cogitatio

ARTICLE

How Trickle-Down Democracy Won the Debate, and Why It Didn't Have To

Jan Pieter Beetz [1], Gilles Pittoors [2], and Wouter Wolfs [3]

[1] Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
[2] Department of Political Science, KU Leuven, Belgium
[3] Centre for European Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium

Correspondence: Gilles Pittoors (gilles.pittoors@kuleuven.be)

Abstract

Pro-EU MEPs pursue a strategy to further democratise EU governance through initiatives such as the *Spitzenkandidaten* and transnational lists. Doing so, they seem to follow a logic of what we call "trickle-down democracy," which entails the belief that the reproduction of domestic representative democracy at the EU level will increase popular support for the EU. However, despite extensive increases in power and authority for Parliament, popular support has not significantly increased, while Euroscepticism has become a mainstream phenomenon. When did pro-EU MEPs commit to a "trickle-down" logic of democratisation? And did they remain wedded to this logic despite strong counterindications? In this article, we adopt a historical institutionalist perspective to answer these questions. Based on a qualitative, interpretive thematic analysis of European Parliament (EP) debates and resolutions, we demonstrate that in the 1970s, when in anticipation of the first direct EP elections the blueprint of European democracy was debated, pro-EU MEPs debated different models and ultimately decided to follow the path of trickle-down democracy. We then show that this choice was reinstated rather than revisited following Maastricht, as growing Euroscepticism in EU politics did not trigger the critical juncture historical institutionalism could expect.

Keywords

elections; EU democracy; European Parliament; historical analysis; political parties

1. Introduction

In contemporary debates, pro-EU MEPs generally propose a reproduction of domestic representative democracy at the European level. Examples include the introduction of a *Spitzenkandidaten* system, the

(direct) election of the Commission president, and transnational party lists. They argue that this strategy will increase popular support for the EU. We refer to this logic as "trickle-down democracy," meaning the top-down development of institutional features at the European level that resemble democratic configurations at the national level in an attempt to strengthen public support for the EU.

Trickle-down democracy is a metaphor borrowed from economics. A core idea of trickle-down economics is that tax cuts, especially for the rich, would increase overall prosperity, because the wealth at the top would trickle down to the bottom. Many have come to doubt the soundness of this logic because it has resulted in greater inequality between the wealthy and the poor. The metaphor has thus gained negative connotations. We are not implying that trickle-down democracy is normatively undesirable. The label merely captures a similarity in logic: More EU democracy "at the top" will trickle down to citizens "at the bottom."

However, in the past, successful calls for a stronger European Parliament (EP) have seemingly not resulted in more popular support. For example, while the Maastricht Treaty strengthened the position of the EP, it also signified an end to the so-called "permissive consensus": Implicit support for far-reaching cooperation turned into explicit resistance to a loss of national sovereignty (e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Since then, Euroscepticism has become a persistent mainstream phenomenon with electoral success, such as the failed referenda on the European Constitution or Brexit (e.g., Leconte, 2015). Eurosceptic politicians commit to the logic of democratic fatalism, i.e., that EU democracy without a people is doomed to fail. As the latter does not exist, they oppose the transfer of power to the EU—let alone its "parliament" (Beetz, 2019)—or the further institutional development of EU democracy. Yet, recent proposals by MEPs for democratising the EU *seem* to remain attached to the trickle-down logic despite Eurosceptic contestation. When did pro-European MEPs commit to this logic of EU democratisation? And did they remain wedded to its paradigm despite the success of Eurosceptic movements? In this article, we look at these questions from the perspective of historical institutionalism. We show that the "trickle-down democracy" logic won the battle of ideas in the run up to the first EP elections. At this point in time, alternative proposals were still debated. Yet, we demonstrate that this initial ideational crossroads ended up being a critical junction. MEPs have become "locked in" by the ideal picture of democratisation as the reproduction of national democracy at the EU level. Other innovative ideas were no longer seriously considered, even in times when public contestation of the EU became more prevalent. Ideas from before this juncture, such as the stronger involvement of national parliamentary institutions, could be considered to bolster EU democracy. Nevertheless, the trickle-down democracy logic seems to have won the day.

In this article, we first introduce historical institutionalism and develop our expectations for the trickle-down democracy logic. To guide our analysis of MEP debates, we then flesh out models for institutionalising representative democracy. Subsequently, we analyse the debates in the run up to the first election of Parliament in 1979 in depth, when the trickle-down logic became a paradigm. We then undertake an analysis of Parliament resolutions and debates of the subsequent European elections and treaty changes. These moments could have been critical junctures at which the trickle-down democracy paradigm might have become contested due to successful Eurosceptic contestation. However, we show that the paradigm continues to underpin proposals in the EP while viable alternatives are not meaningfully considered. Finally, we reflect on the upshot for future research.

2. A Historical Institutionalist Perspective on Trickle-Down Democracy

The central objective of this article is to explore when trickle-down democracy became and whether it remained dominant in pro-EU parliamentary discourse on the democratisation of the EU. To address this question, we take a historical institutionalist perspective, which forms the theoretical backbone for the broader argument we are making: The trickle-down logic has been set as the foundational paradigm for democratising the EU in the 1970s and has been reinforced throughout the decades, even in the face of increasing pressure for change.

Historical institutionalism is part of the "new institutionalist school," a collection of theoretical approaches that emerged in response to behaviouralism and rational choice theories (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Rather than viewing institutions merely as arenas for individual action, new institutionalists consider them as collections of rules, norms, and practices—both formal and informal—that structure and constrain political agency (Hysing & Olsson, 2018).

Within this school of thought, historical institutionalism particularly underscores how the long-term evolution of institutions moulds political behaviour and outcomes, treating institutions as enduring features that steer development along particular paths (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Thelen, 2000). A core principle is thus the logic of path dependence, wherein initial choices establish trajectories that "close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing path-dependent processes" (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341) and potentially lead to a "lock-in." As Thelen (2000) discusses, diverging from a path requires either incremental change or a critical juncture, i.e., a pivotal moment in time of significant change where all options are on the table again. Although Pierson (2000) rightfully argues that path dependence does not necessarily imply a permanent freeze, "identifying such self-reinforcing processes does help us to understand why organisational and institutional practices are often extremely persistent" (pp. 75–76).

