

Stockholms Universitet
Institutionen för Ekonomisk Historia och Internationella Relationer
Internationella Relationer III, VT, 2021.
Kandidatuppsats, 15 hp

Influencing the heads of state and government

Europarty influence in the European Council, in the light of the
Spitzenkandidaten-processes in 2014 and 2019.

Keywords: Europarties, Spitzenkandidaten, European Council, influence

Student: Jens Ahl
Handledare: Hedvig Ördén
Antal tecken: 106 972



Stockholms
universitet

Abstract

This study aims to contribute to the debate on the influence of Europarties in the European Union decision-making process, and more precisely in the European Council. As a starting point the theory on Europarty influence in the European Council, by Jonas Tallberg and Karl Magnus Johansson, will be tested in order to assess its validity. There is a need to further research the role of the Europarties in the decision-making processes of the European Union, since the contributions to the field are scarce. The theory suggests that Europarties can be expected to be influential when 1) there is ideological polarisation surrounding the question of concern, 2) one party is dominating the European Council, and 3) when a Europarty is successful in mobilising and creating cohesion among its leaders. In addition, the Europarties have to be able to compete with domestic constraints that the members of the Council are bound by. The theory is empirically tested by a comparative case study on the outcomes of the Spitzenkandidaten-processes in the European elections in 2014 and 2019. It seems that the Europarties were influential and managed to get a Spitzenkandidat elected as Commission President in 2014, but less successful in 2019. However, the findings of the empirical study suggest that the Europarties were successful in mobilising support also in 2019, but a chain of events led to the fall of the Spitzenkandidaten-process in its current shape and the Europarties have most likely lost a part of their long-term influence.

Table of content

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. Purpose and research questions	5
1.1.1. Research questions.....	5
1.2. Theoretical framework.....	6
1.2.1. The ideological dimensions	7
1.2.2. Composition of the European Council.....	7
1.2.3. Level of cohesion and mobilisation capacity.....	8
1.2.4. Theoretical conclusions	8
1.2.5. Domestic constraints.....	9
1.3. Previous research	9
1.4. Method	12
1.4.1. Comparative case study	12
1.4.2. Process tracing	13
1.4.4. Operationalisation	16
1.5. Empirical material.....	18
1.6. Delimitations of the study	19
1.7. Research ethics.....	20
1.8. Disposition	20
2. Analysis of the empirical material	20
2.1. Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014.....	21
2.1.1. Ideological polarisation.....	22
2.1.2. Composition of the European Council.....	22
2.1.3. Level of cohesion and mobilization capacity.....	23
2.1.4. Domestic constraints.....	24
2.1.5. Summary of findings and empirical tests.....	25
2.2. Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2019.....	26
2.2.1. Ideological polarisation.....	27
2.2.2. Composition of the European Council.....	28
2.2.3. Level of cohesion and mobilization capacity.....	29
2.2.4. Domestic constraints.....	31
2.2.5. Summary of findings and empirical tests.....	31
3. Final discussion and conclusion.....	33
3.1. Discussion	33
3.1.1. Theoretical perspectives.....	33
3.1.2. Testing the theory on Europarty influence.....	35
3.1.3. Spitzenkandidaten-process.....	36
3.2. Conclusions.....	36
3.3. Further research	37
4. References.....	38

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ALDE: Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe¹

ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Party

EPP: European People's Party

EU: European Union

MEP: Member of the European Parliament

PES: Party of European Socialists

PM: Prime Minister

S&D: Socialists and Democrats group

UK: United Kingdom

Tables

Table 1. Process tracing: four tests for causation	15
Table 2. Operationalisation	17
Table 3. Composition of the European Council, July 2014	23
Table 4. Composition of the European Council, June 2019	29

¹ Before 2012, the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR).

1. Introduction

A political party is defined by that regulation as an association of citizens, which pursues political objectives, and is either recognised by, or established in accordance with, the laws of at least one EU Member State. European political parties are described as federations of national political parties from several EU Member States which are united by political affinity. (EUR-Lex, n.d.)

The influence of European Political Parties (hereinafter *Europarties*), in the European Union (EU) decision-making process is not properly examined. Karl Magnus Johansson and Tapio Raunio define Europarties as “networks of like-minded national parties or as loose federations of member parties”, they identify a research gap, and point to the need of further examining the Europarty influence in the EU decision-making processes (2019, pp. 1-2). The reason is twofold, firstly, constitutional changes have increased the possibility for the Europarties, and the party groups in the European Parliament (EP), to influence the policy decisions. Secondly, the members of the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Council of the European Union (hereinafter European Council), are all politicians representing national political parties that in turn are members of the Europarties (Johansson & Raunio, 2019, p. 2).

Europarty influence will in this thesis be defined as the ability of a Europarty, or a coalition of parties, of shaping the European Council negotiations, in order to impact the long-term policy outcomes.

The field of Europarty influence is closely related to the international relations debate on the legitimacy of International organisations. Tallberg and Zürn (2019) points to the decrease of legitimacy in the EU during recent years, with the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in the French and Dutch referendums as well as Brexit. The findings of Sommerer and Agné (2018), are similar and they suggest that decreased legitimacy lead to difficulties in ratifying new policy. This is outside of the scope of this thesis, but understanding the Europarty ability to influence the decisions on other levels than the European Parliament will help to understand if their influence contributes to an increase or decrease of legitimacy and if they can help to reduce the democratic deficit. Previously, the Europarties had no well-defined role in the EU, compared to the role of national political parties in the democratic system of sovereign democratic states (Lindberg, 2008). In the Lisbon treaty, an attempt was made to change this and the role of the Europarties was defined: “Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union” (EU, 2007, Art. 8 A). One of the aims was to increase the relevance of the

European elections and it paved the way for pan-European candidates, hence introducing the Spitzenkandidaten-system (Braun and Popa, 2018). The question is if the Europarties can live up to this wording in the treaty and if a defined relation between them – for instance via Spitzenkandidaten and transnational election lists – and the decision-making institutions can increase the legitimacy and decrease the democratic deficit of the EU?

The Spitzenkandidaten-system – Spitzenkandidat is the German word for lead candidate – allowed for the Europarties to nominate a top candidate in the European elections, that would be the candidate for becoming the President of the European Commission (Christiansen, 2016). By voting on a national party, you would give support to the candidate of a specific Europarty. The European Council, according to the Lisbon treaty, has to take the election results into account (Economist, 2014b), and the idea was to avoid that the leading positions, as previously, would be “selected by leaders in murky back-room deals” (Economist, 2014a).

With the aim of filling a part of the research gap, pointed out by Johansson and Raunio (2019), this thesis will make a comparative case study of the Spitzenkandidaten-processes in 2014 and 2019, in order to learn more of the Europarty influence within the European Council. The scope of the thesis has been delimited to studying the European People’s Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in order to comply with the time and resources available for this thesis.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the research field on the influence of Europarties in the European Union decision-making processes, and more precisely the role of Europarties in the decision-making processes of the European Council. There is a gap to fill since Europarty influence has not been properly examined (Johansson & Raunio, 2019, p. 2).

Jonas Tallberg and Karl Magnus Johansson (2008) has formulated a theory of Europarty influence in the European Council and the validity of the theory will be tested in this thesis. The authors explicitly express the need of testing the theory on new and modern cases. This will be done by a comparative case study of the Europarty influence in the Spitzenkandidaten-processes in 2014 and 2019.

1.1.1. Research questions

What where the Europarty influence in the European Council, with regards to the Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014 and 2019?

Why were the Europarties successful in getting one of their candidates elected in 2014 but not in 2019?

1.2. Theoretical framework

In this section, a summary of the theoretical framework for measuring Europarty influence within the European council will be provided. The framework is set up by Tallberg and Johansson (2008), and will be described below. An extra layer will be added to the theory by extracting additional assumptions from the work by Johansson (2016). He has developed the initial framework of Tallberg and Johansson and his supplement is important, because it takes the EU enlargements after year 2004 into account. The initial text by Tallberg and Johansson does not.

The theory by Tallberg and Johansson was developed in order to explain how the Europarties might influence the decisions of the European Council. It could be tempting to assume that numerical superiority in the Council could explain the Europarty influence; the party with the largest number of heads of state and government in the Council, would be the most influential. However, studying this closer shows that numerical superiority is not in itself enough to explain the possible Europarty influence (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1228).

Their theory is constituted by three hypotheses, which will be further developed below: 1) party politics become more important the more significant the left-right dimension is; 2) if one Europarty dominates the Council the decisions are likely to become more party political; 3) Europarties with great internal cohesion and capacity to mobilise are more likely to influence the Council decisions.

What makes the contribution interesting is that the theory adds an extra layer to the field of Europarty research. Previously the research had focused mainly on the internal organisational development of the Europarties as such, and on Europarty influence within the European Parliament. The theory adds new knowledge to the field, by researching the mechanisms influencing the decisions in the European Council. The Europarties' involvement in the bargaining processes of the heads of state and government had so far not been explored (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, pp. 1223-4).

Tallberg and Johansson conclude by calling for further testing of their theory, not at least since their research does not take the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007 into account (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, pp. 1237-8).

In the following, the three hypotheses, set up to explain Europarty influence, will be further described.

1.2.1. The ideological dimensions

First hypothesis: Europarty influence will be greater when the left-right factor is more significant.

Tallberg and Johansson (2008) form their hypothesis based on the literature proposing that the left-right dimension in specific issues is crucial for the transnational Europarties to mobilize. Traditionally the decisions on the agenda of the Council was often beyond the ideological divide: institutional amendments, setting the budget or issues of foreign policy and enlargement. The left-right dimension was mostly present in the European Council when decisions were referred from the Council of Ministers, either when they had not been able to make a decision or when there was a need for high level confirmation. Since the late 1990's the Council has been dealing with more political issues (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1227). The current discussion on introducing a social pillar is an example of that.

The idea of the importance of the left-right dimension is brought in from Simon Hix (1999; 2008) theory on party politics in the European Union. Tallberg and Johansson also discusses a second ideological factor, mentioned in Hix's works, namely the integration-independence dimension. This ideological factor defines the dimensions of European integration. Even though they don't bring it into their hypothesis, they discuss the fact that both dimensions can be found for instance in the manifestos of the Europarties. They also note that both dimensions are present in European party politics in the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, and the authors assume that the same goes for the European Council. They also note that the number of issues with an ideological dimension are limited in the Council (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, pp. 1224-6).

1.2.2. Composition of the European Council

Second hypothesis: With one Europarty dominating the European Council the decisions are more likely to be party political.

Most of the heads of state and government are representatives of national political parties. These political parties are in turn members of one of the transnational Europarties. Even if the numerical superiority is not alone sufficient for Europarty influence, Tallberg and Johansson assume that the relative number of the leaders belonging to the Europarties will have an effect on the outcome of the decisions taken by the Council (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1227).

