU party and political systems should be thoroughly questioned. In this section, this paper thus attempts to reconceptualise CS at EU level as a development of Europarties.

Candidate selection methods within political parties: why do they matter?

While electoral competition lies at the crux of any definition of pluralist democracy, making up an essential democratic requirement, researchers have tended to focus on inter-party democracy, i.e. general elections, leaving aside the other arena of electoral competition: that of intra-party (Alvarez and Sinclair, 2012). Intra-party democracy encompasses various mechanisms designed to include party members in the deliberation and decision-making taking place within the party (Scarrow, 2005: 3; Scarrow, 1999; LeDuc, Niemi and Norris, 2002). Among them, candidate selection designates the methods through which political parties choose their candidates for elections; as such, it represents an often largely unregulated and unstable institutional element of party recruitment (Rahat and Hazan, 2001; 2010). Changes toward an opening-up of candidate selection methods can thus be associated with “democratic innovations” within political parties.

Typologies of candidate selection methods have been elaborated. Studies on candidate selection procedures raise and combine two questions: at which level within the party (territorial dimension), and through which method within the party (exclusion-inclusion dimension) the electoral lists are drawn-up. Rahat and Hazan have in particular established a classification based on four factors: candidacy, the selectorate, decentralization, and appointment v. voting systems (Rahat and Hazan, 2001). Yet, among the various methods of democratic innovation within political parties which can be associated with these factors, it is the inclusiveness of the selectorate that has been granted most attention in the literature (Le Duc, 2001; Rahat and Hazan, 2007). In fact, the inclusiveness and size of the selectorate constitutes the main variable of most studies focusing on the designation of party candidates (Obler, 1974; Gerber and Morton, 1998; Katz, 2001; Hopkin, 2001; Le Duc, 2001; Rahat, Hazan and Katz, 2008). This arguably reflects the idea that (leader and) candidate selection confers a central role in the functioning of the parties to the actors involved (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Marsh, 1993). In this view, primary elections are largely considered as the most inclusive method (Cross and Blais, 2012; Rahat and Hazan, 2007). Although definitions and meanings of primaries vary (with different systems including open, semi-open, closed, semi-closed, ‘blanket’ primaries, caucuses), it can be broadly defined as an organised competition among aspiring candidates within the same party culminating in a democratic vote. In short and for the purpose of this research, it designates an opening-up of the selection process to party members (‘one member, one vote’, ‘party primaries’ or ‘closed’ primaries) or eventually all voters (‘non-party’ or ‘open’ primaries). Indeed, votes of party members for candidate selection has constituted one of the main focuses of the literature during the 1990s and early 2000s, some authors acknowledging “an era of candidates’ centred campaigns” (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2006: 7) which clearly points at the issue of personalisation of politics.

The literature generally considers candidate selection as institutional mechanisms which, on the one hand echo the nature of the parties (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). The evolution of the parties brings
organisational changes including changes in institutional mechanisms such as candidate selection methods.

“The study of candidate selection can therefore help us understand the dynamics of party organization. For example, the evolution of parties from elite to mass to catch-all influenced how the party organized its selection of candidates” (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 10).

On the other hand, candidate selection affects party politics. McElroy highlights in particular that types of electoral systems used to select candidates are a crucial, yet neglected aspect of candidates’ nomination (McElroy, 2011: 1314). In the same vein,

“A researcher who wishes to compare the candidate selection methods within his or her own country will need months of fieldwork and access to data that is either not public or perhaps even unavailable. [...] It is still appropriate to describe candidate selection as one of the less discussed mysteries that make up the system of democratic government” (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 7).

In an attempt to analyse the consequences for the political system of CSM, Rahat and Hazan have put forward four dimensions: participation, competition, representation, and responsiveness (Rahat and Hazan, 2001; 2010; Rahat, Hazan and Katz, 2008). These indeed correspond to important dimensions of democracy (Rahat and Hazan, 2010).

The introduction or change of candidate selection method (CSM) has been extensively researched in the United States context, most notably including the development of primary elections (Ranney, 1972; Norrander, 1989; Palmer, 1997; Gerber and Morton, 1998; Ware, 2002; Cohen et al., 2008). Besides this abundant literature, increased scientific interest has also been drawn to primaries in Latin America (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich, 2006), with specific case studies such as Uruguay (Altman, 2012). In spite of the increasing number of primaries in Europe, analyses of their implementations are still limited (Heidar and Saglie, 2003; Dolez and Laurent, 2007; Lisi, 2009; Wauters, 2010; De Luca and Venturino, 2010; Lefèbvre, 2011). As Hopkin persuasively argues, the logic of primary elections may not be directly applicable to Western European political parties (Hopkin, 2001).

Current state of play for candidate selection in political parties at European level: operating in a vacuum?

This sub-section studies the specificities of political parties at European level in view of the above-mentioned elements attributed to candidate selection methods. It questions how political parties adapt to the institutional nature of the EU and in particular accommodate (or not) candidate selection. At the EU level, given the largely acknowledged multi-level nature of governance, the linkage problem between the political system and citizens is manifold. This situation concentrates criticisms of ‘democratic deficit’, which has given rise to a scholarly debate (Majone, 2000; 2002; Moravcsik, 1998; 2002; Follesdal and Hix, 2006). Against this background, political parties at European level are being pointed out as “the missing link” (Priestley, 2010), in contrast with the generally accepted view
that “parties link people to a government” (Sartori, 1976: 25), or play a specific role as intermediates between the civil society and the governance system (Lord, 2002).

Despite their formal recognition by the Treaty of Maastricht, and current attempts to modify their statute, political parties at European level largely challenge classical understandings of parties, in particular through the role of their members and the functions assumed (see for instance: Delwit et al., 2004). Starting with the latter, political parties at European level do not fulfil any of the functions generally attributed to their national counterparts and that are of relevance to candidate selection issues. First, European parties do not assume the function of social integration of individuals, the link between these parties and voters being distant, and the aggregation and satisfaction of social demands realised by multiple actors in the multi-level governance system. Second, in the absence of a government per se, there is essentially no coordination or control of governmental organs. Third, since the selection of European elites is made by national parties not European ones, they do not retain much influence in the recruitment of governmental positions. Indeed, while recruiting candidates for public office is often considered a central function of political parties and heavily politicised at the national level (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Norris and Carty, 1990; Marsh, 1993), at the EU level this function is not fulfilled by European parties but national ones. Although recruitment for public office in the EU in manifold, there is only one set of direct elections at the EU level (those for EP elections, often designated as the European elections), for which PPELs do not select candidates. National parties not only generally organise European election campaigns, but also control access to ballots (McElroy and Benoit, 2006).