Though questions about the role of ideas and norms are commonly connected to other strands of new institutionalism, in particular normative institutionalism, it is also embedded in historical institutionalist thinking (Hall & Taylor, 1996). As Peters (2019) argues, "change within historical institutionalism can be understood in terms of one idea replacing another, whether gradually or as a punctuation" (p. 128). Analogous to normative institutionalism's logic of appropriateness, historical institutionalists argue that "locked-in" ideas "constrain the limits of acceptable action…[and] provide a set of ready solutions for policy problems that arise within their domain" (Peters, 2019, p. 86). Sociological institutionalism's emphasis on cultural norms and entrepreneurship finds its translation in historical institutionalism's notion that ideas can be seen as key in the formative stage of institutions, and "new" ideas need to be advocated by creative actors during critical junctures to challenge a dominant paradigm (Hysing & Olsson, 2018; Pierson, 2000).

Applied to this article, a historical institutionalist perspective entails that the establishment of a paradigm about what European democracy *should* look like at an early stage of European integration generates reinforcement of that idea over time, and makes it difficult for later actors to change or diverge from this paradigm. We argue that the trickle-down logic became a paradigm. In this respect, two questions emerge. When did the idea become dominant among MEPs, i.e., what was the critical junction? And secondly, were there no critical junctions afterwards to unsettle this paradigm? We argue that trickle-down democracy—advocated for by a group of federalist MEPs, particularly in the run-up to the first European elections in

1979—became gradually embedded in the institutional rationale of the EP, and subsequently locked in at every major juncture of the European integration process.

The embeddedness of this paradigm is particularly relevant in the context of rising Euroscepticism. More supranational democracy arguably should have resulted in more popular support for integration (Schimmelfennig, 2010). The EP increasingly started to resemble a "normal" national parliament—with institutional features such as direct elections and increased decision-making powers, and classic representative claims referring to European citizens. Yet, this evolution coincided with Euroscepticism becoming a mainstream phenomenon with arguably Brexit as its high watermark (Leconte, 2015). This development indicates widespread alienation from and resistance to the EU rather than increased support for it. These events could have triggered new critical junctures and pushed pro-EU MEPs to put new options on the table to gain popular support. Indeed, nothing about the idea of supranational democracy mirroring national democracy is inevitable (e.g., Beetz, 2019), nor was it the only option on the table in debates before the 1979 EP elections. So were there moments where pro-EU MEPs seriously considered alternatives to breaking open the lock-in?

3. The Possibility of EU Representative Democracy

3.1. Features of Representative Democracy

To answer these questions, we will analyse proposals for the establishment of EU representative democracy by pro-EU MEPs. The institutional core of representative democracy is the chain of legitimate delegation from the people via elections to parliamentary representatives to political executives (Strøm, 2000). Three key features of representative democracy in a polity can thus be distinguished: (a) elections; (b) legislature; and (c) selection of political executives. While these features are interconnected in practice, their separation is analytically useful because it allows us to identify alternative ways of democratising the EU. For instance, regarding legislative organisation, parliamentary representation should translate this electoral mandate into effective legislative decision-making power. The position of the chamber (or chambers) within EU decision-making impacts the power of the democratic legislature. The EP could become the sovereign decision-maker, but national parliaments might also hold authority.

3.2. Four Models of Parliamentary Democracy in the EU Polity

To flesh out these features to guide our interpretive analysis, we distinguish four models of democracy in the EU polity (Beetz, 2019): intergovernmental organisation, democratic confederacy, transnational federation, and federal superstate (Table 1). These models streamline a much richer debate, but they are meant to guide our empirical analysis.

3.2.1. Intergovernmental Organisation

In this model, national democracy is the only legitimate locus of democracy in the EU polity (Offe & Preuss, 2006). Intergovernmental representation in EU governance should democratically legitimize EU governance, which should remain limited in scope and depth (e.g., Grimm, 2009; Moravcsik, 2002). A non-democratic variant is a regulatory—often technocratic—model for the EU (Majone, 2005). These scholars dismiss or at

best tolerate supranational representation; Europe's national governments should have the final say in EU governance.

Turning to the three features, the relevant elections are the national elections. Often these are parliamentary elections, but they can also be presidential elections. Crucially, they are (predominantly) run on purely national agendas. National political parties are active in these elections, but nowadays, especially for (semi-)presidential systems, the candidate can also be an independent. At the EU level, the government party becomes the relevant partisan consideration in articulating the national interests in a two-level game (Moravcsik, 2002). Parliamentary representation at the EU level is a misnomer in this model because an intergovernmental forum makes the decisions. National parliaments can influence government positions, but they have no direct say at the EU level. Decisions are taken by unanimity, with a veto for each state to prevent (larger) democratic states dominating smaller ones. State representatives appoint EU executives who should perform administrative roles. The Commission should act as an international secretariat for the member states.

3.2.2. Democratic Confederacy

In this second model of the EU as a democratic confederacy (e.g., Beetz, 2018; Bellamy, 2016), EU citizens remain primarily part of their national democratic communities, but they share crucial common interests, such as peaceful coexistence, (external) security, and a democratic way of life. These goals require more far-reaching cooperation between European states, for which international organisations lack the required democratic mandate. Transnational representative institutions are necessary to legitimate EU decision-making.

In this model, national elections are crucial, but gain an EU dimension. National parliamentarians as representatives of diverse *demoi* rather than state representatives should legitimate the EU. In contrast to the conceptualisation of a state, a *demos* has a diversity of viewpoints, which can be reflected by multiple seats in a European assembly accorded proportionally to the parties represented in the national parliaments (Beetz, 2018). Crucially, this assembly would have the first and final say on EU legislation, proposing and agreeing upon new legislation. The EP or Council can also play a similar role within these processes (Bellamy, 2016). The European executive is composed of (national) government appointments, proposed as part of the governmental negotiations after the national elections. Consequently, the democratic logic remains the same: National elections result (indirectly) in the appointment of EU executives.