At the same time, it is important to note that one cannot assume that the heads of state and government will subscribe to identical ideologies in each and every question. The Europarties are broad communities in terms of ideology. To use the example of the authors, the member parties of the EPP ideologically range from Christian democratic to conservative and of the PES from social democratic to socialist (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1228). This will have an impact on the decisions and create a divide within the Europarties on certain issues.

1.2.3. Level of cohesion and mobilisation capacity

Third hypothesis: Europarties with high internal cohesion and capacity to mobilise their members are more likely to influence the European Council decisions.

Numerical superiority is, as discussed above, not enough as a prerequisite to influence political decisions in the European Council. Therefore, Tallberg and Johansson theorises that it is a necessity for the Europarties to provide formalised opportunities for the heads of state and government to network, prior to the meetings of the Council. By gathering the leaders to so called pre-Summits, the Europarties are able to create cohesion by finding common lines and to mobilise the leaders on specific issues. However, it is notable that the Europarties have shown different abilities to mobilise their leaders (2008, pp. 1228-9).

1.2.4. Theoretical conclusions

Tallberg and Johansson conclude, based on their empirical research, that “[n]egotiations along party divides are relatively rare in the European Council, where issue-specific, interest-based coalitions instead constitute the most prevalent form of actor alignment.” (2008, p. 1237). The general conclusion follows the line of the theory: few issues can be placed within the left-right dimension and the mobilisation is mostly ineffective, which at least partly depend on the internal ideological differences. The factor that seems most crucial is that of the composition of the Council. When issues that have a clear left-right dimension are on the table, decisions tend to reflect the ideas of the Europarty that collect the most leaders. But yet again, the internal ideological variations are crucial also in these cases (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008, p. 1229). However, party-based cooperation does occur in the European Council. When it does, the empirical findings of Tallberg and Johansson show that the conditions are in accordance with their theorised assumptions (2008, p. 1237).

1.2.5. Domestic constraints

Johansson (2016), has further developed Tallberg and Johansson's theory, and confirms that the success of a Europarty lies in their ability to mobilise their leaders. The mobilisation is mainly taking place in the pre-Summit meetings. The EPP has been more successful in this task, than for instance the PES, and an important reason for this is their ability to commit the German chancellor to attend. This was the case with Helmut Kohl and has continued to be so with Angela Merkel (Johansson, 2016, p. 82). Johansson pays less attention to the hypothesis on the left-right dimension. This might be since his empirical case is focused on the Treaty of Amsterdam, which is not a typical left-right issue. Johansson also reconfirms the importance of the hypotheses on the composition of the Council (2016, p. 83).

The specific contribution by Johansson is the idea that the Europarties are constrained by domestic issues conveyed by the national member parties and their leaders. The heads of state and government are, above all, leaders of national political parties, dependent on winning national elections and making deals with political opponents. Therefore, they need to prioritise domestic issues in the bargaining processes of the European Council. Europarties on the other hand lack the possibility to bind the leaders to any decisions. Johansson derives this variable from the Robert D. Putnam theory on the two-level game, a reality in the "interdependent, yet sovereign." (1988, p. 434) world. Every government leader needs to consider the domestic opinion and international bargaining processes, when making decisions. Domestic factors, that might influence the leaders' decisions, need to be taken into account, when exploring Europarty influence in the European Council (Johansson, 2016, pp. 82-4). No outspoken indication is given to what type of domestic issues that matter, but by studying Johansson's empirical analysis, you get an idea that the important domestic constraints are those related to the specific issue at stake.

1.3. Previous research

The thesis contributes to previous research and scientific debate in two fields. Firstly, it contributes to the understanding of the rather complex processes behind the decision making in the European Union, and in particular which role the Europarties play in this process. Secondly, a contribution will be made to the debate focusing on the role of the Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014 and 2019. The debate has so far mostly covered different aspects of the 2014 process, whilst there so far has been less interest in the events of 2019. Nor has much attention been given to the comparison of the outcome of the process in 2014, to that of 2019. In the following, the most important findings in the field will be accounted

for, and the research gaps will be chiselled, in order to describe how this thesis contributes to the two research fields.

The literature on Europarties are growing, but is not substantial. It has been suggested that further attention is given to the research of the Europarties and not at least since the focus often has been on internal processes of the Europarties or their influence in the European Parliament (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008; Johansson & Raunio, 2019).

Simon Hix drew up a framework, which has been widely adopted in the field, for analysing the ideological differences in the political space of the European Union and he suggests that two ideological cleavages are dominant: the left-right and the integration-independence dimensions. Hix notes that the integration-independence dimension has been most salient since the late 1970's, not at least since the three major Europarties harmonised their policies and became positive to further integration, but predicts a shift towards the left-right dimension. The prediction is based on the fact that most European politicians, from the Members of Parliament (MEP) to the leaders in the Council, has a background in a political party, and political parties play an increasingly important role in the agenda setting and the policy promotion within the institutions of the EU. Hix also points to the national parties so far have been reluctant of transferring power to the transnational Europarties (Hix 1999; 2008).

This last point is probably also a reason to the problem of defining the actor's role of the Europarties. Their role on the European level is less apparent, compared to the clearly defined role of national parties in the democratic system of the state. At the same time, it has been settled that the Europarties are present in the decision-making processes of the EU, on all levels, and that they sometimes are able to influence the decisions (Lindberg et al, 2008). Another question of concern is whether the Europarties would be capable of bearing the responsibilities defined by the Lisbon treaty. This is not at least interesting in the debate on EU legitimacy. The question is if stronger Europarties, could help to reduce the democratic deficit of the EU? For instance, by bringing additional value to the input-legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999), increasing importance of the European elections and the representativeness of the executive power. Or for that matter, by adding value to the throughput-legitimacy (Schmidt, 2013), increasing the open procedures and ways consulting the citizens.

Coming back to the Lisbon treaty, Day (2014) has defined several driving forces for developing and increasing the influence of the Europarties. They span from the simplest reasons, such as reducing transaction costs to more complex, such as introducing transnational election-lists in the European elections and increasing influence over the national member

parties. However, Day does not claim to be able to foresee the future development but suggests two possible scenarios. One being that a success of implementing the Spitzenkandidaten-system in 2014, will lead to increased legitimacy of the Europarties. The second, an opposite scenario would probably lead to decreased Europarty influence.

The debate on the Spitzenkandidaten has mostly been focused to the events and implications of the process in 2014. Several contributions suggest that the background to the introduction of the system was to implement the provisions of the Lisbon treaty and to create a clearer connection between the European elections and the executive (Christiansen, 2016; Hobolt, 2014).

Some literature suggest that the Spitzenkandidaten-process lead to an institutionalisation of the Europarties, including the development of the internal mechanisms (Put et al, 2016). By focusing on one of the internal mechanisms of the Europarties, namely the selection process of the Spitzenkandidat in 2014. They conclude that most Europarties developed ground-breaking models, but due to the lack of time there was a lot of improvements to be made to make the procedures more democratic. However, in a follow-up study looking at the procedure in 2019 the results were partly discouraging. Not much in the procedures had change, but the authors suggest that by increasing the democratisation of the procedures, the public interest in the European election, could increase (Wolfs et al, 2021).

In general, most of the literature are quite discouraging in their analysis of the outcomes of the 2014 process. For instance, the impact of the Spitzenkandidaten-system in the European elections was quite low. The visibility of the candidates was low in most European countries (Hobolt, 2014; Braun & Popa, 2018). One reason for this could be the way the national parties handled the issue. In most countries, it was business as usual, without the national parties trying to harmonise their campaigns to the institutional change that the Spitzenkandidaten-system entailed. On the other hand, in those countries where member parties did actually adapt to the new system, the results show that it had an impact on the interest of the citizens (Braun & Popa, 2018).

However, presently the Spitzenkandidaten-system has had the largest impact, not on the citizens and the election system, but rather on the struggle between the different institutions (Hobolt, 2014). This goes against the initial principles, namely to create clearer division between the Europarties (Christiansen, 2016) and the long-term vision of how the democracy should be developed in the European Union (Hobolt, 2014).

Despite the valuable insights given by the research so far, most of the literature on Europarties has either focused on internal mechanisms or their influence in the EP-processes,

but there is a further need in defining the role of the Europarties in the political spheres of the EU. One concrete way of doing so, is by examining the influence of Europarties in the bargaining processes of the European Council. The role of the Europarties in the processes of appointing the Commission President is also unclear, in the light of the institutional changes that came with the Spitzenkandidaten-system. This system has been researched from different valuable angles, but so far neither from the perspective of the Europarties nor has any comparison of the outcome in the processes of 2014 and 2019 been done. This thesis will thrive to fill the research gaps in those two areas.

1.4. Method

This thesis has a qualitative, descriptive and theory testing approach. The author subscribes to an objectivist ontology, hence following an epistemological positivist tradition. The theory will be tested by using a comparative case study, and by examining the underlying processes and mechanisms of the cases, by doing a simplified process tracing. In this section, the research design and methodological choices will be further presented.

The reason for choosing a theory testing approach is that you wish to test the validity of, and possibly contribute to, an existing theory. This is done by using new empirical material to challenge the theory. In the social sciences, the only way to be sure about the generalisability of a theory is to test it against different empirical materials (Teorell & Svensson, 2012, pp. 48-51). The idea of testing all the hypotheses of a theory and not leaving out any parts, in order to ensure that it is fully tested, will be honoured (Van Evera, 2010, p. 35).

1.4.1. Comparative case study

According to Esaiasson et al (2017, p. 93) there are four types of research design that are appropriate for the theory testing approach. The reason for choosing a comparative case study design will be developed in the following.

The comparative case study design is developed to combine the study of historical cases and the social science focus on theory (Teorell & Svensson, 2012, p. 236). The strength is that it is a tool to test theories in specific circumstances. In addition, it can also help to develop underdeveloped theories and it helps to describe causality (Bryman, 2016, p. 67).

The comparative case study allows the author to identify key actors and mechanisms in order to make generalisations about Europarty influence, hence contributing to the research in the field (Johansson, 2016, p. 81). By using the research design the thesis will follow in the footsteps of Tallberg and Johansson (2008) and Johansson (2016).

Important when designing the comparative case study is to define the cases, and not to fall into the trap of selection bias (Lamont, 2015, p. 132). In this thesis, a “most-similar case-comparison” is made², meaning two similar cases with different outcomes was chosen (Lamont, 2015, pp. 133-4).

In this thesis, the differences between the Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014 and 2019, will be studied, in order to understand the Europarty influence. The processes were similar, but the outcome different. In the 2014 case the candidate of the largest Europarty, Jean-Claude Juncker, was appointed as President of the Commission (Schmitt & Popa, 2016). In the 2019 elections the person becoming Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, had not been a candidate in the elections (Gray et al, 2019).