In addition, while candidate selection at the national level questions the role of members within political parties, PPELs’ members are not individuals but national member parties and sectoral organisations. A such, although a ‘struggle’ between the different ‘faces’ of the parties (Katz and Mair, 1993) can be identified within Europarties, the ‘party on the ground’ is based on a specific form of membership.

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6 Although individual affiliation is possible in some of the parties, only very few activists are affiliated and they have little representation in the organs of the parties.
Arguably, national member parties are the most powerful amongst the three components. Europarties have even been analysed as conglomerates of national parties (van Gerven, 2005: 373), underlining the influence of the national level on any transnational process. This predominance can also however be interpreted as “the most powerful obstacle to the development of genuine Europarties” (Bardi, 1994), when considering the heterogeneity of conceptions and interests of the members and when taking into account the non-personification of the political offer during European elections (Magnette, 2003: 220-227). According to the ‘second-order national elections’ hypothesis (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), EP elections are marked by an absence of genuine European parties together with a lack of personification of the electoral offer. They are also are remote from EU policy issues and fought on national grounds, often acting as mid-term national elections. This expounds essential weaknesses of PPELs (Fabbrini, 2011; 2013) and the leading role of the national parties. Furthermore, many of the characteristics of the parties at European level reflect the nature of the EU polity, leading some author to conclude that EU institutional setting prohibits the development of PPELs (Magnette, 2003). The political system is based more on consensus and fragmentation of issues than on competition between partisan ideologies (Lord, 2002). In contrast to other political systems, the adaptation of parties “may be driven by competition for office or legislation influence, rather than directly for citizens’ votes” (Lord, 2010: 8). Thus, despite national political parties still constituting the organisational basis of politics at the European level, competing models of PPELs’ development have been expounded. Aside from a development based on sovereignty transfer from national political parties (Niedermayer, 1983) – or often an under-development (Lord, 2002), authors have come to study the development of their parliamentary bases (Bardi, 1994). Indeed, party politics at the EU level has been largely analysed through the lenses of comparative politics in studies about the European Parliament (EP). This applies...
to studies of EP organisation and MEPs voting behaviour, including party groups and their cohesion (Kreppel, 2002), the political space (mostly in terms of its pro-/anti-integration and left-right dimensions) (Hix, 2001; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006), voting coalitions (Kreppel and Hix 2003; Hix, Kreppel and Noury, 2003). To the same extent, issues of political representation, elections and campaigns cannot overlook the EP. As Priestley convincingly argues, PPELs are largely subjected to their corresponding EP groups both in terms of their organisation and party politics (Priestley, 2010). Because of this ascendency of the ‘party in public office’, which have become central to the functioning of the party, PPELs are sometimes described as quintessential of cartel parties (Calossi, 2012). As it has been argued previously, organisational changes within parties including changes in institutional mechanism such as candidate selection methods reflect an evolution of the party model and hereby a shift in the conception of democracy.

“In the less ideological era of the catch-all party, Kirchheimer (1966: 198) concluded that “the nomination of candidates for popular legitimation as office holders thus emerges as the most important function of the present-day catch-all party”. This claim seems to be even stronger when related to the cartel party.” (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: ?).

Backed up by concerns regarding the alleged “democratic deficit”, cartel parties such as PPELs should bring about an opening-up of CSM. But this has never occurred prior to 2014, leading Lord to argue that the “aggregation of the choices of policies” makes up the main contribution to EU democracy by parties, while the “aggregation of choices of leaders” remains underdeveloped (Lord, 2010: 25). Building on the main critiques addressed to the EU political system within the “democratic deficit” debate, authors have put forward solutions to foster electoral contestation (Follesdal and Hix, 2006: 554; Hix, 2008; Lord, 2002) sometimes upholding a parliamentarisation process (Fabbrini, 2013). They often expressly and specifically point out to the office of Commission President: the position and its link with Europarties often constitute the cornerstone of the argumentation (Follesdal and Hix, 2006: 554; Hix, 2008; Fabbrini, 2011).

In addition, despite the framework introduced by Rahat and Hazan distinguishing four dimensions of CSM democratisation (Hazan and Rahat, 2001), studies often concentrate on the level of inclusiveness of the selectorate (Le Duc, 2001; Rahat and Hazan, 2007), since candidate and leader selection confer crucial powers within the party to the actor involved (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Marsh 1993; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Although the selectorate deserves specific attention given the role of national parties as ‘members’ of Europarties, other dimensions appear as equally challenging in the case of PPELs, including among others: candidacy -who can stand as a candidate? Are there restrictions affecting the potential candidate pool?-; centralisation -at which level are the candidates selected? -; voting v. appointment procedure -how are candidates nominated?-). The introduction rather than mere reform of the selection systems entails a much broader perspective and a questioning of different dimensions of the process.
The link between intra-party democracy and democratic representation is not straightforward (Pennings and Hazan, 2001). Yet, given the key-role played by political parties in democracies, their developments within the supranational integration process cannot be overlooked if one wants to grasp the width of democratic innovation in Europe. The EU remains in essence an incomplete political system without true parties. This paper has argued so far that the main conceptualisations of candidate selection methods imperfectly match the function and role of members of political parties at European level. Against this background, the introduction of candidate selection as a potential development within what remain otherwise under-developed PPELs should be thoroughly theoretically questioned. As a result, candidate selection at European level is largely under-conceptualised, and likely to remain so due to the peculiarities of the EU political and party systems.

Light has to be shed on those elements of candidate selection methods which can be developed for analysing what ought to be the most powerful executive position in the EU political system. The introduction of candidate selection as a development within what remain otherwise under-developed PPELs should be thoroughly theoretically and empirically questioned.

The 2014 European elections and the selection of candidates for the European Commission Presidency

This sub-section analyses the processes initiated within Europarties for designating candidates to the Presidency of the European Commission. As such, it highlights the main mechanisms of one particular development of PPELs: the introduction of CSM.

A first note should be made on the institutional designation mode of the President. The mechanism has significantly evolved from the Treaty of Nice to the Treaty of Lisbon, with a greater involvement of the EP.