3.2.3. Transnational Federation

In the transnational federation model (e.g., Habermas, 2017; Patberg, 2017), national liberal democracies continue to protect citizens' basic rights, but globalisation creates challenges that can only be effectively and legitimately addressed by a EU democracy. EU citizens are simultaneously part of national people and a pan-EU citizenry.

This model's parliamentary system should consequently give an equal voice to the elected representatives as part of a national people *and* as part of a European citizenry. Neither of these voices should be superior to the other. The EU should become "a transnational democracy without ultimate decision-making authority" (Habermas, 2017, p. 172). The result is a separation of power model, whereby the EP and national

parliaments share authority. At the EU level, the EP should be part of a perfect bicameral system—a frequent feature of federal systems—in which the Council fulfils the role of the upper chamber, representing the territorial interests of the member states. Transnational EP lists of like-minded parties would fit well with this logic, while the assembly would (indirectly) rely on national elections. The current logic of appointment of the European Council president captures the duality of this democratic logic: (S)he is nominated by the heads of state and government in the European Council and subsequently approved—or "elected"—by the EP; the national executives in the European Council represent citizens as nationals, while the EP represents them as a transnational citizenry.

3.2.4. Federal Superstate

In the final model of a federal superstate (e.g., Føllesdal & Hix, 2006; Morgan, 2005), EU citizens constitute a pan-European *demos* with sovereign power over all policy issues in the polity. Political unification is seen as the democratic solution to the new global challenges and supranational democracy is assumed to unify national citizens.

The election of Parliament should take place by a single pan-European *demos*. In this election, European parties should compete for the vote of EU citizens and national parties are normatively irrelevant. Although the exact electoral system can take many forms, the EP would become the sovereign parliament. Nation-states would become regions in a United States of Europe: constitutional units of a European federation that is organised in a hierarchical way. Like any other national parliament, the EP decides with a simple majority on legislative issues. The main points of contention are related to the type of (national) democracy to be institutionalised at the EU level: a presidential system with its separation of powers, versus a parliamentary fusion of powers model (e.g., Fabbrini, 2024; Sonnicksen, 2017). The full development of the latter would mean a political system that mirrors the dominant practice at the national level: a fixed majority and coalition agreement among the majority parties. Elections will decide upon European political executives either directly or indirectly: The Commission president is either elected directly, pace a presidential system, or, following a parliamentary logic, the *Spitzenkandidat* procedure becomes an institutional norm in which the European Council plays no role.

Table 1. Overview of models of parliamentary democracy in the EU and their core features.

Model/Feature	Intergovernmental Organisation	Democratic Confederacy	Transnational Federation	Federal Superstate
Organisation of elections and parties	National election of the executive	National election of national assemblies, partly based on EU issues	Transnational elections of the EP and national procedure for the assembly	A pan-European election
Chamber(s) of the European legislature	Intergovernmental forum	Assembly of national parliamentarians	A supranational and a regional chamber	A sovereign EP
Selection of political executives	National government officials	Appointment by national representatives	Simultaneous appointment by national representatives and EP	Direct election or *Spitzenkandidat*

The EU's current situation is a mixture of the models of intergovernmental organisation (reflected in European Council decisions) and a (flawed) transnational federation (reflected in the community method). The trickle-down logic would push the status quo more towards a federal superstate or at least seek to strengthen the EU's transnational federal dimension. Recent proposals, such as transnational lists and direct election of the Commission, are attempts to (re)gain popular support for the EU through top-down means, thus fitting the trickle-down democracy paradigm because they aim to "perfect" the mirroring of the EU democracy to its domestic counterparts. Proposals did not, for instance, suggest giving national parliamentarians a stronger voice. But has this always been the case? Or is there still a lively debate on alternative possibilities to regain popular support?

4. Methodology

Our analysis traces the development of the trickle-down paradigm from the pre-1979 critical juncture through later parliamentary debates, with particular focus on the post-Maastricht period, when public opposition to European integration became more pronounced. It is important to emphasise that our goal is not to produce a comprehensive, exhaustive mapping of all discourses, divergent viewpoints, or minority positions articulated in the EP since the 1950s. Rather, our primary objective is to identify and elucidate the principal themes and institutional stances that have shaped and characterised the dominant position on European democracy in the EP.

Accordingly, we employ a qualitative, interpretive thematic analysis of archival material and publicly available sources, drawing on established approaches in historical and textual analysis (see, e.g., Gerring, 2012; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003; Peterson, 2017). The data was collected and analysed in two steps. First, we identified those EP resolutions and preceding parliamentary debates that focused on (aspects related to) EU democracy in the EP's historical and contemporary archives. We concentrated our analytical attention on a subset of key documents that, in our assessment, best encapsulated and articulated the EP's dominant position on EU democracy. Second, these documents were read closely and interpreted to distill the main themes and positions embedded within them. No additional researchers or external coders participated in this process. This close reading centred on the three guiding themes from the analytical framework: elections and parties, legislative organisation, and executive selection.

In total, the article references 21 documents. It is worth noting, however, that we identified dozens of relevant documents addressing various aspects of democracy within the EU, spanning topics such as voting rights for EU citizens, institutional reforms, and the powers of Parliament. While all of these documents were consulted and informed our broader understanding of the debates, keeping in mind also the constraints of the article format, we referenced only those texts that provided particularly salient insights or illustrative examples and quotations that underpin and substantiate the arguments advanced in the article. The majority of quotations are drawn from official parliamentary reports and resolutions, reflecting our focus on Parliament's institutional position. Occasional statements by individual MEPs were included where they held clear analytical relevance, such as interventions by party leaders. This selective, interpretive engagement aligns with established qualitative research practice, emphasising scholarly discretion in highlighting material most pertinent to our theoretical narrative (Costantino, 2008). Supplementary secondary materials, including academic commentaries and historical studies, support the contextualisation of the findings within broader political and historical developments.