Another important feature when formulating the research questions is to respond to the question “What case is my case a part of?”³ This implies the choice of theory to connect to your case (Teorell & Svensson, 2012, p. 237). The main case of this thesis, is to examine the influence of Europarties in the decision-making process of the European Council. By analysing the two Spitzenkandidaten-cases, this thesis can test the validity of, and possibly contribute to, the theory on Europarty influence, developed by Tallberg and Johansson (2008). In addition, comparing the cases will also contribute to the understanding of the Spitzenkandidaten-process itself.

1.4.2. Process tracing

In order to conduct the comparative case study, the methodological choice for this thesis will be a simplified process tracing, examining the empirical material as described forthcoming.

Process tracing is used in historical cases to try to trace the mechanisms causing the outcome (Teorell & Svensson, 2012, p. 247). “The goal is to establish whether the events or processes within the case fit those predicted by alternative explanations.” (Bennett, 2010, p. 10). Bennett compares the process tracing to that of a policeman trying to puzzle different clues together in order to solve a crime. You need to examine the means, motives and opportunities in order to find the logical chain of possible causality and correlation.

Van Evera (1997, pp. 31-2) introduces four empirical tests that will be of value to this thesis, when evaluating the material and trying to find the mechanisms of causality. Hoop, smoking gun, doubly decisive and straw in the wind tests. Bennett (2010) explains the tests by

² Esaiasson et al (2017, pp. 109-10) argues that the most-/least-similar case-model are a similar concept to the comparative design.

³ Translation from Swedish original by the author.

using terminology of logics and more precisely the question of necessity and sufficiency, as described in table 1. He also explains that the tests are not definite, but rather provide credible explanations.

According to Van Evera (2010, p. 32) the doubly-decisive tests is the most accurate test, providing evidence of both necessity and sufficiency if the evidence passes and eliminates the hypothesis if it fails, but finding such evidence is rare. Putting the material through a combination of the hoop and smoking-gun tests however provide the same predictability as the doubly-decisive tests. The results of hoop tests confirm necessity if passing and eliminates the hypothesis if it fails. The smoking gun tests on the other hand confirms the hypothesis if the evidence passes the test, but does not eliminate the hypothesis if it does not.

The straw-in-the-wind tests are less certain. They tell us something about the relevance of the hypothesis, but do not either confirm or eliminate it (Bennett, 2010; Van Evera, 2010, pp. 31-2). In order to confirm or eliminate the hypotheses, in this thesis, we will use the hoop and smoking gun tests to analyse the empirical findings.

Table 1. Process tracing: four tests for causation^a

		Sufficient To Establish Causation ^b	
		No	Yes
Necessary To Establish Causation	No	Straw in the Wind <i>Passing affirms relevance of hypothesis but does not confirm it.</i> <i>Failing suggests hypothesis may not be relevant, but does not eliminate it.</i>	Smoking Gun <i>Passing confirms hypothesis.</i> <i>Failing does not eliminate it.</i>
	Yes	Hoop <i>Passing affirms relevance of hypothesis but does not confirm it.</i> <i>Failing eliminates it.</i>	Doubly Decisive <i>Passing confirms hypothesis and eliminates others.</i> <i>Failing eliminates it.</i>

^a The typology creates a new, two-dimensional framing of the alternative tests originally formulated by Van Evera (1997: 31–32).

^b In this figure, “establishing causation,” as well as “confirming” or “eliminating” an hypothesis, obviously does not involve a *definitive* test. Rather, as with any causal inference, qualitative or quantitative, it is a *plausible* test in the framework of (a) this particular method of inference and (b) a specific data set.

Source: Bennett (2010).

One of the disadvantages of process tracing, mentioned by Checkel (2008) is that of time and material. Doing a full scaled process tracing is time consuming and the amount of material that is required is huge. This is something that you lack, when writing a thesis on this level. Hence the process tracing done here will not be a full-fledged state-of-the-art investigation, but rather a simplified version, using the empirical material chosen in accordance with what is described in the section on empirical material, below. In addition, and to further limit the study, the thesis will only study three of the Europarties, namely, the EPP, PES and ALDE.

One of the weaknesses with process tracing, noted by Lamont (2015, p. 137), is that it will only give information about the cases at hand and not in more general terms. However, this is also in line with what Tallberg and Johansson (2008) suggest when they propose that their theory need to be tested against multiple new cases, in order to confirm its validity. Or as put in the words of Van Evera: “One tests a theory by asking if the empirical evidence confirms the theory’s predictions, not by asking how many cases the theory can explain.” (Van Evera, 1997, p. 39).

Two other weaknesses, discussed by Bennett (2010), is that of digging too deep into, hence getting stuck in the details, as well as the risk of lack of freedom when the number of cases are few and the variables many. His response to the critics is that there is a need to grade the material. All details and pieces of evidence cannot be valued equal, and the researcher need to make distinctions.

In the next section, we will go further into detail on the different variables used in the thesis and how they are operationalised, and we will also look further into how to grade and value the pieces of evidence that is found in the empirical material.

1.4.4. Operationalisation

Finding the appropriate indicators for your independent variables might be a difficult task, not at least if you wish to secure reliability and validity. In this thesis, the aim has been to operationalise the variables in a way, as close as possible to the operationalisation of Tallberg and Johansson, although there are some differences that will be described further.

The independent variables of the study, 1) ideological dimension, 2) composition of the European Council, 3) level of cohesion and mobilisation and 4) domestic constraints, further presented in table 2, are a mix of both absolute and contextual variables. The second variable is absolute, while the first, third and fourth are contextual (Esaiaasson et al, 2017, pp. 53-4). Therefore, it will be necessary to collect and sample different types of empirical material in order to further research the different variables.

The first variable is operationalised differently, compared to the study of Tallberg and Johansson. This in order to capture not only the left-right ideological dimension, but also other ideological dimensions that can be valid, for instance the integration-independence dimension. Even though Tallberg and Johansson uses the left-right dimension in their hypothesis, the ideological polarisation seems to be important as such, and after studying the empirical evidence, you find that other dimensions of polarisation has affected the results. Hence, the definition has been broadened in this thesis. But in order to be true to the theory testing methodology, specific attention will be given to the left-right dimension.

Regarding the fourth variable, Johansson does not give any precise detail on how to define domestic constraints. The operationalisation is done in order to capture the degree of politicisation of relevant domestic constraints that might influence the results.

Table 2. Operationalisation

<p><u>Independent variable:</u> <i>Ideological polarisation</i></p> <p>Europarties are more likely to influence European Council decisions when there is a clear ideological polarisation surrounding the issues. The left-right and the integration-independence dimensions are ideological factors that can increase Europarty influence.</p>	<p><u>Independent variable:</u> <i>Composition of the European Council</i></p> <p>Europarties are more likely to influence European Council decisions when a majority of the leaders belong to one party.</p>	<p><u>Independent variable:</u> <i>Level of cohesion and mobilisation</i></p> <p>Europarties are more likely to influence European Council decisions when they are able to unite and mobilise the leaders belonging to their party.</p>	<p><u>Independent variable:</u> <i>Domestic constraints</i></p> <p>Europarties need to compete with domestic constraints that the members of the Council are bound by.</p>
<p><u>Case-specific measurement:</u></p> <p>Are there ideological polarisation, the left-right dimension and/or the integration-independent dimension, that had an impact on the Spitzenkandidaten-process?</p>	<p><u>Case-specific measurement:</u></p> <p>The composition of the European Council will be measured. How many of the leaders belong to each Europarty?</p>	<p><u>Case-specific measurement:</u></p> <p>Have the Europarties worked to mobilise the members of the Council? Have they been able to create cohesion?</p>	<p><u>Case-specific measurement:</u></p> <p>What are the domestic constraints the leaders need to consider, that might have an impact on the Spitzenkandidaten-system?</p>
<p><u>Empirical material:</u></p> <p>News articles.</p>	<p><u>Empirical material:</u></p> <p>For 2014, individual search for country, leaders and party, crosschecked with the membership lists of relevant Europarties. For 2019, documentation from the European Council, crosschecked with the membership lists of relevant Europarties.</p>	<p><u>Empirical material:</u></p> <p>News articles, statements by the Europarties and think-tank reports.</p>	<p><u>Empirical material:</u></p> <p>News articles.</p>

One advantage of process tracing is that it allows the researcher to focus on the differences between the variables rather than differences between the cases (Bryman, 2016, p. 68). When digging into the question of theory testing, and the empirical tests of Van Evera, the tests can

help to distinguish between the necessity and sufficiency of the variables and to fulfil the process tracing requirements on discussing alternate scenarios. This will come in handy when testing the variables and the case specific measurements of the thesis, presented in table 2. The tests can help distinguish the relevance and validity of the variables by discussing the different possible aspects that could affect the outcomes at any given time.

The logical causality between the four variables will be further examined in order to described the necessity of the first three variables that are connected to Tallberg and Johansson's original hypotheses. Are they sufficient to explain the Europarty influence one and one, in different combinations or are all three variables necessary in order for the Europarties to become influential? Likewise, is the fourth variable, derived from the work of Johansson (2016), a necessary condition for the first three variables to explain the influence of Europarties. Finally, are all variables equally important to explain influence, or are they graded differently?

In table 2, the variables and the operationalisation is described. The table also includes information on the empirical material, which will be further described in the next section.

1.5. Empirical material

In this section, the empirical material will be described. In addition, the material will be discussed from a source critical standpoint. The different variables call for different types of source material and in addition, there is a need to use both primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources are statements from the Europarties, transcripts from debates in the European parliament and summaries of decisions in the European Parliament. Secondary sources are reports in media, think-tank reports and in one case, an article from an academic journal, offering background information that was useful to be able to lay the puzzle. In order to ensure high level of transparency, all sources are open and available on the internet. The source critical quest of ensuring the authenticity of the sources taken from the internet has been overcome by using only material from official websites of the institutions, organisations and media outlets.

In order to be able to identify the casual mechanisms of the first, third and fourth variables, the primary and secondary sources described above were used. The second variable is a numerical variable describing the composition of the European Council. The European Council had a list of participants published for the meeting in 2019, which was crosschecked with the membership lists of the relevant Europarties. Such a list was not published for the

2014 meeting, so each country has been assessed individually, checking the leader and party affiliation and in a second step crosschecking with the Europarties membership lists.

Secondary sources will be used in order to address the lack of official documentation from the meetings of the European Council, the pre-Summit meetings organised by the Europarties and from informal negotiations etc. This is, according to Lamont (2015, pp. 81-2) not a problem as long as you are aware of the background of the media outlets. In this thesis, only international, well known, outlets will be used. Puzzling the evidence, by comparing the material from three different outlets, *The Economist*, *Euractive* and the EU edition of *Politico*, helps you to avoid falling into the trap of the material being biased. It is obvious that the different outlets provide their own angles and interpretations, but by sampling material from several sources and focusing on the parts when their story is consistent (Rigsarkivet, 2015), you can be fairly sure you have an as varied and complete view of the events as possible. In order to find relevant reports and articles and to ensure that nothing relevant has been missed out, the search engines of the outlets have been utilised, using the search-words “Spitzenkandidat” and “Spitzenkandidaten.” The results have been systemised and in some cases additional articles have been found by a snowballing effect; searching through the links in an article, to further news stories.