“The Council, meeting in the composition of Heads of State or Government and acting by a qualified majority, shall nominate the person it intends to appoint as President of the Commission; the nomination shall be approved by the European Parliament. […] The President and the other Members of the Commission thus nominated shall be subject as a body to a vote of approval by the European Parliament. After approval by the European Parliament, the President and the other Members of the Commission shall be appointed by the Council, acting by a qualified majority.” (Treaty of Nice, Art.214(2)).

“Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who
shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure.” (Treaty of Lisbon, TEU, Art.17(7))

The main change thus concerns an increase in the appointment powers of the EP over the Council (from “approval” to “election”). Interpretations of the provisions have been subject to increased controversies. In particular, the nature of the “account” of the EP election results seems to indicate an aggregate result in terms of seats, which could be problematic at disaggregated level for certain head of governments. One could also argue that there will be no subsequent election by the EP in the sense that there will be no electoral competition between several candidates following the EP elections, given that the European Council will propose only one candidate (the election is thus not intrinsically different from a confirmation or an appointment). Thus, unlike primaries and alternative selection methods in national parties across Europe and beyond, the selection of candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission by political parties at European level will not be followed by elections. This absence of subsequent election (neither are the candidates obliged to run for MEPs positions nor is there a true election by the EP) questions the nature of the selection and situates it in-between candidate selection and leader selection (in the sense of the selected ‘leader’ will eventually but not necessarily be occupying a position depending on results in another election). The parties however seem to insist on the ‘candidate’ dimension (the PES Resolution entitled “Selecting our common candidate”, while the EGP mentions more cautiously “leading candidates”, which could serve as both leaders or candidates).

Prior to the institutional nomination, the link between the Commission and the EP is thus pursued through the processes of candidate selection. Although the idea to link EP elections with the designation of the Commission’s President is not new, it is not expressly mentioned. In 2004, The European Green Party as the first party to run a pan-European political campaign nominated Daniel Cohn-Bendit as its candidate. In 2009 however none of the parties did put forward a candidate as Barroso was seeking reappointment (and even secured support of some socialist parties). In a resolution of 2012, the European Parliament (EP), quickly followed by a recommendation from the European Commission (EC), asserted the role of PPELs in the selection of the candidates for the EC Presidency. Although the European People’s Party (EPP) did react to the proposition, only two parties have established a concrete selection method: the Party of European Socialists (PES) with a

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7 European Union, Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, Article 17(7), OJEU C 83, 30.3.2010.
8 For instance, there is no national political party in the UK affiliated to the EPP, so in case of an overall victory of the EPP in terms of EP seats and a nomination of an EPP Commission President, this would marginalised UK national electoral results. Notwithstanding that the protest nature of EP elections is likely to go against the will of ruling governments which head of states or government are present in the European Council.
new mechanism in 2011\textsuperscript{11} and the European Green Party with a procedure announced during its Madrid Congress of May 2013.

The Party of European Socialists’ project constitutes the very first concrete initiative to introduce candidate selection within political parties at European level. Based on the proposition of the PES Working Group ‘Candidate2014’ headed by Ruairi Quinn, the resolution ‘Selecting our common candidate in 2014’ enshrines the decision-making process, as follows: an internal decision-making methodology decided independently by each delegation (delegation mainly consisting of member parties and organisations), while based on a proportionality of votes within each delegation and the weighting of the votes of the various delegations. Although the resolution uses a number of concepts related to intra-party democracy such as the personalisation of politics or the issue of inclusiveness, the process is in fact marked by the assumption of a lack of direct or individual (membership) ballot. The weighing system (no ‘OMOV’) also calls into question the equality of rights among party members (a crucial aspect of internal democracy according to Faucher-King, 2007: 108). As such, the mechanism reflects the argument of the absence of straightforward democratisation through voting (Faucher-King, 2008: 138). With regard to the literature on CSM, the interpretation which therefore stands out would qualify it as a system of primaries, largely mirroring the US system of presidential primaries, where results of individual states are weighted and aggregated. As such, it does constitute the very first concrete initiative to introduce ‘primary elections’ at the EU level.

In the realm of their third common campaign, the European Greens through the EGP Committee have elaborated a mechanism which has been discussed within the ‘Campaign Working Group’ (although national delegations in the EP having expressed strong reservations on several aspects). Two “leading candidates” will be selected through an online primary open to all European citizens over 16 years old endorsing green values, after candidates secure the support of four Green member parties (it is unclear if participants to the primary will be given one or two votes, but the main proposal suggested one vote). The specificity of this process lies in the fact that one candidate will necessarily be a woman, irrespective whether she is among the top two candidates. Besides, the Green candidates are never mentioned as candidates for the Presidency but rather as leaders for the campaign, due to the party’s limited chance of winning the EP elections (in fact, an internal document of the EGP even mentions that: “Commission president candidate: The Committee confirms its’ earlier decision that we will deal with that if the occasion arises”).

The literature on candidates’ selection and on democratic innovations has raised issues of democratisation mainly in national contexts so far. In view of the two distinct mechanisms introduced

by the EGP and PES, as well as the absence of such mechanism in other PPELs, the next section explores the reasons behind these developments. The analysis is presented under the light of theoretical arguments and empirical evidences of the introduction of candidate selection for the Commission Presidency.

II. The introduction of primary elections: a ‘new institutionalist’ framework

In its first section, this paper has established that despite strong conceptual limitations, it is nevertheless relevant to analyse candidate selection in Europarties in an attempt to bridge the existing gap in the literature between candidate selection at national level and political parties at European level. This section draws on the new institutionalisms to explain institutional change. Neo-institutionalism asks two questions which are central to the discussion of the introduction of candidate selection: How to explain the process by which institutions are created or modified (causes)? And how to build the relation between institutions and individual behaviours (consequences)? This section focuses on the former by investigating the reforms of candidate selection in political parties in general and the creation and developments of these institutional mechanisms within Europarties. It proposes three alternative sets of contrasting but not necessarily competing explanations.