5. Setting the Stage: The 1979 Elections

Prior to the first direct election of the EP in 1979, a decade of debate took place on how to prepare and organise the elections, and how these could be built upon to develop a European democratic system. Different approaches were discussed, but by 1979 MEPs united behind the idea to construct a European representative democracy similar to the national level, mirroring the model of a federal superstate with some features of a transnational federation. Such a democratic set-up was not deemed a reflection of the existence of European *demos* but, conversely, as an instrument to achieve this normative objective. Three fundamental characteristics of the elections-to-be were discussed: (a) the organisation of the elections and the nature of the EP as a representative body, (b) the role of (European) political parties, and (c) the powers of the EP. At this stage, Parliament was still fighting for basic powers and recognition, and did not yet push hard for a role in the nomination of a European executive, a theme that featured more strongly in the post-1979 period.

5.1. Elections and Representation

A majority in Parliament pushed for a direct election of *European* MPs, positing democratic representation through *national* parliamentarians as a democratic flaw. For instance, during a debate on direct European elections in 1959, Belgian Christian-democrat Étienne de La Vallée Poussin argued that "the Treaties set up institutions whose accountability is not clearly established and whose parliamentary control is made practically impossible…[for which] the only remedy is to have the EP elected on a general basis" (European Parliament, 1959b).

The main argument was that "the peoples of Europe" needed to be more directly involved in European integration. Parliament's 1960 Draft Convention explicitly stated that "the point is to involve the peoples in the construction of Europe, and thus to strengthen the democratic character of the institutions" (European Parliament, 1960). This call became stronger as member states kept postponing a decision on the organisation of European elections. For instance, the 1963 Furler Report stated that it is Parliament's duty to "express the variety in public opinion and the general interests of the people" (European Parliament, 1963), and in 1975 the EP issued a resolution on European Union (European Parliament, 1975a), arguing that:

> The progressive achievement of the Union must be based on the active and conscious participation of the peoples, whose interests it must reflect, and that the European Parliament will, therefore, have to take at all times, with the assistance of the national Parliaments, all initiatives likely to foster and ensure such participation.

Notably, the mixed use of the terms "people" (singular) and "peoples" (plural) indicates how MEPs were still on the fence about considering the EP as representative of either a multinational sphere or a single European *demos*. Gradually, however, MEPs came to see their representative role in a more unitary way. Throughout the 1970s, Parliament increasingly connected European elections directly to "European citizens" (Pittoors, 2023a). In its 1977 resolution on civil and politics rights, Parliament emphasised "the political importance for the development of the European Community—not least with a view to direct elections in 1978 [sic]—of strengthening the ties of solidarity among its citizens by granting special [civil and political] rights" (European Parliament, 1977a). The goal was not just to grant citizens voting rights, but to create a political community of European citizens to be achieved through their participation in European elections and representation by Parliament, thereby moving beyond the plurality of European peoples.

Importantly, though MEPs often talked of political *participation*, they understood this in a classic *representative* way—that is, participation through electing representatives in Parliament. For instance, the 1975 Bertrand Report equated the "election of [EP] members by direct universal suffrage" with advancing "towards the construction of Europe with the active participation of the peoples" (European Parliament, 1975b). Parliament thus positioned itself as the main representative institution through which citizen participation was to be achieved. This, in turn, justified the call for a substantial reinforcement of the Parliament's powers (cf. Section 5.3).

5.2. Role of Political Parties

Throughout these discussions, the initial disagreement about whether transnational European parties should exist prior to holding European elections materialised by 1979 around the dominant idea that holding such elections would bring about the genesis of such parties. From the very beginning, the importance of political parties as main organisations to mobilise and inform the public was recognised, but there was widespread hesitation about whether national parties were up to the task (Pittoors, 2023b).

One of the strongest voices opposing a hasty organisation of European elections came from Belgian Christian Democrat Pierre Wigny. He proposed to postpone the direct elections of Parliament until the proper supporting institutions existed to make the launch of the European elections a success. Notably, he argued strongly in favour of political parties being developed at the European level before embarking on European elections. His main concern was that "voters, largely unfamiliar with European issues, would show little interest in the elections in the absence of European parties and that they would be able to choose their candidates only on the basis of national considerations" (European Parliament, 1958).

However, despite these arguments, strong voices in Parliament opposed any postponement of the European elections. In the same 1958 debate, French MEP Pierre-Henri Teitgen argued strongly in favour of the catalytic qualities of elections, warning against a vicious circle that would indefinitely postpone the direct elections to Parliament: "There will be no European parties as long as no European elections are held. If one were to wait for the former before organising the latter, one could wait forever to organise them" (European Parliament, 1958).

The catalytic quality of Parliament elections became somewhat of a silver bullet argument and was repeated time and again. In his Introductory Report to the 1960 Draft Convention, Dehousse countered the argument that "elections are only justified when the voters first have a better understanding of European questions," by stating that it is "precisely through their participation in public life that [voters] have gradually matured" (European Parliament, 1960). French socialist Maurice Faure likewise expressed the conviction that "the election of the Parliament by general elections will mobilise the electorate of the six member countries."

Consequently, European political parties were somewhat neglected in the debate, which focused on Parliament's powers and the elections as such. It was only when European elections became a tangible possibility in the late 1970s that political parties came back to the fore. Particularly, MEPs became increasingly concerned about the lukewarm interest in and knowledge of European affairs by the public at large. In a 1977 resolution on the (faltering) information campaign for European elections, Parliament highlighted "the need for political parties and movements to step up their activities during the actual electoral campaign by engaging in a democratic contest" (European Parliament, 1977c).

Yet, while ample voices stressed the crucial role of *national* parties—as German MEP Hans-August Lücker, leader of the Christian Democrat Group, said: "They are the ones who in the end will be out in the field" (European Parliament, 1978)—many MEPs also emphasised the importance of *European* coordination of such national campaigns. For instance, the 1975 Patijn Report argued that "not until the parties succeed…in establishing close links between themselves, developing joint programmes and creating supranational party structures can direct elections to the European Parliament become a key factor in the process of political integration" (European Parliament, 1975c). The initial hesitation and adherence to a more transnational or confederal model for party politics thus gave way to a supranational perspective, even though most effort went into convincing member states to actually hold European elections.