To be able to collect relevant primary source documents, the websites of the EU institutions and Europarties have been systematically searched. The relevant documents, statements, transcripts from debates etc. have been collected and systematised, in order to fit them into the study.

In the coming sections, the delimitations of the thesis and questions related to research ethics will be described.

1.6. Delimitations of the study

The scope of this thesis is spatially delimited to the decision-making process of the European Union, and more precisely the influence of Europarties within this process. In order to follow the delimitations given by the theoretical framework, the scope will be further narrowed to only studying the Europarty influence within the European Council, and more precisely to what extent the heads of state and government are following party colours. In addition, the study will limit itself to studying the EPP, the PES and the ALDE parties

The Europarty influence will be studied by researching the Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014 and 2019, which gives the time delimitations of the thesis. More precisely this will mean the period between the preparations of the elections, when the Europarties select their

candidates and confirm their platforms until the European Council decide on who will be appointed as President of the European Commission.

1.7. Research ethics

A researcher needs to ask himself if there are any conflicts of interest between him and the research question (Lamont, 2015, p. 60). In this case, it is important to note that the author has a long-standing past as active within one of the Europarties, namely the EPP, and he has taken part in meetings and congresses, representing a Swedish member party. However, by being transparent about this and by not using the EPP as a sole case example, there shall not be any risk of conflict of interest. None of the two parties has commissioned the study, nor have they been involved in designing the research. The knowledge the author has acquired during the active years will rather hopefully help deepen the understanding of the role of Europarties and how they function.

The thesis will also meet the requirements regarding source material collected from the internet in regards to transparency, availability and that the material is not sensitive in any way (Bryman, 2016, p. 139).

1.8. Disposition

In the introductory sections of this thesis, the background and purpose has been described, followed by introductions of the theoretical and methodological frameworks.

In the following, the thesis will be divided into two sections. In the first of those, an analysis of the empirical material by a comparative case study will be conducted. The analysis has been divided into two subsections, one per case. The first subsection will be devoted to the Spitzenkandidaten-process in the 2014 and the second section to the process in 2019. Each section will in turn be further divided according to the thematic given by the independent variables: the left-right dimension, the numerical conditions within the European Council, the level of cohesion and mobilisation capacity and the domestic constraints. The third and final section will offer a discussion where the results will be analysed on the basis of the theoretical framework and the analytical starting points. Finally, the final conclusions will be presented.

2. Analysis of the empirical material

In this section, the two Spitzenkandidaten-cases will be analysed. Each case is divided into subsections, where the variables will be separately described, in accordance with the operationalisation. The case-specific questions are as follows:

1) Are there ideological polarisation, the left-right dimension and/or the integration-independent dimension, that had an impact on the Spitzenkandidaten-process?, 2) How many of the leaders in the European Council belong to each Europarty?, 3) Have the Europarties worked to mobilise the members of the Council? Have they been able to create cohesion?, and 4) What are the domestic constraints the leaders need to consider, that might have an impact on the Europarty influence over the Spitzenkandidaten-system?

Each subsection will start with a short background of the Spitzenkandidaten-process, the main candidates and the outcomes.

2.1. Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2014

In November 2012, the European Parliament, adopted a resolution that could be seen as the official starting point of the Spitzenkandidaten system. The resolution was supported by MEP's belonging to the parliamentary groups of the EPP, the PES and the ALDE (EP, 2012a). It was stated that the European Parliament:

Urges the European political parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission and expects those candidates to play a leading role in the parliamentary electoral campaign, in particular by personally presenting their programme in all Member States of the Union; stresses the importance of reinforcing the political legitimacy of both Parliament and the Commission by connecting their respective elections more directly to the choice of the voters (EP, 2012b).

The nomination of the top candidates, were supposed to create a clearer link between the European elections and the executive power of the EU, the European Commission (Christiansen, 2016).

The candidates of the three Europarties in the scope of this study was Martin Schultz, the incumbent President of the European Parliament and an MEP from Germany, representing the PES, Guy Verhofstadt, an MEP and former Prime Minister (PM) of Belgium, representing the ALDE. The EPP was represented by the former PM of Luxemburg, Jean-Claude Juncker (Schmitt & Popa, 2016).

As further described in the analysis below, the Europarties cooperated and were successful in getting the European Council to appoint the candidate of the largest party, Juncker of the EPP, as Commission President (Vogel, 2014c).

2.1.1. Ideological polarisation

In the case of 2014, there is evidence of polarisation, and the integration-independence dimension seems to be mostly valid. The resistance to appoint Jean-Claude Juncker, the top candidate of the EPP, cut right through several Europarties, and not at least the EPP itself (Vogel, 2014a; Jacobsen & Gotev, 2014). Hence there was a lack of a clear left-right dimension surrounding the Spitzenkandidaten-process of 2014. However, the strongest opposition adhering to the promises given in the Spitzenkandidaten-process was the PM of the United Kingdom (UK), David Cameron. The appointment of Juncker could, according to Cameron, lead to a British exit out of the EU (Keating 2014b), and when the leaders of the largest parliamentary groups and the Europarties publicly supported Juncker, he accused the EU of being “‘too big, too bossy, too interfering’.” (Cameron as cited by Traynor, 2014).

Initially, David Cameron was not alone in his views. For instance, PM Mark Rutte of the Netherlands and PM Fredrik Reinfeldt of Sweden, were cautions of not transferring too much power to the European Parliament (Euractive, 2014b; Keating, 2014b). According to some sources, even Angel Merkel had been startled by the amount of attention given to the election result, by the Lisbon treaty (Economist, 2014a). Reinfeldt invited Merkel to Harpsund, Sweden, together with Cameron and Rutte, in what seems as a campaign to persuade her to join their cause. The three Prime Ministers were together not strong enough to block the decision in the European Council, but together with the German Chancellor they would constitute a blocking minority (Jacobsen & Gotev, 2014). However, Merkel had already supported the Spitzenkandidat. Reinfeldt and Rutte changed their minds during the process, and the only one that in the end followed in the same path as Cameron was Viktor Orbán, PM of Hungary (Vogel, 2014c; Watt & Traynor, 2014)

The debate indicates an ideological divide between those supporting the system, and those more hesitant, wanting the member states to continue to be the dominant actors.

2.1.2. Composition of the European Council

In June and July 2014, the European Council (see table 2) was dominated by the EPP with twelve members and the PES with ten members. Together with the four members from the ALDE parties, 26 out of 28 members of the Council belonged to Europarties that supported the Spitzenkandidaten-system.

Table 3. Composition of the European Council, July 2014

<u>Europarty</u>	<u>Number of members</u>
European People's Party	12
Party of European Socialists	10
Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe	4
European Conservatives and Reformists Party	1
Non-aligned	1
TOTAL	28

Source: ALDE (n.d); Britannica (n.d. a; n.d. b; n.d. c; n.d. d; n.d. e; n.d. f; n.d. g; n.d. h; n.d. i; n.d. j; n.d. k; n.d. l; n.d. m; n.d. n; n.d. o); Bundeskanzlerin (n.d.); Folketinget (n.d.); ECR (n.d.); EPP (n.d.); Government of the Czech Republic (n.d.); Government of Malta (n.d.); Government of the Republic of Cyprus (n.d.); Hungarian Government (n.d.); Luxembourg Government (n.d.); Party of Alenka Bratušek (n.d.); PES (n.d.); Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske (n.d.); Preşedintele României (n.d.); Slovak Republic Government Office (n.d.); Stubb (n.d.); University of Oxford (n.d.).

2.1.3. Level of cohesion and mobilization capacity

Christiansen (2016), describes the implementation of the Spitzenkandidaten-system. The Europarties – and in the beginning especially the EPP – played a significant role in order to mobilise around this question. The first call came from the EPP Congress in Estoril in 2002, suggesting to include the election of the Commission President by the European Parliament in the Constitutional Treaty. In 2009, the EPP continued the mobilisation, when the congress in Warsaw, in April, nominated the incumbent President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, for a second term. This was the first time a Europarty nominated a Spitzenkandidat, even if the term was unknown at that time. The PES was expected to nominate their own candidate, but since several of their leaders supported Barroso, this never happened. (Van Hecke et al, 2018).

In the run-up to the European Elections in 2014, the mobilisation initiative was overtaken by the PES. They were the first of the three Europarties to introduce their internal nomination process (Euractive, 2013). Schultz, was launched as their candidate, in November 2013. ALDE followed, launching their candidate in February 2014, and finally, the EPP introduced Juncker as a candidate in March 2014 (Schmitt & Popa, 2016).

During the election campaign the three Europarties were turned into campaign organisations, and most of the mobilisation efforts were handled by these organisations. The tone towards the members of the European Council was rather harsh. Both Juncker and Schultz pushed for the lead candidate of the Europarty becoming the largest in the Elections, to be nominated. Verhofstadt even went so far to suggest that the European Parliament should reject any other candidate suggested by the Council (Keating, 2014a).

After the elections, when the EPP was recognised as the largest party, it didn't take long for several other candidates, to start to mobilise for Juncker as the winner. "It is a moral obligation of the European Council to put forward the candidate who secured the leading

position in the European election,’ says Greek far-left leader Alexis Tsipras.” and suggested that Juncker would get the first chance to form a majority (Keating, 2014b). Schultz, demanded Juncker to become President of the Commission when admitting his defeat (Christiansen, 2016).

When the actual negotiations within the European Council started, a lot of the mobilisation capacity was transferred to the parliamentary groups. The President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, had opened for negotiations with the European Parliament and organised probing rounds with the group leaders. Manfred Weber, leader of the EPP group and Hannes Swoboda, leader of the Socialists and Democrats group (S&D)⁴, had advocated the candidacy of Juncker (Vogel, 2014b). Swoboda even tried to press the leaders belonging to the EPP by Tweeting “Absurd that Juncker has our backing to start negotiations but is blocked in the European Council by his own EPP family!” (Swoboda as cited by Jacobsen & Gotev, 2014).

In the end, a deal was struck by the EPP and the PES – the ALDE supported it shortly after – with Juncker as Commission President (Keating, 2014c). Van Rompuy presented the deal to the Council on June 26, 2014, and proposed Juncker as Commission President. Earlier the same day, the EPP leaders met at a pre-summit meeting, in Kortrijk, where cohesion was formed as they supported Juncker (EPP, 2015).