The three new institutionalisms: explaining institutional change

The emergence of the new institutionalisms in the 1980s corresponds to the focus being directed at what will become one of the essential issues in political science: how can one explain stability or change? This paper contributes to the lively debate among those who argue that institutions matter but disagree on how and to what extent they do. In sum, the three new institutionalisms correspond to different dynamics of institutional change by asking how much importance should be attributed to the individual and institutional context, or to the larger environmental factors such as culture or social norms. In fact, institutions are often seen as constraints, leading most studies to deal with stability mechanisms rather than change as further detailed by Freidenvall and Krook (2007: 8). Political institutions especially seal individuals’ preferences and interests which allow making expectations on behaviours (Pierson, 2000). This does not however preclude institutional change. According to the historical perspective (HI), institutions are created in times of crisis: “critical junctures” emerge unpredictably, pushing actors to take decisions as to the features and content of change (Collier and Collier 1991; Mahoney 2000). But apart from these turning points, reproduction is insured through a ‘path dependence’ dynamic which confines changes to a given line and prevents other options (North,

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12 We follow the distinction made by Hall and Taylor who identify three main analytical methods: historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, leaving aside other possible school of thoughts (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Although discursive institutionalism constitutes a welcome attempt to reconcile these approaches (see in particular: Freidenvall and Krook, 2007), notably questioning the transmission and translation of discourses, it remains out of the scope of this paper.
1990; Aminzade, 1992; Pierson, 2000; Tilly, 2001). Yet, historical institutionalists themselves have increasingly come to question the distinction between the times of changes and those of reproduction, by acknowledging that incremental changes occur when institutions persist (Pierson, 2004; 153). Along these functionalist lines and hence sharing some of the assumptions of HI, rational choice institutionalism (RCI) sees institutions as organically evolving or being designed through endogenous mechanisms: there is an evolution of the institutional set-up following its inability to deliver or respond to the preferences and interests of the individuals (Greif and Laitin, 2004; 640). In brief, it mainly consists in an institutional transformation according to new aims, and thus following a “logic of consequentiality”. Although eventually sharing this gradualist assumption, sociological institutionalism (SI) has developed in an essentially different research direction than the two above-mentioned perspectives. In the wake of constructivism, SI views actors as driven by a “bounded rationality” following a “logic of appropriateness”, set in specific institutional arenas:

“Rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions.” (March and Olsen, 2004: 2)

While March and Olsen (1984; 1989) analyse the reinstatement of institutions under different definitions, Hall and Taylor (1996) compare the three NI and argue for a rapprochement.

**Candidate selection: a new institutionalist perspective**

“It remains puzzling that the large production of papers under the ‘new institutionalism’ […] did not see a systematic study of important institutions such as primary elections” (Serra, 2005)

Behaviouralism has long dominated analyses of political recruitment processes, notably centred on the relation between elites and masses (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 5). Along this behavioural line, the literature first considered candidate selection as an institutional component of recruitment serving political aims and reflecting societal values (Czudnowski, 1975, cited in Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 5). The advent of neo-institutionalism allowed authors to set the importance of candidate selection as an institution, which together with other institutional and non-institutional elements delineate recruitment processes (Norris, 1997). Analyses have increasingly come to recognise the qualitative and quantitative impact of CS, as an independent variable, on the political systems (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988). But since this paper questions the introduction of institutions, a broader perspective is used, centred on the assumption that institutions matter. If analysing the introduction of candidate selection as “institutions” allows drawing on both questions central to the neo-institutionalist framework (How to explain the process of institutional creation and development? How to construct the relationship between institutions and behaviours? (Hall & Taylor, 1996)), the focus is directed here toward the former. If it often goes without saying in the study of political parties that rules of any kind serve to
constrain possible outcomes and thereby shape the behaviour of actors (be it candidates, parties’ leaders or voters), how is this anticipated (or not) at the time of institutional creation?

Why introducing primaries? The causes of changes of CSM often identified in the literature revolve around the weakening role of the party (Hazan and Pennings, 2001). Internally, dropping membership rates and financial problems arguably hampers the recruitment of candidates. Externally, the growing number of floating voters leads to the vulnerability of party elites. All in all, the absence of a stable electoral basis points to the need of new methods to regain popularity and votes in elections. CSM is thus viewed as an attempt to strengthen the sense of involvement of both members and voters. Barnea and Rahat propose a framework for analysing reforms of CSM (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). They nevertheless maintain that CSM are usually more preserved than reformed, much in line with other explanations of stability and change (Roberts, 2013). In this paper, both change and introduction of CSM by political parties are considered as reform. The merit of Barnea and Rahat’s classification mainly lies in the refining of this general pattern along three levels: that of the political system, party system and intra-party organisation. Although acknowledging that candidate selection is above all an intra-party affair on which parties retain much autonomy (Barnea and Rahat, 2007), it encompasses relevant factors at these different levels. By arguing that the political and party systems both constitute a constraining environment and determine anticipated costs and benefits of each decision taken by the party, it calls for a neo-institutional reading of the introduction of CSM. As such, three distinct hypotheses can be formulated to explain the patterns of institutional creation and development, before testing them against candidate selection at European level. First, candidate selection methods can be seen as efficient solutions for the political parties introducing or changing them (RCI). Second, the introduction or changes in CSM are less the results of present interests than of earlier decisions whose consequences now constrain political parties’ actors (HI). Last but not least, different CSM reflect exogenously constructed social norms (SI).

a) Rational choice institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction and change

An initial hypothesis could hold that the introduction or change of CSM reflects the goal-seeking behaviour of the political parties which expounded them. Although very limited literature focuses on the causes of the introduction of candidate selection in general and primary elections in particular, the following paragraphs argue that the existence of institutions is best explained in reference to the value its functions have for actors (that is, the benefits actors gained from the existence of the institution), and conversely failed to develop when parties had nothing to gain. Accordingly, CSM would have been developed only when (national) parties benefit from them. Barnea and Rahat see the decisions on reform of candidate selection as being led by individual politicians or party activists according to a calculated perception of its value for the party as a whole and his/her own position within it (Barnea
and Rahat, 2007), with events described at the political and party systems levels as simply creating window of opportunities. The intra-party arena is hence circumscribed to an RCI account of CSM reform. This account is however declined in several factors. Yet, specific motives and constraints have to be explored to give substance to this goal-seeking hypothesis.

First, decisions on reform of CSM usually occur within wider party agencies such as conventions or central committees. Coalitions of intra-party actors within these agencies defend different interests and perceptions with respect to the power balance within the intra-party arena. Such accounts of CSM are largely present in the literature concerning the introduction of American primaries. Studying the origins of direct primaries in Northern US States, Alan Ware offered an explanation of their introduction as a formalisation of previously informal rules (Ware, 2002). From the late 1880s onwards, based on the observation that changes in the caucus and conventions systems proved impossible or at least ineffective, institutionalisation has been promoted by party elites.