5.3. Legislative Organisation and Parliamentary Powers

At the same time, many asked whether it made sense to have direct elections for a parliament that had no powers (Pittoors, 2024). During a meeting of the Working Group on European Elections in 1959, there was wide disagreement on the preferred sequence of events—first elections, or first powers? German socialist Ernst Albrecht Metzger (European Parliament, 1959a) argued that:

> If one wants the future Parliament to be truly effective and representative, one must also include an extension of its powers. A Parliament elected by universal suffrage, which has a significant number of Members but has such limited powers as currently provided for by the Treaties, can only bring discredit to democracy and the parliamentary system because such a large number of Members can only talk and will have nothing to say.

Others considered that "when it comes to the expansion of the Parliament's power, it would be better to wait until after the Parliament is directly elected, because…it will be difficult to acquire both [powers and elections] and the risk exists one achieves nothing at all" (European Parliament, 1959a). Moreover, there was a firm belief that holding European elections would provide the future Parliament with such political authority that it would become impossible to deny it more powers: "The peoples of Europe will become more closely involved in the European ideal, and consequently the elected Parliament will be able to develop a dynamic power that will enable it to expand its own powers." This argument was pointedly captured by the chair of the Working Group, Belgian socialist Fernand Dehousse: "The powers depend on the elections, not the other way around."

Nonetheless, the debate on expanding Parliament's powers, which made limited but tangible progress throughout the 1960s and 1970s, was sodden with references to democracy. For instance, the 1963 Furler Report listed some "necessary changes" for Parliament to become "a real parliament and not just an advisory assembly," including the right of initiative and the right to appoint the European Commission, connecting these to "the parliamentary element of the European Community" (European Parliament, 1963). A decade later, when Parliament was granted (limited) budgetary oversight powers, the 1973 Spénale Report again based its call for more powers on Parliament's crucial role in providing the European Community with a stronger democratic foundation:

> By giving the European Parliament a power of co-decision in the determination of the Communities' own resources…we should be taking a step in the direction of a better democratic balance in the Communities. (European Parliament, 1973)

Similarly, the 1975 Bertrand Report put forward that "the European Union must be conceived as a pluralist and democratic Community" based on "a Parliament having budgetary powers and powers of control, which would participate on at least an equal footing in the legislative process, as is its right as the representative of the peoples of the Union" (European Parliament, 1975b). Though Parliament was granted a limited expansion of its powers—especially in budgetary matters—MEPs became increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress. As Dutch MEP Schelto Patijn lamented in January 1975:

> Opponents of direct elections have been telling us for long enough that the European Parliament must have power before it can be directly elected, while at the same time withholding these powers from Parliament on the hypocritical grounds that we are not directly elected. (European Parliament, 1975c)

This sentiment was echoed by several speakers during that plenary session, and even Commission President Ortoli—a French Gaullist to boot—weighed in, saying that:

> To envisage the direct election of your Assembly amounts effectively to raising the problem of Parliament's legislative powers, given its added political weight and, ultimately, to anticipating developments towards [the] European Union and the general institutional equilibrium it will bring about.

Still, by the late 1970s, these debates had fused in a broadly carried call to "restore the balance of power within the European Community [and] create a more democratic form of supervision" (European Parliament, 1977b). Elections were seen as a necessary step in Parliament's assumption of its democratic role as representative of the people of Europe, expressed through "detailed and careful scrutiny of legislation,...constant questioning of the activities of the executive,...speeches in debates designed to reflect and at the same time to influence the development of public opinion" (European Parliament, 1978). However, at that point in time, none of these aspects were directly linked to the selection of the political executives at the EU level. Parliament sporadically mentioned general notions such as that it "should participate in the appointment of...the Commission" (European Parliament, 1975a), but the focus of the debate lay with (budgetary) oversight and legislative parity with the Council. This element only became part of the narrative in the decades following the 1979 European elections.

6. Reinforcing the Path: 1979 to Present

The dominant idea set in the run-up to 1979, namely that—similar to national democracies—European democracy should be based on a strong EP in line with the model of a federal superstate, became the leitmotif in parliamentary positions and debates in the following decades. At no point did Parliament diverge from this paradigm, or did it suggest the EU should develop features of the intergovernmental or confederal model. In other words, the trickle-down democracy logic remained uncontested, suggesting a "locked-in" paradigm on EU democratisation among pro-EU MEPs.

Granted, apart from the low turnout, pro-EU MEPs had little cause to assume their strategy was not working. European citizens, it was argued, still needed to adapt to the new reality of European integration, and more powers and visibility for the directly elected Parliament would bring that about. It was not until the rise of openly Eurosceptic voices and parties from the 1990s onwards that pro-EU MEPs had serious cause to

reconsider and diverge from their playbook, possibly triggering a new critical juncture or at least an examination of the trickle-down paradigm. However, even when faced with growing indications that the trickle-down strategy was not strengthening popular support, we show the enduring dominance of this logic from the Maastricht Treaty until recent debates on EU democracy. While the theme of legislative organisation was mainly discussed in relation to the nomination of the Commission, the other two themes on "European parties and lists" and the "election of the executive" received more explicit attention. In addition, in the debates since the Lisbon Treaty, a new theme on 'party coalitions and governmental agreements' emerged.

6.1. European Parties and Lists

In their seminal 1980 study of the European elections, Reif and Schmitt (1980) definitively established the image of European elections as "second-order national elections." MEPs similarly recognised the low turnout as an indication that "Europe has still not made a sufficient impression on its people; most of the citizens of Europe do not feel themselves really concerned by the Community" (European Parliament, 1979). Raising awareness thus became a key objective for MEPs—in particular, the questions of political parties and of transnational lists, both of which were aimed at increasing a sense of joint constituency among European citizens.