To summarise, prior to the European elections in 2014, the mobilisation had been longstanding. One of the frontrunners, the EPP, had started to mobilise in 2002 and introduced their first common candidate already in 2009. Eventually, the EPP were joined by the PES and the ALDE and the trio made successful mobilisation campaigns on different levels, and succeeded in getting the Spitzenkandidat of the EPP, elected as Commission President. Despite the success, the way of getting there was anything but straight and in the end, the EPP had problems uniting their leaders behind the single candidate. The reason for this, at least partly, lies in the question that will be discussed in the next section.

2.1.4. Domestic constraints

Angela Merkel and David Cameron are described as the biggest rivals in the European Council (Euractive, 2014a; Economist, 2014c). They also seem to have been the two leaders most clearly driven by motives based in domestic constraints, along the integration-independence dimension.

⁴ The S&D Group in the European Parliament is a part of the PES Party.

Merkel, who by no means had been fully positive to the Spitzenkandidaten-system, was pushed by campaigns and initiatives that were in favour of the system. To start with, there were a massive media campaign led by *Der Spiegel* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and among the drivers of this campaign was a man Nikolaus Blome, running the *Der Spiegel* Berlin bureau, who were reported to be close to Merkel. (Jacobsen & Gotev, 2014; Economist, 2014c). Furthermore, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), junior government partner, was pushing for the system, since they wanted their own top candidate, Martin Schultz, to receive an appropriate position (Politico, 2014)

From David Cameron's perspective, the British media was strongly opposing the Spitzenkandidaten-system. In addition, Cameron had to deal with opposition that strongly opposed the system. This included the political opposition, in the form of the British Labour Party (Jacobsen & Gotev, 2014), but also, the internal party opposition, within the Conservative Party. Cameron supposedly feared that the appointment of Juncker would make it difficult for him to control the anti-EU sentiments within the party (Economist, 2014b; Wyles, 2014).

2.1.5. Summary of findings and empirical tests

The empirical evidence of the 2014 case paints a picture suggesting there was ideological polarisation surrounding the Spitzenkandidaten-process. The polarisation was mainly along the integration-independence dimension. The EPP was the largest party and together with the PES and the ALDE, which they formed a coalition with, they accounted for 26 out of the 28 seats. The evidence can be traced back to the year 2002, showing how the Europarties had mobilised for the Spitzenkandidaten-question since then. As soon as the election results were clear in 2014, the three Europarties started to support each other, mobilising for the Spitzenkandidaten-system. The evidence also shows that the Europarties were successful in creating internal cohesion, and that the EPP and the ALDE, were able to do so even though several leaders initially had been hesitant to the system. The two main combatants in 2014, Angela Merkel and David Cameron, were constrained by domestic pressure. The pressure came both from the political sphere and from media campaigns. Merkel was pushed towards the system while Cameron, was pressured to go against it.

With this description in mind, it is time to test the theory of Tallberg and Johansson by putting the evidence through the empirical tests described above. We know that the Spitzenkandidaten-process were successful in 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker was elected as

Commission President. The question is whether the assumptions made by the theory are sufficient to explain this outcome.

Firstly, putting the four variables individually through the hoop test, they will all pass. It seems reasonable to assume that the variables are relevant in order to explaining the influence of the Europarties. Secondly, using the smoking gun test, the variables fail the tests when tested individually. There is no support that any of the variables would be alone sufficient for explaining why the Europarties were influential. Thirdly, by combining the first three variables, two at a time, they will continue to pass through the hoop tests. However, an explanation suggesting that one Europarty, or a coalition of several, dominating the European Council, in combination with strong mobilisation and the ability to create cohesion among their leaders will pass through the smoking gun tests, confirming that these two variables, unlike the other combinations, made an impact on the decision of the European Council. The main reason for this is probably the strong cooperation between the three parties of concern. Without the dominant position in the council, without the huge mobilisation effort and the ability to form cohesion among the leaders, it would not have been possible to influence the decision in such a successful way.

When adding the variables on polarisation and domestic constraints, individually and in combination, to the composition of the council and mobilisation and cohesion variables, you can see that they add extra layers, deepening the explanation, and the different combination passes both tests. The variable on polarisation could be less important to establish causation, but on the other hand, the three coalition partners were all bound by their view on European integration and without it, maybe they had not cooperated. Similarly, had the constraints on Merkel pushed her in any other direction, it is likely that the outcome could have been different. Therefore, it is hard to say that these two variables are less important than the composition of the council and mobilisation and cohesion, even if the latter two are sufficient to explain causation due to the circumstances in 2014.

In the final section of the thesis, we will return to this question, comparing the results of the two cases.

2.2. Spitzenkandidaten-process in 2019

The basic preconditions in 2019 were the same as in 2014. The EPP candidate were Manfred Weber, the leader of the EPP in the European Parliament and a representative of the

Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU)⁵ of Bavaria (EPP, 2018) and the PES had appointed Frans Timmermans, the Dutch member of the European Commission (PES, 2018). However, the ALDE did not have one, but seven candidates, presented as Team Europe (ALDE, 2019b).

The outcome, which will be further described in the analysis below, was a crash of the Spitzenkandidaten-system, at least as it is known today and the European Council appointed the Defence Minister of Germany, Ursula von der Leyen, who had not been a candidate, as Commission President (Gray et al, 2019).

2.2.1. Ideological polarisation

In 2019, the political situation was different compared to in 2014. The polarisation was larger and multi-layered and both the left-right dimension and the integration-independence dimension seems to have been present. The latter not as present as before, maybe depending on Brexit (Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019).

This time, the resistance from the European Council was stronger. In accordance with the suggestion of Reinfeldt and Rutte in 2014, the Council would revise the regulations with regards to the Spitzenkandidaten-system prior to the European elections in 2019 (Vogel, 2014c). During the revision process, several Council members came out as negative to the system, such as the leaders of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia as well as President Emmanuel Macron of France (Herszenhorn & De La Baume, 2018a). The latter proclaiming that he was not bound to the Spitzenkandidaten-system (Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019). In February 2018, the European Council denied to adopt a proposal which they meant would reduce their power of action, and which would have been a mechanism for automatically selecting the Commission President (Herszenhorn & De La Baume, 2018b).

Early on, it seemed clear that the European Parliament would become more diverse, and that the EPP and the PES dominance would not prevail (Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019), and when the election results were presented this turned out to be the case. The EPP received 182 seats and the S&D 154 seats, far from a majority (Herszenhorn, De La Baume & Barigazzi, 2019b; Gotev & Brzozowski, 2019; EP, 2019). This is probably a reason why the bargaining had started prior to the results were presented (Gotev, 2019). This time the left-right dimension seems to have been more important. Several possible coalition constellations were on the table in the talks, and at some point, anything but the EPP seemed to have been

⁵ The CSU is the Bavarian junior sibling party of the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), the party of Angela Merkel.

the main goal. Several possible coalitions were brokered, including one initiated by the PES, trying to form “a Macron-to-Tsipras alliance”, but to many of the national member parties taking part in such an alliance had problems cooperating (Herszenhorn & De La Baume, 2019a). Later on, talks were initiated between the EPP, the PES and the ALDE, and these parties would eventually also form a coalition that would distribute the top EU jobs, but before that, the centre-left coalition of the PES and the ALDE declared they would not support Manfred Weber, which basically meant killing the Spitzenkandidaten-system in its current form (Herszenhorn, De La Baume & Barigazzi, 2019a; De La Baume, 2019b; Economist, 2019a; Michalopoulos, 2019).

To summarise, in 2019 the left-right dimension was most visible in the debate. Maybe this was because the PES and the ALDE, in the more diverse political landscape, saw a chance to move against the EPP, which had dominated the scene for almost a decade.

2.2.2. Composition of the European Council

In June of 2019, the European Council composition (table 3) was more diverse, compared to in 2014. The EPP and the PES had seven members each and ALDE, with 6 members, was not far behind. The European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR) had two members and the European Left one.

The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, has been listed as “non-aligned”. Even though his party, La République En Marche!, is a member of the liberal group of the European Parliament, the Renew Europe, it is not a member of the ALDE Party (ALDE, n.d.; Renew Europe, n.d.).

Hungarian PM, Viktor Orbán, has been listed as Non-aligned, since his party was suspended from the EPP earlier the same year, and he was not invited to the EPP pre-summit meetings (EPP, 2019a; 2019e).

Theresa May, the PM of the UK, did not take part in the bargaining process, since the UK was in the verge of leaving the EU due to Brexit (Economist, 2019a).

Table 4. Composition of the European Council, June 2019

<u>Europarty</u>	<u>Number of members</u>
European People's Party	7
Party of European Socialists	7
Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe	6
European Conservatives and Reformists Party	2
Party of European Left	1
Non-aligned	5
TOTAL	28

Source: ALDE (n.d.); ECR (n.d.); EPP (n.d.); European Council (n.d.); European Left (n.d.); PES (n.d.).

2.2.3. Level of cohesion and mobilization capacity

The Europarties entered the campaign in the 2019 European elections with different attitudes. The EPP elected their lead candidate, Manfred Weber, in Helsinki in November 2018 (EPP, 2018). The PES held their Congress in Madrid, in February 2019, where Frans Timmermans, was elected as their candidate (PES, 2019a). The announcement of his candidacy came in November 2018 (PES, 2018).

In March 2019, the ALDE presented their team of seven candidates, Team Europe (ALDE, 2019b). Officially, they wanted a strong team in times of increased polarisation and threats against European values (ALDE, 2019a). However, according to speculation, this was a way to bring the party closer to Macron, since they courted his party to join their party family. It was also believed that the fragmentation could give the ALDE an upper hand in the upcoming bargaining process (De La Baume, 2019a).

The EPP and the PES continued to mobilise for the Spitzenkandidaten-system whilst the ALDE started to mobilise against, claiming the system to be unfair, favouring the EPP. Their mobilisation seems to have been successful, since several of the ALDE leaders used the message of the Europarty. For instance, did Xavier Bettel, PM of Luxemburg, and Dutch PM Rutte express their views about Spitzenkandidaten-system in the same terms as the Europarty, when speaking to the Media (Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019).

The EPP also seem to have been fairly successful in creating cohesion amongst its leaders. We know that there were some internal feuds, and some of the support were maybe not more than lukewarm, but for instance Merkel reiterated her support for the EPP candidate on several occasions (Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019; Solletty, 2019; De La Baume & Herszenhorn, 2019). A pre-summit meeting declared the EPP support for Weber and the Spitzenkandidaten-system in May, 2019 (EPP, 2019b), followed-up by support from an EPP meeting where the member parties were present, a few days later (EPP, 2019c). The EPP continued their mobilisation efforts after the PES and the ALDE had declared that they would

not support Weber (De La Baume, 2019b; Stolton, 2019). While Merkel wanted to ensure a deal would include the European Parliament, Joseph Daul, President of the EPP, still made statements in support of Weber (De La Baume, 2019b) and the last official statement, supporting the candidacy of Weber was made by the EPP on June 24, 2021 (EPP, 2019d). After that, it seems as if they gave up their mobilisation.