The second argument - still based on a calculating perspective - argues that the party in government (especially the leader) and his allies may initiate democratisation in order to achieve autonomy in decision-making. Amorphous or atomistic party members, the argument goes, would less restrain the “party in public office” than ideologically-oriented activists (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). This interpretation largely amounts to the “logic of consequentiality”: since institutional designs structure the strategic interaction of political actors and as such influence the political payoffs, the choice between alternative institutional designs (including candidate selection processes) bears important political consequences (whether intentional or unintended) for the parties (Roberts, 2013) both in terms of representation and responsiveness. Any change in the formal rules might affect the behaviour of political actors at elite and mass levels (Norris, 2004). More precisely, the behaviour of individual politicians must be affected by the nature of the selection method (Rahat and Hazan, 2001). In their study of the introduction of blanket primaries in the US State of California, Cain and Gerber contend that “rules and institutional structures matter because they determine the incentives and opportunities that voters and candidates face. Change the rules, and the incentives and opportunities should change as well” (Cain and Gerber, 2002: 3). In a study of primaries in the United States, Gerber and Morton found that closed primaries lead to representatives taking policy positions furthest from their district’s median voter’s ideal position, compared to semi-closed primaries where representatives are more moderate (Gerber and Morton, 1998).

Along the same line of thoughts, the authors of the framework distinguish a situation whereby the leadership contest is intense and groups pose challenges to the existing power distribution. Reforming CSM can alter the balance of power and serve the interests of contenders (beforehand) or new leaders (afterwards) within the party. This argument can be interpreted as the internal face of the previous one:
CSM is used by the “party in central office” as a means to achieve autonomy and redistribute power within party structures. More inclusive processes of leader and candidate selections have therefore sometimes been presented as the panacea for restoring their organisational dynamics (Seddonne and Sandri, 2012): candidate selection rules can influence the legitimacy of parties, their internal cohesion, but also their bonds to grass-root constituencies (Siavelis, 2002: 436-437; Langston, 2003). Principal-agent models would further contribute to the view that parties might delegate some power to members or even supporters in an attempt to consolidate their own or the party’s position. For Pennings and Hazan, at party level, the opening-up of the selection of candidates results in a strengthened role of party elites, as on the one hand, parties monitor who is selected, and on the other hand, opening-up the selection to party ordinary members or even voters by-passes middle-ground activists (Pennings and Hazan, 2001), much in line with the “cartel party” model (Katz and Mair, 1995; 2009), in which professionalisation has led the party in public office to take over the organisational role of mass membership. Yet, an alternative explanation would see candidates directly mobilising supporters at the expense of parties and parties’ leaders (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 9). Through this increasing independence of candidates from party and party leadership and a personalisation, the candidates’ views and preferences outrun the program of the party (Pennings and Hazan, 2001). Radical forms of democratisation of candidates’ selection might thus lead to a decrease of party cohesiveness, and hence weaken the quality of representative democracy (Pennings and Hazan, 2001), while more moderate forms are supposed to foster beneficial effects on party organisation (notably through higher membership rates). Studying the presidential nomination process in the US, Smith and Springer underline that primaries have replaced caucuses and conventions as the major system for the selection of delegates, which corresponds to a lack of control of national parties over the nomination process as well as a phenomenon of personalisation (Smith and Springer, 2009). Conversely, retaining control over candidate selection by the party leadership leads to stronger and more disciplined national party organisations which in turn have proved to lead to stronger programmatic grounds to appeal to voters (Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997: 420-422). As such, the ability of parties to comprehend and overcome the consequences of democratising candidate selection is crucial (Pennings and Hazan, 2001).

b) Historical institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction and change

Other explanations of the introduction or changes in CSM could build on a longer-term perspective, arguing that the behaviour of the actors is affected by earlier decisions. Such path-dependent account suggests that change is made in relation to the legacy of past events, but does not repeal rationality as it still builds on a transaction-cost analysis at critical junctures (Pierson, 1997). As such, institutional developments constitute an answer to collective action dilemmas and represent the structuring factor of collective behaviours. At the party system level, a number of typical events can be interpreted as catalysts, influencing the timing of reform.
A change in CSM would allow parties to demonstrate a popular reformist commitment in the absence of (or failed attempts at) reforming the electoral system itself, and thus set an example. Based on the Israeli example, the exposure of corruption scandals or demonstration of extremely opportunistic behaviour can also pave the way for the promotion of a more open, democratic and transparent system (Barnea et Rahat, 2007).

Perhaps more persuasive is the electoral explanation: the idea that parties open-up their selection process following an electoral defeat so as to reconstruct their image and regain future electoral success, in the context of an improved competitiveness of the party system (Barnea et Rahat, 2007). This perspective also seems relevant to explain the introduction and/or opening-up of CSM as an incentive to modify the role of members in view of the decreasing membership. The timing of these changes is crucial because it corresponds to a modification of the role of political parties. The loss of members and votes represent timely institutional constraints (Pennings and Hazan, 2001). Other constraints might also include national laws (Pennings and Hazan, 2001).

Finally, the inter-party level allows for parties to imitate their counterparts, pointing at the experience of some parties as affecting others. This interpretation concerns the spread of CSM across party systems. A simple observation is that while originating from the United States, where they have been held since 1904, primary elections have spread to a number of Latin American and European parties, at national and local levels.

Table 1: Primary elections in selected European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Date - type of election or position</th>
<th>Type of primary</th>
<th>Other specifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>sp.a</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>ΕΔΕΚ</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>UMP</td>
<td>2007 - presidential election *</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>One candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS (+ Parti Radical de Gauche)</td>
<td>1995 &amp; 2007 - presidential elections + local and legislative elections</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2012 - presidential election</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>PASOK/ΠΑΣΟΚ</td>
<td>2004 &amp; 2007 - internal party election</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>2004: One candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Democratic Party (PD) (+ centre-left)</td>
<td>Since 2005 – internal party election / designation of candidates for Prime Minister</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Enshrined in the PD’s statuses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Internal polls were also organised to designate UMP candidates for local ballots such as for the 2008 and 2014 municipal elections in Paris or the 2010 regional election in Île-de-France.

** 1) Party members; 2) Labour members of Parliament and of the European Parliament; 3) Members of affiliated organisations such as trade unions - each accounting for one third of the votes.

c) Sociological institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction and change

In contrast with the above-mentioned rationalist explanations of their introduction and changes in political parties, CSM can also be analysed as a social construct. In line with the sociological institutionalism developed by March and Olsen (1984; 1989; 1995), the compliance with exogenously constructed social norms and roles over unilateral endogenous interests, following a “logic of appropriateness” ought to be accounted for. Individuals are locked in organisational and cultural field or sectors, and it is them which determine preferences and interests. At the political system level, a trend toward democratisation of CSM in established democracies during a period running from the 1960s to the 1990s has been identified by several authors (Bille, 2001; Scarrow and al., 2000).