Introduced formally in Art. 138a of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, European political parties are seen as the "facilitators of successful European political debate…and should be rendered more visible" (European Parliament, 2020). Their fundamental role in European democracy has not only been recognised in the Maastricht Treaty itself, but has also been repeatedly called out by Parliament. The 1996 Tsatsos Report argued that European political parties not only contribute to "the expression of political will at the level of the Union," but also "provide a unique opportunity for the integration of political culture" and are even "necessary so that a genuine European citizenship may emerge" (European Parliament, 1996). This idea was confirmed several times over, for instance, in the 2000 plenary debate on the statute of European political parties, during which EPP leader Hans-Gert Pöttering argued that "full-blown democracy in the European Union cannot be achieved without solidly-funded European political parties" (Wolfs, 2022).

Also in more recent debates, a stronger role for European political parties was explicitly seen by the EP as a measure to strengthen the European debate and to form a European political awareness among citizens (European Parliament, 2012, 2013). In its resolution evaluating the 2019 elections, the Parliament regretted "that owing to restrictive measures at European and national levels, European political parties cannot fully participate in European election campaigns" (European Parliament, 2020). This was repeated in its resolution on the 2024 European elections: "The restrictions under the current EU and national regulatory frameworks prevent European political parties from fully participating in European election campaigns" (European Parliament, 2023).

A number of measures that have been frequently proposed over time to strengthen their position include strengthening internal party democracy (in particular for nominating the Spitzenkandidaten; cf. Section 6.2), the development of common political Europarty manifestos, more financial and regulatory capabilities to conduct campaigns, and including their names and logos on (national) electoral ballots and (national parties') campaigning material (European Parliament, 2013, 2020, 2023). According to the EP, "European election

rules must promote European party democracy" (European Parliament, 2020): The normative benchmark for democracy at the EU level was thus a federal superstate.

6.2. Executive Election

This increased role for European political parties is often linked to the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* process as the main instrument to select the political executive. In its resolution leading up to the 2014 elections, the EP called upon the Euro parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission and urged those candidates to play a leading role in the electoral campaigns by personally presenting their programme in all EU member states. This was seen as an important way to reinforce "the political legitimacy of both Parliament and the Commission by connecting their respective elections more directly to the choice of the voters" (European Parliament, 2012). In the same resolution, Parliament stressed that as many members of the European Commission as possible should be drawn from the Members of the European Parliament "to reflect the balance between the two chambers of the legislature" (European Parliament, 2012).

The failure of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system in 2019—when Ursula von der Leyen was nominated and elected as Commission president—could be explained, according to the EP's resolution evaluating the 2019 European elections, by a "lack of explanation and understanding of the process among EU citizens" (European Parliament, 2020). In the same resolution, Parliament regretted that:

> Only some of the EU citizens who took part in the European elections believed that their vote could make a difference when it came to the election of the President of the Commission, highlighting the need to raise awareness of the process among EU citizens.

Parliament highlighted that only 8 percent of the respondents of an electoral Eurobarometer survey voted to influence the choice of the next Commission President, which highlighted, according to Parliament the need to clarify the system, and that "all European voters should be allowed to vote for their preferred candidate for the President of the Commission" (European Parliament, 2020).

In its resolution in preparation to the 2024 European elections, the EP recalled how the "lead candidate system could foster the European public debate and empower European political parties" and that "failure to implement the lead candidate system has led to disappointment among many voters and reduced trust in the process" (European Parliament, 2023). The lead candidate system is often opposed to the system as stipulated in the treaties, in which the European Council plays the pivotal role through untransparent "deals behind closed doors" (European Parliament, 2023).

This system is also often linked to the need for transnational lists and, consequently, a joint constituency. In its resolution evaluating the 2020 elections, Parliament emphasised that the system requires "the *Spitzenkandidaten* [to] be able to stand as official candidates at the next elections in *all* member states, elected by a European political party and standing for a unified European electoral programme" (European Parliament, 2020, own emphasis). Moreover, in Parliament's view, such transnational lists would place Euro parties more at the centre of European elections (European Parliament, 2020). Parliament thus embraced a view that moves elections and executive (s)election procedure in the direction of a transnational federation and arguably even at points a federal state.

6.3. Party Coalitions and Government Agreements

In the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty, the European Parliament laid out several proposals that unambiguously posited it as the main representative institution providing the Union with its democratic legitimacy. For instance, the 1990 Colombo Report stated that:

> It seems increasingly clear that only the European Parliament, the representative of the will of the people, on the basis of a mandate which it claims for itself once again, can determine the objectives and institutions of the Union. (European Parliament, 1990)

In that same year, the first Martin Report explicitly stated that:

> fundamental democratic principles require that Community legislation should only enter into force with the explicit approval...of the European Parliament representing the electorate as a whole" and that "the appointment of the European Commission and in particular its President should be subject to the scrutiny and consent of the [EP]. (European Parliament, 1990)

These proposals thus involved bolstering Parliament's role in Community/Union decision-making and granting it greater supervisory authority over the European executive. Member states, to a certain degree, met Parliament's demands and not only created the co-decision procedure in Article 189b, but also formalised the practice of parliamentary consultation for the nomination of the Commission president and extended the Commission's term of office to five years, thereby aligning it with the Parliament's term.

However, while MEPs overall supported the Maastricht Treaty, they were far from satisfied. Parliament's 1992 resolution on the Maastricht IGC stated that the institutional structure developed at Maastricht "has not eliminated the parliamentary democratic deficit" (European Parliament, 1992). Note how Parliament speaks here specifically of the parliamentary democratic deficit, highlighting how it directly connects democratisation to the development of a (supranational) parliamentary system. Tellingly, the Resolution goes on to conclude with Parliament expressing "its determination...to pursue its endeavours to obtain a democratic and effective European Union of federal type." In the plenary debate following the Maastricht IGC, MEP David Martin, as rapporteur of the report, unambiguously condemned the Treaty's provisions regarding European democracy:

> We have to express our deep dissatisfaction that both the scope and the nature of co-decision have been so curtailed by the Maastricht Treaty. It is certainly not so that this Parliament can claim to be living and working within a democratic Community....The European Parliament, of course, has a duty to press for more powers for itself, not just for its own sake but in order to satisfy and safeguard the rights of the European citizens.