Apart from that the political opponents saw a chance of overrunning the EPP, a mistake by the EPP was the selection of the top candidate as such. Several sources indicate that Manfred Weber's lack of experience from the executive branch made the other Europarties and especially the leaders, hesitant to provide their support (Economist, 2019a; De La Baume & Herszenhorn, 2019; Stolton, 2019). This could be at least partly a contributing factor as to why the Spitzenkandidaten-system did not survive more than one political term.

The European Parliament made attempts to demonstrate unity in support of the Spitzenkandidaten-system. The President of the Parliament, Antonio Tajani, an Italian MEP belonging to the EPP, made a statement declaring the united parliamentary support for the Spitzenkandidaten-system. But he left out the fact that for instance the ALDE did not back the system. Guy Verhofstadt, of the ALDE, and others mobilised against the statement (Herszenhorn & De La Baume, 2019b; Rios, 2019).

The PES had committed to the Spitzenkandidaten-system, and started to mobilise early on. In February 2018, they declared that they were one of the creators of the system and that they would continue backing it in 2019 (PES, 2018a). They mobilised for Timmermans, trying to create deals, as the EPP was on the defensive (Herszenhorn & De La Baume, 2019a). When Weber had lost his chance of becoming Commission President, the PES saw a chance for Timmermans to become the one being appointed by the Council. In late June, the party reconfirmed their support: "The Party of European Socialists today reiterates its firm commitment to the Spitzenkandidat process as the key democratic link between the voters of Europe, represented in the European Parliament, and the leadership of the European Commission." (PES, 2019b). Pedro Sánchez, the PM of Spain and one of PES negotiators in this process, even challenged the initial definition of the Spitzenkandidaten-system. He suggested that the Spitzenkandidat was any of the Europarty top candidates (Herszenhorn, De La Baume & Barigazzi, 2019b).

After the European Council, in a first round had failed to appoint a Commission President, the PES became very close to achieving their goal and getting their candidate elected. Merkel, Macron and others brokered a deal with Timmermans on top (Herszenhorn & Barigazzi et al, 2019; Barigazzi et al, 2019). However, this deal created an upheaval within the EPP, where

several of the EPP leaders, as well as many MEP's, rebelled against it, which meant the deal was off the table (Barigazzi et al, 2019; Herszenhorn & Eder, 2019; Economist, 2019b; Brzozowski, 2019; Euractive, 2019). This seems to have been the fatal blow to the Spitzenkandidaten-system, returning the decision to the European Council.

To summarize, the empirical evidence shows that the Europarties were partly successful in creating coherence and to mobilise around their causes. Some of them more than others. In the case of the EPP and the PES it meant a continued support for the Spitzenkandidaten-system, allowing for the Europarties and the European Parliament to continue the influence over the election of the President of the European. The ALDE had a different agenda, trying to gain influence and to persuade Macron to join their political family. Different decisions along the way did however change the situation.

2.2.4. Domestic constraints

The top contenders in 2019 were Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron. Macron had from the start stated he was not obliged to follow the Spitzenkandidaten-system, while Merkel had supported the system as well as backing Weber (De La Baume & Eder, 2018; Herszenhorn, Barigazzi & Eder, 2019; Herszenhorn, De La Baume & Barigazzi, 2019b).

Merkel was constrained by the fragile government coalition that she was leading, which on the one hand meant pleasing the German socialists, backing Timmermans and trying to undercut the EPP dominance. On the other, pleasing the CSU, supporting the candidacy of Weber (Herszenhorn, De La Baume & Barigazzi, 2019b; Herszenhorn & Barigazzi et al, 2019; Herszenhorn & Eder et al, 2019; Grey et al, 2019).

In the case of Macron, there are no clear evidence of any domestic issues that seem to have constrained him during this process.

2.2.5. Summary of findings and empirical tests

In the case of 2019, the empirical evidence paints a different scenario where there was ideological polarisation, albeit on a different level compared to in 2014. This time there were multidimensional polarisation, but most distinct a left-right dimension. The composition of the European Council was more diverse than before, and the biggest parties were almost evenly sized. Seven members belonged to the EPP, seven to the PES and six to the ALDE. All in all, the three parties gathered 20 out of 28 seats in the Council.

The Europarties were successful in mobilising, creating cohesion among their leaders, even if there is evidence of internal fragmentation. The big difference this time was that the three

main Europarties were not united. The EPP and the PES mobilised for the Spitzenkandidaten-system whilst the ALDE had changed positions, suggesting it to be unfair. The increased diversity in the European Parliament led to efforts to form strong coalitions. At first, the PES and the ALDE joined forces to eradicate the candidacy of the EPP candidate. In a second shot, the EPP rebelled internally against a deal brokered by Merkel, which would have led to Timmermans becoming the Commission President. These two blows seem to have eradicated the entire Spitzenkandidaten-process, and returned the upper hand to the European Council.

The two main players were Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron. The evidence shows that Merkel was constrained domestically, and had to navigate between the different demands of her fragile government coalition. Regarding Macron, no evidence has been found suggesting he was domestically constrained.

With this summary in mind, we will return to the empirical tests of Van Evera. Just as in the previous case, the variables will individually pass the hoop tests and fail the smoking gun tests. They are all plausible, but not sufficient explanations. When combining the first three variables, two and two, the different combinations will pass through the hoop tests, but this time, none of them will pass through the smoking gun tests. The ideological polarisation, with a left-right dimension is strong, up to the moment when the parties themselves eradicated the Spitzenkandidaten-system, the mobilisation and ability to create internal cohesion was also strong, but there were no dominant party and the party coalitions were shifting in the European Council. This fact makes it difficult to explain the Europarty influence in 2019, without including all three variables. The combination of the strong left-right dimension, no dominant party in the Commission and the fact that the three largest parties, one centre-right, one centre left and one centre, were almost equally large, can explain the shifting coalitions. However, in order to explain Europarty influence, you also need cohesion and mobilisation. Therefore, the first three variables are needed and equally important, in order to explain the influence in 2019.

The fourth variable on the other hand seems less important in this case, and probably mostly explain why Angela Merkel acted as she did, more than impacting the Europarty influence as such. On the other hand, had she been pushed in any other direction, it is likely that the outcome could have been another. Therefore, it is equally difficult as in 2014, to say that the domestic constraints variable can be completely left aside.

In the next section, the findings of the research will be further discussed and concluded. The discussion on the results of the empirical tests will also continue and they will be compared with the results of the 2014 case.

3. Final discussion and conclusion

In this final section, the results of the two empirical cases will be compared, before a short final conclusion is presented and possible further research discussed.

3.1. Discussion

The purpose of this thesis has been to test the theory of Tallberg and Johansson, in order to contribute to the debate on Europarty influence in the European union decision-making processes and more precisely in the European Council. The theory has been tested by two comparative case studies researching the Europarty influence in the 2014 and 2019 Spitzenkandidaten-processes.

In the previous section the two cases have been described and in this section, we will go on to comparing the cases. The relation between the theory and the findings will be discussed. Thereafter the theory testing will be discussed, was the theory and its entities valid in order to give a credible explanation to the two cases?

3.1.1. Theoretical perspectives

One of the initial ideas of the Spitzenkandidaten-system was, according to Christiansen (2016), to create a clearer ideological division between the Europarties. One of the major challenges on the European level is the citizens increased lack of interest, the lack of legitimacy and an increased democratic deficit. The introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten-system was meant to create clearer ideological dimension as well as to clarifying the link between the European elections and the appointment of the executive power, which in term was meant to imitate the political system on the national level. The belief was that the interest among the citizens would increase. However, the process in 2014 contradicted this initial thought, since the major Europarties cooperated in order to get the system to work, and to execute their influence over the European Council. There was ideological polarisation, but along the lines of the integration-independence dimension. Initially the polarisation divided the leaders of several of the Europarties, risking the Europarty influence. But the EPP, the PES and the ALDE managed to overcome this challenge, creating a coalition uniting behind the candidate of the largest Europarty. In the process of 2019, the picture was different. The ideological dimension went along the line of the left-right dimension, creating diversion among the three parties, and the power struggle between them seem to have been significant. The conclusion is that ideological polarisation has been present in both cases, thus paving the way for increased Europarty influence.

As described above, the composition of the European Council was more diverse in 2019, compared to 2014. In 2014, the EPP had a dominant status and the coalition of the three largest parties gathered 26 out of 28 seats in the Council. Even if some of the leaders, especially some of those belonging to the EPP and the ALDE, were sceptics, the conditions were favourable for increased Europarty influence. The diversity in 2019, without a dominant party or without a defined coalition of parties, made the conditions for Europarty influence less favourable.

In both cases, the evidence shows that the Europarties were quite successful in mobilising and creating cohesion among their leaders. In 2014, several leaders were initially reluctant to adhere to the mobilisation, but in the end, the three parties in the scope of this thesis, all managed to create cohesion among a majority of the leaders. The scene in 2019, was yet again different from before. This time the ALDE was mobilising against the Spitzenkandidaten-system, while the other two, at least during a major part of the process, mobilised in favour of the system. The power struggle, between the different Europarties, also played a significant role in terms of how successful they were in mobilising. In the end of the bargaining process, Merkel, Macron and others brokered a deal suggesting the socialist candidate, Timmermans to become the Commission President. But the EPP, which had been on the defensive since the PES and the ALDE ruined their chances of getting their candidate elected, saw the chance to regain the initiative. When several of the EPP leaders rebelled against the deal, the EPP managed to create cohesion against it. The conclusion is, that the Europarties were quite successful both in 2014 and in 2019 to mobilise and to create cohesion, thus creating favourable conditions for Europarty influence.

In terms of the fourth variable on domestic constraints, which is not a part of the original theory, the evidence shows that there have been domestic constraints both in 2014 and in 2019, that can explain the behaviour of the more influential leaders. The evidence shows that especially Angela Merkel had to consider positions of the junior coalition partners in her government, but also national media campaigns. In both cases, the domestic constraints have pushed her toward supporting the Spitzenkandidaten-system. However, it has not been possible to clarify if and in what ways the domestic constraints, hence the addition made by Johansson (2016), have impacted the Europarty influence, but one can assume that had Merkel been pushed in any other direction, the outcome could have been different.

3.1.2. Testing the theory on Europarty influence

In order to test the theory of Tallberg and Johansson, two empirical tests, developed in the field of process tracing were used, testing the necessity and sufficiency of the variables. The outcome of the tests was slightly different in the two cases, and this probably depended on the different circumstances in 2014 compared to 2019. Therefore, the general conclusion is that the Tallberg and Johansson theory provides a valid explanation for Europarty influence. The key variable seems to be the ability of the Europarty to mobilise and create cohesion among its members in the European Council, but the polarisation and the composition of the Council explain circumstances necessary for a party, or a coalition of parties, to be able to influence the decisions.