The creation and developments of institutions is attributed to the legitimacy credentials attributed to them in a given context. In this context, a largely shared meaning of “appropriateness” when dealing with candidate selection is that of openness and democratisation. Democratisation can thus first reflect social developments: the liberalisation and personalisation of politics, together with the decrease of ideology and party identification (Barnea and Rahat, 2007: 382). Under such explanatory pattern, CSM would change as an adaptation to a changing political environment (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Katz and Mair, 1995) and changing electoral market (Mair et al., 2004). Such cultural perspective would see reform as an Americanisation of CSM, as shown in the case of Israel (Aronoff, 2000; Goldberg, 1994).

Second, another explanatory factor points at CSM reform as a compensation for the intensely partisan character of a given electoral system (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). Although the above-mentioned definitions of an appropriate behaviour may rely on vague conceptions, they might be useful when consequences cannot be calculated (Lord, 2002). In terms of uncalculated consequences, the gains often foreseen in rational-choice analyses of choices of CSM might not exist. Indeed, paradoxical conclusions on the consequences of the opening-up of the selection’s method for candidate’s selection have been drawn: benefits in terms of electoral gains and party image display mixed pictures (Peterson and Djupe, 2005; Bruhn, 2012). For instance, in the US, the divisive primary hypothesis asserts that
the more divisive the presidential primary contest is compared to that of the other party, the fewer votes are received in the general election (Atkeson, 1998).

Third, CS democratisation can be interpreted as an element in the overall evolution of the parties’ organisational structure. It allows leaders to effectively free themselves from the pressures of party activists. Besides, in times of economic and social developments freeing citizens from their dependency on parties (Pennings and Hazan, 2001: 1-2), and indeed marked by decreased membership rates, democratisation constitutes an attempt to bring members back in by giving them power in CS.

The following section builds on these various theoretical explanations to analyse the introduction of primary elections in Europarties.

\textit{Candidate selection as a development within Europarties: the neo-institutionalist key}

This section presents explanations of the introduction of candidate selection at European level, considering such introduction as an institutional development within Europarties. Each sub-section introduces one set of explanation that has been previously applied to CSM change in political parties at national level. They attempt to bridge the gap between explanations of changes in candidate selection at national level and explanations of developments of the Europarties by applying this neo-institutionalist framework to the introduction of primaries in Europarties. It should be noted that, while in traditional political parties a reform of CSM consists in the replacement of a pre-existing selection method (and as it is often assumed, toward democratisation of such CSM), such is not the case within PPELs where no selection system pre-existed.

a) Rational choice institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction in Europarties

Rational choice institutionalism builds on the principal-agent theory to encompass models in which member states calculate their interests mainly based on the reduction of transaction costs. Rational choice accounts in EU studies, whether seeking to understand the process of European integration through international relation theories or EU politics through comparative approaches, have argued that EU institutions (and above all the Commission) constitute the product of conscious member states design, witnessed in particular by the presence of control mechanisms (see for instance: Franchino, 2001; Pollack, 2003; 2005). Translated into the Europarty institutional structure, principal-agent models would consider national member parties as principals and PPELs as agents (Hanley, 2008; Külahci, 2010). Although only few analyses of Europarties draw from RCI, Lord furthermore summarises transaction-costs accounts of parties in EU politics: the underdevelopment of PPELs derives from the interests of national political parties which compose them (Lord, 2002). National
parties might adopt policy orientations of PPELs in order to avoid duplicating their investments, leading them to detain policy leadership of PPELs (Lord, 2002). As such, the optimising behaviour of the parties would explain the evolution of the transnational parties, including changes in their institutional mechanisms such as candidate selection.

Barnea and Rahat’s argument at the intra-party level considers the decisions on reform of candidate selection as being led by politicians or activists according to a calculated perception of its value. Within Europarties, this points to the issue of power balance, and especially at the role of national member parties. First, what were the coalitions of intra-party actors within the party agencies that have decided on reform and what were their interests and perceptions regarding the power balance within the Europarty? The PES and EGP both set up working groups to elaborate the selection system. Although in the PES, the dominating role of national political parties is largely reflected in the nomination and selection processes through the aggregation and weighing system, this is less the case in the EGP open primary system (although national parties play a role in the nomination beforehand, where potential candidates have to be endorsed by four Green parties to stand as candidate in the primary contest). The EGP process also arguably enhances the role of the EP group: the process is more centred on the leading of the EP elections campaign than the actual Presidential office, and as such it seems to encourage MEPs to run. Against this background, because it resembles a leader selection process, the CSM sheds light on the party in public and central office.

The second interpretation according to which in a calculating perspective, the party in government (especially the leader) and his allies may initiate democratisation in order to achieve autonomy in decision-making may better apply to the EGP case. Internally, analysing the reorganisation and redistribution of power entailed by a change of CSM questions the predominance of member parties within the PPELs (Bardi, 1994; Joksic, 2009), which can be considered as the “party on the ground” (Katz & Mair, 1993; Calossi, 2012). Democratisation of CS usually amounts to a strengthening of the role of party elites in the selection of candidates (as parties monitor who is selected through the rules and nomination process). But elites in PPELs come from national political parties. Opening up to party ordinary members or even sympathisers as it is the case in the EGP is seen as by-passing middle-ground activists, which can be associated here with member parties. Indeed, the EGP is the only party to run a common campaign for EP elections since 2004 (in contrast to campaigns being run and controlled by national member parties in other PPELs). As a result, entrusting EGP voters with candidate selection seems to restrain national parties which ideological difference are sometimes difficult to accommodate. Although the Green/EFA group presents the highest degree of voting cohesion, the domination of the two larger national delegations (the German and French ones) has largely revitalised the Fundi/Realo controversy (Rüdig 1990; Doherty 1992; Poguntke 1993; Frankland 1995; O’Neill 1997).
Along the same line of thoughts, an internal situation with intense leadership contest and groups challenging the existing power distribution could lead to CSM change (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). Here the explanation for the introduction of CSM at EU level is only partially relevant. The EGP will look for leaders in replacement of D. Cohn-Bendit (undoubtedly the most emblematic of the two current co-presidents of the EP group). The PES has recently elected a new President whose leadership is not specifically contested (S. Stanishev who first served as an interim President before being elected in September 2012 by the Congress in the absence of any contender), and the EC President candidate could appear as a stronger figure for the party than this current leadership, the PES explicitly calling for “personalization” in its resolution\(^\text{13}\). The process however does not alter fundamentally the balance of powers within the party marked by a weak “party in central office”. To the contrary, the PES system further empowers member parties by making them pivotal in the nomination (competition is limited by obtaining the support of six PES parties or organisations) and responsible for the selection process in their respective member states. As such, there is arguably a greater control of dominant delegations or coalitions. Despite the proportionality rule, the weighing mechanism reflects the power structure of the party. The leeway left to member parties in their internal designations mechanism make them the keystone of the system, much like states’ parties in the US.