Yet, despite these protestations, it would take until the 2007 Lisbon Treaty for the next major steps to be taken in this regard. The changes in the Treaty of Lisbon, which explicitly stipulated that the president of the European Commission is "elected" by the EP, were used by Parliament to call for new developments. In its resolution on the 2014 European elections, Parliament stated that:

> In view of the new arrangements for the election of the European Commission introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon and the changing relationship between Parliament and the Commission which will

stem from them as from the elections in 2014, that reliable majorities in Parliament will be of paramount importance for the stability of the Union's legislative procedures and the good functioning of its executive. (European Parliament, 2012)

The idea of a "legislature agreement" that should be agreed by the main European political groups in the EP and the (president of the) European Commission in the aftermath of the European elections is a more recent element in this respect. In 2020, the Parliament called for the introduction of the possibility for European political parties and movements "to form pre-electoral coalitions" to transform the European elections into a single European election instead of 27 separate national elections, and stated that the formation of a coalition or programmatic agreement was required because the election of the Commission President depends on a majority of MEPs (European Parliament, 2020). The idea put forward by the EP has been that such a legislature agreement is negotiated among the main groups and functions as the basis for the work programme of the European Commission to "guarantee, to European voters, [a] coherent follow-up to the elections." Each candidate to the European Commission is expected to abide by this agreement (European Parliament, 2023). This call is the latest proposal of pro-EU MEPs towards a federal superstate.

7. Conclusion

Pro-EU MEPs' ideas on democratisation became and remain wedded to a trickle-down logic, despite Eurosceptic contestation. This logic became the dominant paradigm in the run-up to the first direct EP elections in 1979, and was locked in in the decades after. We did not find proposals associated with an intergovernmental organisation or democratic confederacy. A transnational federation is also often not endorsed full-heartedly, but seen as a stepping stone or practical compromise. Federation features are justified with reference to a single people or European citizenry. The mirroring of the EU to domestic forms of representative democracy became and remained the dominant paradigm in EP debates, indicating the pervasiveness of the trickle-down democracy logic.

In earlier debates, MEPs did consider grounding EU democracy in its national constituent parts. They explored a "bottom-up" logic of democratisation, entailing that the European decision-making should further incorporate national parliamentary institutions to ensure popular support. The inclusion of national parliaments has increased over time, but it remains limited to scrutinizing proposals. The Early Warning System, or "yellow card procedure," is arguably the most far-reaching role. Yet, the initiative for these proposals did not come from MEPs, but it was an intergovernmental decision (Van Gruisen & Huysmans, 2020). Ideas for a more concrete institutionalisation of national representation into EU legislative procedures exist, such as a European Senate (Beetz, 2018), a third (virtual) chamber (Cooper, 2005), and a green card (Bellamy, 2016) or red card procedure (Van Gruisen & Huysmans, 2020, p. 469). Yet, these bottom-up proposals did not feature prominently in the contemporary debates.

This explorative analysis points toward an additional explanation for the type of proposals considered by pro-EU MEPs for Europe's democratisation. Analyses that focus on interinstitutional power struggles are not fully equipped to explain the MEPs' particular choice, since bottom-up logics also offer space for more powers and support for the EP. Our historical institutionalist analysis yields an alternative hypothesis: ideational lock-in. But what is the mechanism behind this lock-in? Do MEPs believe that this ideal remains in their interest? Maybe a self-reinforcing effect of trickle-down democracy is at work here: Failure invites

more of the same. In other words, there is no support because the EU does not resemble domestic democracy enough. Yet, another possibility is that there is simply a poverty of ideas. MEPs are also socialised in national arenas; hence, they transpose national ideas to the supranational context. This hypothesis might also have some force in explaining Eurosceptics' continued commitment to national democracy. On this note, the research does not explain why Euroscepticism did not trigger a critical juncture, and maybe the recent success of the far-right will trigger such a juncture. These questions and hypotheses will require further empirical inquiries.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

This research is based on publicly available resources, which can be accessed through the (historical) archives of the European Parliament.

References

Beetz, J. P. (2018). From practice to principle and back. Applying a new realist method to the European Union's democratic deficit. *Political Studies*, *66*(2), 339–355. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717722355

Beetz, J. P. (2019). Safeguarding, shifting, splitting or sharing? Conflicting conceptions of popular sovereignty in the EU-polity. *Journal of European integration*, *41*(7), 937–953. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1665662

Bellamy, R. (2016). A European republic of sovereign states: Sovereignty, republicanism and the European Union. *European Journal of Political Theory*, *16*(2), 188–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885116654389

Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, R. D. (2007). The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism. *World Politics*, *59*, 341–369. https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2007.0025

Cooper, I. (2005). Bicameral or tricameral? National parliaments and representative democracy in the European Union. *Journal of European Integration*, *35*(5), 531–546. http://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2013.799939

Costantino, T. E. (2008). Constructivism. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 116–120). Sage.

European Parliament. (1958). *Review of the work of the ad hoc Assembly and of the Constitutional Committee on the appointment by direct universal suffrage of the members of a European Parliament* (Doc. APE 954).

European Parliament. (1959a). *Working Group on the European elections. Summary report of the meeting of Thursday 17 and Friday 18 September 1959 held at the Binnenhof in The Hague* (Doc. APE 2485).

European Parliament. (1959b). *Working Group on the European elections. Summary Report of the meeting of Thursday 17 and Friday 18 September 1959 held at the Senate in Brussels* (Doc. APE 1474).

European Parliament. (1960). *Draft Convention on the election of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage* (Doc. APE 3242).

European Parliament. (1963). *Report on the tasks and powers of the European Parliament* (Doc. PE 9214).

European Parliament. (1973). *Interim report on the proposals from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council on the strengthening of the budgetary powers of the European Parliament* (Doc. 131/73).

European Parliament. (1975a). *Resolution on European Union* (Doc. C 179/28-30).

European Parliament. (1975b). *Report on European Union* (Doc. 174/75).

European Parliament. (1975c). *Report on the adoption of a Draft Convention introducing elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage* (Doc. 368/74).

European Parliament. (1977a). *Resolution on the granting of special rights to be citizens of the European Community in implementation of the decision of the Paris Summit of December 1974 (point 11 of the final communique)* (Doc. C 299/26-27).