The question of differences between the two dimensions of ideological polarisation should also be assessed. As we have seen, the left-right dimension seems to create power struggles that in this context paradoxically made the Europarties influential in the short term, but on the other hand most likely will decrease their long-term influence. Maybe the ability to form coalitions with other parties are even more important with the present circumstances. The number of members of the Council has almost doubled since the theory was created and the diversity of parties present in the Council has also increased.

Regarding the variable on domestic constraints, which is not a part of the initial theory, it is difficult to explain if it brings any additional value to the theory, as Johansson (2016) suggests. Merkel was one of the dominant players both in 2014 and again in 2019, and one of those that was exposed to the most domestic pressure. Maybe the fact that the constraints were in line with how the EPP was mobilising makes it hard to measure how it impacted the Europarty influence. However, one could assume that domestic constraints, working against the EPP direction, could have altered the outcome. Another explanation to why it is difficult to establish its importance could be the type of case used. Johansson studies processes within the EPP, while this thesis have studied the interaction between several parties.

The evidence in this thesis supports the validity of the initial theory, but suggests that the presence of any type of ideological polarisation, not only the left-right dimension, increases the probability of Europarty influence.

The initial thought in the Spitzenkandidaten-process, was to imitate the domestic party political situation and to create a clear connection between the European elections and the appointment of the executive power (Christiansen, 2016). But with the increased number of parties represented both in the European Parliament and in the Council, the ability of creating

coalitions between two or more parties, also need to be taken into account, if you wish to imitate the domestic situation.

3.1.3. Spitzenkandidaten-process

An initial assumption, when designing this study was that the Europarties had been successful in executing influence over the European Council in 2014, but less so in 2019. However, after making the empirical analysis, the reality seems somewhat different. The Europarties have been successful in influencing the process also in 2019, but the scenario was different. The EPP had lost parts of its initiative, ending up on the defensive, which opened up for the PES and the ALDE to challenge the EPP position as the leading Europarty. In the end, the EPP regained at least a part of its dominance, but to what cost? Up to the point of the internal upheaval within the EPP, against the deal that would have made Timmermans the Commission President, the Europarties were influential in order to mobilise and create cohesion among their Council members. After that event, the initiative returned to the members of the Council, the Spitzenkandidaten-system in its present form were eradicated and the Europarties lost a big part of their long-term influence.

It is important to point out that the EPP does not bear sole responsibility for terminating the Spitzenkandidaten-system. Rather it is a combination of events and actions during the process that lead to this. Or, to use a cultural analogy found in *Politico*: “So who killed the *Spitzenkandidat*? It’s an outcome familiar to fans of Poirot — all of them did.” (Gray, 2019). Analysing the long-term influence, the eradication of the system probably will lead to a decrease of Europarty influence and a return to murky backroom deal. On the other hand, the parties might manage to agree on a new system, in order to try to live up to the writings in the Lisbon treaty, before the next European elections in 2024.

3.2. Conclusions

With regards to the research questions of this thesis, and despite the initial assumptions, the findings show that the Europarties managed to exercise a significant influence over the decision-making process in the European Council both in 2014 and 2019. In 2014, the conditions were favourable and the parties were successful throughout the process and the Spitzenkandidat of the biggest party was appointed as Commission President. In 2019, the conditions were not as favourable as in 2014, but the Europarties initially managed to exercise a large amount of influence. However, a chain of events led to the fall of the Spitzenkandidaten-process in its current shape. Paradoxically, one can assume that the return

of the initiative in appointing the Commission President to the heads of state and government will lead to long-term loss in Europarty influence.

3.3. Further research

The empirical findings of this thesis open for several questions that would be interesting to research further. The theoretical framework also calls for further research to continue clarifying the validity of the theory and in order to further research the influence of the Europarties. The Johansson and Raunio statement that the Europarties and their influence has not been properly examined is still valid, and there is a need for testing new cases, especially those from recent years. Not at least since the number of parties and party families has increased since the theory initially was developed.

Two of the variables in this thesis, and their impact on Europarty influence could also be further researched. Firstly, the question of ideological polarisation. To what extent is it valid and are there any differences in the different types of ideological dimensions? Does for instance the left-right dimension have a larger impact in Europarty influence than the integration-independence dimension, as implied in the theory? Secondly, what impact does domestic constraints have on the Europarty influence and when does it have an impact? In order to dig deeper into this question, one would need to make elite interviews, to understand the factors influencing the leader's actions.

The question of legitimacy of the European Union, not at least with regards to the Spitzenkandidaten-process, would also need to be further examined. Has the process, and its decline, meant anything in terms of increasing or decreasing the legitimacy of the European Union? The same goes for an increased, or for that matter absence of, Europarty influence. Does it have an impact on the legitimacy of the Union?

Finally, it would be interesting to further examine the impact of the power shift in 2014, that came as a result of the successful Spitzenkandidaten-process, moving power from the European Council to the European Parliament. Did it have an impact on the Brexit debate?

4. References

- ALDE (n.d.), “ALDE Member Parties”, https://www.aldeparty.eu/alde_member_parties, accessed on May 3, 2021.
- ALDE (2019a), “Team Europe presented on 21 March”, 2019-03-19, https://www.aldeparty.eu/team_europe_presented_on_21_march, accessed on May 18, 2021.
- ALDE (2019b), “Team Europe: seven leaders to renew Europe”, 2019-03-21, https://www.aldeparty.eu/team_europe_seven_leaders_to_renew_europe, accessed on May 18, 2021.
- Barigazzi, J., D.M. Herszenhorn and M. De La Baume (2019), “Conservatives rebel against Merkel’s EU top jobs plan”, *Politico*, 2019-06-30.
- Bennett, A. (2010), “Process Tracing and Causal Inference”, in H.E. Brady and D. Collier (eds.), *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, second edition, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Braun, D., and S.A. Popa (2018), “This time it was different? The salience of the Spitzenkandidaten system among European parties”, *West European Politics*, 41:5, 1125-1145.
- Britannica (n.d. a), “Antonis Samaras”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonis-Samaras>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. b), “Austria in the European Union”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Austria/Austria-in-the-European-Union#ref1232338>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. c), “Bulgaria’s transition”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Bulgaria/Bulgarias-transition>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. d), “Dalia Grybauskaite”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dalia-Grybauskaite>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. e) “Donald Tusk”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Donald-Tusk>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. f), “Enda Kenny”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enda-Kenny>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. g), “Estonia - Independence restored”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Independence-lost#ref1199783>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Britannica (n.d. h), “Federalized Belgium”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belgium/Federalized-Belgium#ref1126633>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. i), “François Hollande”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Hollande>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. j), “Fredrik Reinfeldt”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fredrik-Reinfeldt>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. k), “Italy - Scandal and the struggling economy”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Italy/Scandal-and-the-struggling-economy#ref1197767>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. l), “Latvia - Independence restored”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Latvia/The-Soviet-occupation-and-incorporation#ref219359>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. m), “Mariano Rajoy”, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mariano-Rajoy>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. n), “The Netherlands - Into the 21st century”, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Netherlands/Into-the-21st-century#ref1142126>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Britannica (n.d. o), “Portugal - Sovereign debt crisis” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Portugal/Sovereign-debt-crisis#ref1113501>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Bryman, A. (2016), *Social Research Methods*, 5th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brzozowski, A., G. Gotev and J. Valero (2019), “EU leaders entrenched over top jobs as EPP rebels against Merkel”, *Euractive*, 2019-07-01.

Bundeskanzlerin (n.d.), ” Biografie Angela Merkel”, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/angela-merkel/biografie>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Checkel, J. (2008), “Process Tracing”, in A. Klotz and D. Prakash (eds.) *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Christiansen, T. (2016), “After the Spitzenkandidaten: fundamental change in the EU’s political system? ”, *West European Politics*, 39:5, 992-1010

Day, S. (2014), “Between ‘Containment’ and ‘Transnationalization’ – Where next for the Europarties?” *Acta Polit*, 49, 5–29.

De La Baume, M. (2019a), “Leading liberals join EU election fray”, *Politico*, 2019-03-10.

De La Baume, M. (2019b), “Liberals and Socialists will not back Weber”, *Politico*, 2019-06-20.

De La Baume, M., and F. Eder (2018), “Manfred Weber gets Merkel’s Spitzenkandidat ‘blessing’: officials”, *Politico*, 2018-08-31

De La Baume, M., and D.M. Herszenhorn (2019), “EPP loves Weber but some party members doubt he is ‘the one’”, *Politico*, 2019-06-12.

Economist, the (2014a), “Election or selection?”, 2014-03-15.

Economist, the (2014b), “Cameron versus the Spitzenkandidaten”, 2014-05-22.

Economist, the (2014c), “Has Merkel lost her touch?”, 2014-06-03.

Economist, the (2019a), “EU leaders fail to agree on who should lead the union”, 2019-06-21.

Economist, the (2019b), “EU leaders settle on a new team to run the club”, 2019-07-02.

ECR (n.d.), “Affiliates”, <https://ecrparty.eu/about#affiliates>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

EPP (n.d.), “Parties & Partners”, <https://www.epp.eu/parties-and-partners>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

EPP (2015), *EPP Annual Review 2014 – Making History – Leading Europe Forward*, Brussels: European People’s Party.

EPP (2018), “Manfred Weber elected as EPP candidate for the President of the European Commission”, 2018-11-08, <https://www.epp.eu/news/manfred-weber-elected-as-epp-candidate-for-the-president-of-the-european-commission>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

EPP (2019a), “FIDESZ membership suspended after EPP Political Assembly”, 2019-03-20, <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/fidesz-membership-suspended-after-epp-political-assembly/>, accessed on May 29, 2021.

EPP (2019b), “EPP leaders reiterate full support for Manfred Weber”, 2019-05-28, <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/epp-leaders-reiterate-full-support-for-manfred-weber/>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

EPP (2019c), “EPP Political Assembly remains committed to Spitzenkandidat process; welcomes new Ukrainian parties”, 2019-06-04, <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/epp-political-assembly-remains-committed-to-spitzenkandidat-process-welcomes-new-ukrainian-parties/>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

EPP (2019d), “Poll: Citizens want the Council to respect the Spitzenkandidat process”, 2019-06-24, <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/poll-citizens-want-the-council-to-respect-the-spitzenkandidat-process/>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

EPP (2019e), “30 June: EPP leaders to meet for Summit in Brussels ahead of a special meeting of the European Council”, 2019-06-24, <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/30-june-epp-leaders-to-meet-for-summit-in-brussels-ahead-of-a-special-meeting-of-the-european-council-press-registration-enfr/>, accessed on May 29, 2021.

Esaiasson, P., M. Gilljam, H. Oscarsson, A. Towns och L. Wängnerud (2017), *Metodpraktikan – Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, Femte upplagan, Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer.