b) Historical institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction in Europarties

While borrowing RCI’s assumptions of endogenous preference formation, historical institutionalism (HI) mainly revolves around the concept of path-dependence and unintended consequences (Pierson, 1996). It advances that decisions taken in the past constrain the behaviour of actors, and as a result, shape the features of political parties. Borrowing results from others (Hix, 2001, 1999; Tsebelis and Kreppel, 1998; Corbett et al., 1995), Lord establishes the self-reinforcing nature of some of these institutional features (Lord, 2002): the left-right cleavage structure, the centre-based coalitions, and the mismatch between developed parliamentary bases of the PPELs and under-developed electoral ones. Can these features also help explaining the introduction of candidate selection methods? Which typical events at the party system level can be interpreted as catalysts, influencing the timing of this introduction?

First, CSM introduction largely contribute to the view that a change in CSM would allow parties to demonstrate a popular reformist commitment in the absence of or failed attempts at reforming the electoral system itself, and thus to set an example (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). At the EU level, this argument retains particular saliency given the criticisms surrounding the electoral system. Which past reform(s) or reforming attempt(s) can explain the introduction of CSM? One obvious answer consists

in the Treaty provisions themselves, which by changing the mechanisms of EC President designation and hereby empowering the EP have almost naturally led to CS upstream. This link has in particular been established in a Commission recommendation and a subsequent EP resolution\(^{14}\). As such, the treaty change appears as a critical juncture. In parallel, the proposal for a direct election of the EC President as attracted much scholarly (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Hix, 2000; 1998: “real European elections and competitive parties may develop if the EU becomes a (partial) presidential/interlocking system: if the institutional balance is kept, but the Commission President is directly elected”) and political attention (notably in D. Cohn-Bendit and G. Verhostadt’s *For Europe*), but never materialised. In addition, Held has advanced that elections that are fought on issues relevant to another arena (e.g. the national instead of the European arena) cannot perform the development role (Held, 1996). The “second-order elections” hypothesis (Reif and Schmitt, 1980) indeed points at several other deficiencies in EP elections including the lack of personalization and weakness of PPELs. The introduction of candidate selection clearly aims at enhancing personalisation, as confirmed by the PES resolutions. EP elections also have unintended consequences: their results have come to be interpreted as general (national) elections and they are marked by the instability of votes. This eventually destabilise domestic electoral competition (Lord, 2002). In terms of example setting, the EGP is the only Europarty having held transeuropean political campaigns for the last to EP elections and direct democracy constitutes one of the three pillars of the Green movement. Against the low turnouts in EP elections, the EGP explicitly aims at “mobilization” and “reconnecting European citizens with the 2014 European Elections campaign”\(^{15}\).

Based on the Israeli example, the exposure of corruption scandals or demonstration of extremely opportunistic behaviour can also pave the way for reform promotion, toward a more open, democratic and transparent system (Barnea and Rahat, 2007). Despite some former scandals, it is more the complexity of the EU political system for ordinary citizens, which constitutes one of the dimensions of the standard version of the EU “democratic deficit” (Follesdal and Hix, 2006).

Maybe more persuasive is the electoral explanation: the idea that parties open-up their selection process following an electoral defeat so as to reconstruct their image and regain future electoral success, in the context of an improved competitiveness of the party system. Among the two case studies, we note that on the one hand, while the PES made up the largest parliamentary group until 1999, it has since been outweighed by the EPP group, with particularly low results in 2009\(^{16}\). More generally all three major EU institutions are currently dominated by the EPP. Considering the divisive


primary hypothesis (the more divisive the primary contest compared to that of the other party, the fewer votes received in the general election) is made difficult, as the PES is the only one of the two major parties to hold primaries. The proportionality system introduced could lead to some divisions as much as the nationality of the candidates, a division limited by the so far omnipresence of one candidate, the current President of the EP, M. Schulz. On the other hand, although having secured an increased number of seats in the last election, the Greens present fluctuating results, very mixed fortunes in different member states, and are currently part of a questionable alliance with MEPs belonging to the European Free Alliance (EFA). If overall they do succeed better at the EU than national levels, according to the second-order hypothesis, participation in national and regional governments might mean that protest votes against governments will turn voters away from them. Because the two historically most influent delegations secured for the first time concomitantly a very high number of seats in 2009 (the German die Grüne/Bundnis 90: 14 seats and the French EELV: 15 seats), they are likely to find themselves on the down side in 2014. Findings establishing that opposition parties and weak parties benefit from primaries more than incumbent parties and strong parties do (Serra, 2011), are thus confirmed for PPELS. It is remarkable that only two parties have introduced CS mechanisms: the PES can be considered as the main opposition party (although precautions have to be taken because of the consensus-based nature of the political system), and the EGP is often classified as a small party, notwithstanding its limited geographical outreach.

Finally, the inter-party level allows for parties to imitate their counterparts, pointing at the experience of some parties as affecting others. The specific formats of CSM also call for an interpretation. This contagion operates in two distinct ways for Europarties. One can identify a cross-level vertical contagion: as mostly socio-democrat and green parties have introduced primaries at the national level\textsuperscript{17}, so did the PES and EGP. At the EU inter-party horizontal level, although these two parties are so far isolated at the EU level, other parties have also pinpointed the opportunity raised by the selection of candidates\textsuperscript{18}.