European Parliament. (1977b). *Debate on the date of direct elections to the European Parliament.*

European Parliament. (1977c). *Resolution on the European Community's information policy with particular reference to the Commission information programme in preparation for direct elections to the European Parliament* (Doc. C 133/36-37).

European Parliament. (1978). *Debate on the date of European elections.*

European Parliament. (1979). *Solemn sitting.*

European Parliament. (1990). *Interim report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Institutional Affairs on the European Parliament's guidelines for a draft Constitution for the European Union* (PE 141.140/A/fin).

European Parliament. (1992). *Resolution on the results of the intergovernmental conferences* (A3-0123/92).

European Parliament. (1996). *Report on the constitutional status of the European political parties* (A4-0342/96).

European Parliament. (2012). *Resolution on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014* (2012/2829(RSP)).

European Parliament. (2013). *Resolution on improving the practical arrangements for the holding of the European elections in 2014* (2013/2102(INI)).

European Parliament. (2020). *Resolution on stocktaking of European elections* (2020/2088(INI)).

European Parliament. (2023). *Resolution on the European Elections 2024* (P9_TA(2023)0455).

Fabbrini, S. (2024). The rise and fall of the Spitzenkandidaten? The inner logic of Parliamentary Federation. In M. Ceron, T. Christiansen, & D. G. Dimitrakopoulos (Eds.), *The politicisation of the European Commission's presidency: Spitzenkandidaten and beyond* (pp. 63–82). Springer Nature.

Føllesdal, A., & Hix, S. (2006). Why there is a democratic deficit in the EU: A response to Majone and Moravcsik. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 44*(3), 533–562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00650.x

Gerring, J. (2012). *Social science methodology: A unified framework* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Grimm, D. (2009). Defending sovereign statehood against transforming the European Union into a state. *European Constitutional Law Review, 5*, 353–373. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1574019609003538

Habermas, J. (2017). Citizen and state equality in a supranational political community: Degressive proportionality and the pouvoir constituant mixte. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 55*(2), 171–182. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12517

Hall, P. A., & Taylor, R. C. (1996). Political science and the three new institutionalisms. *Political Studies, 44*, 936–957. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb00343.x

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2009). A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science, 39*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000409

Hysing, E., & Olsson, J. (2018). New political institutionalism. In E. Hysing & J. Olsson (Eds.), *Green inside activism for sustainable development* (pp. 23–45). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56723-5_2

Leconte, C. (2015). From pathology to mainstream phenomenon: Reviewing the Euroscepticism debate in research and theory. *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique, 36*(3), 250–263. http://doi.org/10.1177/0192512115576236

Lowndes, V., & Roberts, M. (2013). *Why institutions matter: The new institutionalism in political science*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mahoney, J., & Rueschemeyer, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

Majone, G. (2005). *Dilemmas of European integration: The ambiguities and pitfalls of integration by stealth*. Oxford University Press.

Moravcsik, A. (2002). In defence of the 'democratic deficit': Reassessing legitimacy in the European Union. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 40*(4), 603–624. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00390

Morgan, G. (2005). *The idea of a European superstate: Public justification and European integration*. Princeton University Press.

Offe, C., & Preuss, U. K. (2006). The problem of legitimacy in the European polity: Is democratisation the answer? In C. Crouch & W. Streeck (Eds.), *The diversity of democracy: Corporatism, social order and political conflict* (pp. 175–204). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Patberg, M. (2017). A systematic justification for the EU's pouvoir constituant mixte: Principles of constitutional politics in supranational polities. *European Law Journal, 23*(6), 441–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/eulj.12262

Peters, B. G. (2019). *Institutional theory in political science: The new institutionalism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Peterson, B. L. (2017). Thematic analysis/interpretive thematic analysis. In J. Matthes, C. S. Davis, & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 1–9). Wiley.

Pierson, P. (2000). Not just what, but when: Timing and sequence in political processes. *Studies in American Political Development, 14*(1), 72–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0898588x00003011

Pittoors, G. (2023a, December 12). *The European Parliament and the European citizen as voter* [Briefing]. European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)757569

Pittoors, G. (2023b, June 7). *Political parties, voter mobilisation and the 1979 European elections* [Briefing]. European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)749769

Pittoors, G. (2024, February 26). *The European Parliament, its powers, and the 1979 European elections* [Briefing]. European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)759605

Reif, K., & Schmitt, H. (1980). Nine second-order national elections—A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results. *European Journal of Political Research, 8*(1), 3–44. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00737.x

Schimmelfennig, F. (2010). The normative origins of democracy in the European Union: Towards a transformationalist theory of democratisation. *European Political Science Review, 2*(2), 211–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773910000068

Sonnicksen, J. (2017). Democratising the separation of powers in EU government: The case for presidentialism. *European Law Journal, 23*(6), 509–522. https://doi.org/10.1111/eulj.12264

Strøm, K. (2000). Delegation and accountability in parliamentary democracies. *European Journal of Political Research, 37*, 261–289. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00513

Thelen, K. (2000). Timing and temporality in the analysis of institutional evolution and change. *Studies in Amercian Political Development, 14*, 101-108. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X00213035

Van Gruisen, P., & Huysmans, M. (2020). The early warning system and policymaking in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, *21*(3), 451–473. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116520923752

Wolfs, W. (2022). *European political parties and party finance reform: Funding democracy?* Palgrave Macmillan.

About the Authors

Jan Pieter Beetz (he/him) is an assistant professor in political theory and European integration at the Utrecht University School of Governance. His research focuses on democratic theories of the EU, legitimate action against democratic backsliding in member states, and the integration of empirical and normative reflection in political theory.

Gilles Pittoors (he/him) is a lecturer in political science at the University of Leuven. His research addresses questions of EU democracy from a multilevel and transnational (party) politics perspective, with particular attention to the Europeanisation of national democratic institutions and practices across EU Member States.

Wouter Wolfs (he/him) is a lecturer of European studies at the University of Leuven. His research focuses on the history of European integration, European democracy, interinstitutional relations in the EU, parliamentary capacity-building, political finance, and the organisation of European political parties.