\textbf{Table 2: Framework of causes of CSM reforms applied to the PES and EGP}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant pressure for electoral reform</th>
<th>Corruption scandals</th>
<th>(Recent) loss of seats</th>
<th>Loss of government</th>
<th>Leadership succession/cocontestation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PES CSM</td>
<td>- (one of the two major parties across the institutions,</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{17} See: Table 1.
\textsuperscript{18} EPP, ‘EPP welcomes Commission recommendation for the nomination of presidential candidates [...]’, Op.Cit.
c) Sociological institutionalist accounts of candidate selection methods introduction in Europarties

In an essentially different research direction, constructivism delineates unfixed national preferences, and the independent role of norms and ideas in shaping policy outcomes (Wendt, 1999; Checkel, 2001). More precisely, in sociological institutionalism, actors, among which political parties, are driven by a “bounded rationality” following a “logic of appropriateness”, set in specific institutional arenas. This third neo-institutionalism thus would argue that national parties’ interests are affected by the transnational actors and the specificities of the EU political environment (Lord, 2002). To which extent does the EU political environment allows for CSM to develop?

The trend toward democratisation of CSM identified for the 1960s-1990s period elsewhere (Bille, 2001; Scarrow and al., 2000) and often interpreted as echoing social developments (Barnea and Rahat, 2007: 382) questions the extent to which a personalisation of politics, a decrease of ideology and of party identification have occurred at the EU political system level. The introduction of primaries could be seen as an adaptation to a changing political environment, possibly reflecting interpretations which qualify the evolution of the EU political system as “parliamentarisation” (Fabbrini, 2011; 2013).

The cultural perspective which sees reform as an Americanisation of CSM in the case of Israel (Goldberg, 1994; Aronoff, 2000) would explain in particular the features of the PES candidate selection system. A number of observers have noted the ‘American’ shape of the PES system19. The EGP insists on the direct nature of its system, reflecting their focus on direct democracy. Yet, in view of the facts that primaries have only more recently been introduced in political parties in European countries, and that the developments of PPELs have been studied as elements of the process of “Europeanisation” of political parties (Ladrech, 2009), such cultural perspective should question a possible “Europeanisation” of CSM.

Second, another explanatory factor points at CSM reform as a compensation for the intensely partisan character of the given electoral system. Although this is not necessarily a predominant feature at

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European level\(^{20}\), considering the second-order hypothesis of European elections amounts to see the (partisan) national electoral systems as predominant in the characterisation of the EU electoral system. Third, CS democratisation can be interpreted as an element in the overall evolution of the parties’ organisational structure, much in line with our overlying assumption. It allows leaders to effectively free themselves from the pressures of party activists. Besides, in times of economic and social developments freeing citizens from their dependency on parties (Pennings and Hazan, 2001: 1-2) and thus marked by decreased membership rates, it constitutes an attempt to bring members back in by giving them power in CS. For PPELs, this general pattern applies only sporadically: there are no individual members (or where there are, they retain no power within party organisation), and maybe even more crucially, there are no voters. The latter has been restlessly underlined in the literature as due notably to second-ordereness (Reif and Schmitt, 1980): EP elections are fought on national grounds, acting arguably as mid-term national elections (Hix, 1999; Marks et al., 2002) and not about parties at European level (Follesdal and Hix, 2006: 536). This is linked perhaps even more profoundly to the identitive aspect of voting behaviour whereby party choice constitutes a lifelong habit for voters: citizens do not identify with PPELs because they are too unfamiliar to them, impeding their development (Lord, 2001). The designation of candidates for the Presidency of the EC however potentially modifies this pattern by enabling citizens to relate to an executive position at EU level and identify with the PPELs behind it (with national parties acting as “transmission belts” in the case of the PES primary system).

Sociological institutionalism in spite of its more diffuse nature proves a useful theoretical tool to the developments of political parties at EU level, including the introduction of candidate selection. When associated with rational choice and historical institutionalism, it allows for a more complete and detailed account of this institutional mechanism.

**Conclusion**

The Europarty model largely challenges classical understandings of political parties through the role of its members and the functions assumed, not least in terms of political recruitment. In this context, the selection of candidates for the position of European Commission President constitutes an innovative political development which has not until now received the scholarly attention it deserves. This paper has presented these mechanisms by reviewing and reconciling the literature that both candidate selection and Europarties have provoked. It has in particular distinguished aspects of

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\(^{20}\) Although there is an abundant literature of Left/Right alignments in the EU political system, most authors agree on the consensus and coalition-based nature of the system (see for instance: Lord, 2001; Hix, 1998).
candidate selection that have developed in the European arena from those that have not. Against this background, considering candidate selection at European level as institutional mechanisms has allowed shedding light on their rationales. The central attempt has thus been to put forward explanations for the introduction and their specific patterns within two parties: the Party of European Socialists and the European Green Party.

These institutionalist explanations are three-fold: rationalist, historical and sociological. They direct focus on different causes and correspond to essentially different level of analysis, enabling to consider them as complementary rather than competing. This appears much in line with previous attempts to integrate different approaches in EU studies and beyond (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Jupille, 2003). Overall the findings thus suggest, through a critical assessment of existing theoretical frameworks and taking into account methodological and conceptual constrains associated with EU-wide primary elections, that developments at the upper levels (the EU party and political systems) have influenced intra-party decision-making on CSM, although the parties themselves have ultimately designed them through a calculation of their own interests and perceptions. More interestingly however, these multi-level factors seem to have played in different ways than usually identified for CSM changes in parties at national level, as well as in different ways across the two case studies.

The causes and consequences of CSM are often intertwined. In order to fully assess these institutional changes, further research would need to analyse the consequences of this introduction, as this has been done for candidate selection processes elsewhere. Analyses of candidate selection as an element of political recruitment, most notably those subscribing to a neo-institutionalist framework, have thus also led scholars to apprehend it as an independent variable, shaping not only the parties but also the party system and polity as a whole (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 7, 11-12). In this respect too candidate selection within PPELs constitutes a largely under-conceptualised interstice between literature on party politics at the EU level and candidate selection at large. But it is perhaps above all empirically that this question should be asked post-2014. Responsiveness, as much as representation, participation and competition (Hazan and Rahat, 2010) could be analysed while keeping in mind the specificities of the EU party and political systems.

The link between the opening-up of candidate selection methods and democratisation is not straightforward. The various dimensions of the EU “democratic deficit” (Follesdal and Hix, 2006) are only partly addressed through the selection of candidates and ‘primary systems’ introduced at the EU level. If they pave the way for contestation for leadership, they do so in a limited manner: for one position only and arguably impeding other proposals such as transnational MEP lists or direct election for that very position.
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