EU / Official Journal of the European Union (2007), *Treaty of Lisbon – Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community*, (2007/C 306/01), http://publications.europa.eu/resource/ellar/688a7a98-3110-4ffe-a6b3-8972d8445325.0007.01/DOC_19, accessed on April 16, 2021.

EUR-Lex (n.d.), “Glossary of summaries – European Political Parties”, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/eu_parties_status.html, accessed on May 7, 2021.

Euractive (2013), “Schulz in pole position for Commission president nomination”, 2013-10-02.

Euractive (2014a), “Cameron and Merkel are the EU Council’s biggest rivals”, 2014-06-12.

Euractive (2014b), “Opposition to Juncker wanes, Cameron isolated”, 2014-06-19.

Euractive (2019), “EPP ready to sacrifice Weber to get EU Commission leadership”, 2019-07-02.

European Council (n.d.), “Special meeting of the European Council, 30 June 2019 – List of Participants”, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/40101/20190630-eucon-trombinoscope.pdf>, accessed on May 3, 2021.

European Left (n.d.), “Our Parties”, <https://www.european-left.org/our-parties/>, accessed on May 29, 2021.

European Parliament / EP (2012a), “Debates – 6. Elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (debate)”, November 22, 2012 – Strasbourg, CRE 22/11/2012 – 6, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-7-2012-11-22-ITM-006_EN.html, accessed on May 13, 2021.

European Parliament / EP (2012b), “European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014”, (2012/2829(RSP)), P7_TA(2012)0462, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0462_EN.html, accessed on May 13, 2021.

European Parliament / EP (2019), “Review of European and National Election Results, Update: September 2019”, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/review_of_european_and_national_election_results_2019/incoming_ep_2019.pdf, accessed on May 17, 2021.

Folketinget (n.d.), “Helle Thorning-Schmidt”, <https://www.ft.dk/medlemmer/mf/h/helle-thorning-schmidt>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Gotev, G. (2019), “Borissov: Horsetrading for the EU top jobs has started”, *Euractive*, 2019-05-23.

Gotev, G., and A. Brzozowski (2019), “The Brief – Macron, the Kingmaker”, *Euractive*, 2019-05-27.

Government of the Czech Republic (n.d.), “Bohuslav Sobotka”, <https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/zivotopis/bohuslav-sobotka-115458/>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Government of Malta (n.d.), “Prime Ministers of Malta - Dr Joseph Muscat”, <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/Government%20of%20Malta/Prime%20Ministers%20of%20Malta/Pages/Dr-Joseph-Muscat.aspx>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Government of the Republic of Cyprus (n.d.), “Nicos Anastasiades - Curriculum vitae”, https://www.presidentcy.gov.cy/presidentcy/presidentcy.nsf/prc01_en/prc01_en?OpenDocument, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Grey, A., J. Barigazzi and M. De La Baume (2019), “Who killed the Spitzenkandidat?”, *Politico*, 2019-07-05.

Herszenhorn, D.M., J. Barigazzi and F. Eder (2019), “EU leaders, stressing unity, see turbulence ahead”, *Politico*, 2019-05-09.

Herszenhorn, D.M., J. Barigazzi, M. De La Baume and R. Momtaz (2019), “EU leaders fail to choose EU leaders”, *Politico*, 2019-06-21.

Herszenhorn, D.M., and M. De La Baume (2018a), “Commission’s Spitzenkandidat process at risk”, *Politico*, 2018-02-01.

Herszenhorn, D.M., and M. De La Baume (2018b), “EU leaders: We won’t be bound by Spitzenkandidat process”, *Politico*, 2018-02-23.

Herszenhorn, D.M., and M. De La Baume (2019a), “The EU’s rising red tide”, *Politico*, 2019-05-20.

Herszenhorn, D.M., and M. De La Baume (2019b), “Tajani says majority of Parliament backs ‘lead candidate’ system”, *Politico*, 2019-05-28.

Herszenhorn, D.M., M. De La Baume and J. Barigazzi (2019a), “Last supper of the Spitzenkandidaten”, *Politico*, 2019-06-08.

Herszenhorn, D.M., M. De La Baume and J. Barigazzi (2019b), “EU top jobs: Spitz hits the skids”, *Politico*, 2019-06-20.

Herszenhorn, D.M., F. Eder, M. De La Baume, R. Momtaz and J. Barigazzi (2019), “How Merkel’s plan for EU top jobs fell apart”, *Politico*, 2019-07-01.

Hix, S. (1999), “Dimensions and alignments in European Union politics: Cognitive constraints and partisan responses”, *European Journal of Political Research*, 35(1), 69–106.

Hix, S. (2008) “Towards a partisan theory of EU politics”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:8, 1254-1265.

Hobolt, S.B. (2014), “A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21:10, 1528-1540.

Hungarian Government (n.d.), “Prime Minister’s Office - Viktor Orbán”, <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-minister>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Jacobsen, H., and G. Gotev (2014), “‘No momentum’ for Juncker: EU leaders leave options open”, *Euractive*, 2014-05-28

Johansson, K.M. (2016), “Europarty Influence and Its Limits: The Case of the European People’s Party and the Amsterdam Treaty”, *Journal of European Integration*, 38:1, 79-94.

Johansson, K.M., and T. Raunio (2019), “Political Parties in the European Union”, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keating, D. (2014a), “Ignoring spitzenkandidat system would create a ‘major incident’”, *Politico*, 2014-05-12.

Keating, D. (2014b), “Tsipras to reinforce Juncker nomination during Brussels visit”, *Politico*, 2014-06-03.

Keating, D. (2014c), “Schulz re-elected as European Parliament president”, *Politico*, 2014-07-01.

Lamont, C. (2015), *Research Methods in International Relations*. London: SAGE.

Lindberg, B., A. Rasmussen and A. Warntjen (2008), “Party politics as usual?: The role of political parties in EU legislative decision-making”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(8), 1107–1126.

Luxembourg Government (n.d.), “Xavier Bettel – Biography”, <https://gouvernement.lu/en/gouvernement/xavier-bettel/CV.html>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Michalopoulos, S. (2019), “Socialists and liberals kick EPP’s Weber out of EU Commission race”, *Euractive*, 2019-06-20.

Party of Alenka Bratušek (n.d.), “About me”, <http://www.alenkabratusek.si/en/about-me/>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

PES (n.d.), “Members”, <https://pes.eu/en/members/>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

PES (2018a), “PES: We created the Spitzenkandidat process, now we're fighting for it”, 2018-02-06, https://pes.eu/news_content.php?id=618, accessed on May 18, 2021.

PES (2018b), “PES unites behind Timmermans as Lead Candidate for 2019 European elections”, 2018-11-05, https://pes.eu/news_content.php?id=1006, accessed on May 18, 2021.

PES (2019a), “Madrid Election Congress”, <https://www.pes.eu/en/about-us/the-party/congress/madrid-2019/>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

PES (2019b), “PES backs Frans Timmermans and Spitzenkandidat process”, 2019-06-27, <https://www.pes.eu/en/news-events/news/detail/PES-backs-Frans-Timmermans-and-Spitzenkandidat-process/>, accessed on May 18, 2021.

Politico (2014), “This time it’s not so very different”, 2014-06-25.

Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske (n.d.), “Biography of Zoran Milanović”, <https://www.predsjudnik.hr/en/president/>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Președintele României (n.d.), “Anunț de presă”, http://old.presidency.ro/index.php?_RID=det&tb=date_arhiva&id=15514&PRID=arh, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Put, G.J., S. Van Hecke, C. Cunningham, and W. Wolfs (2016), “The Choice of Spitzenkandidaten: A Comparative Analysis of the Europarties’ Selection Procedures”, *Politics and Governance*, 4(1), 9–22.

Putnam, R.D. (1988) “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games”, *International Organization*, 42(3), 427–460.

Renew Europe (n.d.), “About us”, <https://reneweuropengroup.eu/en/about-us/>, accessed on May 3, 2021.

Rigsarkivet (2015), *The Little Golden Book on Source Criticism*, https://www.sa.dk/undervisningsfiler/2015/09/SourcesCriticism_2015_TheDanishNationalArchives.pdf, accessed on 2021-05-24.

Rios, B. (2019), “Parliament calls for Spitzenkandidat to be respected, liberals oppose it”, *Euractive*, 2019-05-28.

Scharpf, F.W. (1999), *Governing in Europe: effective and democratic?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schmidt, V.A. (2013), “Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and ‘Throughput.’”, *Political Studies*, 61(1), 2–22.

Schmitt, H., S.A. Popa (2016), *Turnout in the EP Elections 2014 – A comparative study of the EU Member States*, 2016:8, Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies.

Slovak Republik Government Office (n.d.), “Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic”, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070609150240/http://www-8.vlada.gov.sk/index.php?ID=1555>, accessed on May 28, 2021.

Sollety, M (2019), “Anti-Weber front materializes on EU election morning after”, *Politico*, 2019-05-27.

Sommerer, T. and H. Agné (2018), “Consequences of Legitimacy in Global Governance”, in J. Tallberg, K. Bäckstrand, and J. A. Scholte (eds.), *Legitimacy in Global Governance: Sources, Processes, and Consequences*, (pp. 153–168), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Stolton, S. (2019), “‘Institutional crisis’ if EU doesn’t pick Spitzenkandidat, EPP warns”, *Euractive*, 2019-06-20.
- Stubb, Alex (n.d.), “Alex’s Abridged CV”, <https://www.alexstubb.com/personal-details/>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Tallberg, J., and K.M. Johansson (2008), “Party politics in the European Council”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:8, 1222-1242.
- Tallberg, J., and M. Zürn (2019), “The legitimacy and legitimation of international organizations: introduction and framework”, *The Review of International Organizations*, 14(4), 581-606.
- Teorell, J., och T. Svensson (2012), *Att fråga och att svara – Samhällsvetenskaplig metod*, Malmö: Liber
- Traynor, I. (2014), “EU power struggle as Cameron tries to stop Juncker getting top job”, *The Guardian*, 2014-05-28.
- University of Oxford (n.d.), “British Prime Ministers”, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/oxford-people/british-prime-ministers>, accessed on May 28, 2021.
- Van Evera, S. (1997), *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Van Hecke, S., W. Wolfs and V. De Groof (2018), *25 Years of Spitzenkandidaten – What Does the Future Hold?*, Policy Brief, November 2018, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.
- Vogel, T. (2014a), “Juncker appointment in the balance”, *Politico*, 2014-06-09.
- Vogel, T. (2014b), “Juncker has ‘solid backing’ from centre-right MEPs”, *Politico*, 2014-06-12.
- Vogel, T. (2014c), “EU summit proposes Juncker but reviews selection process”, *Politico*, 2014-06-27.
- Watt, N. and I. Traynor (2014), “David Cameron loses Jean-Claude Juncker vote”, *The Guardian*, 2014-07-27.
- Wolfs, W., G.-J. Put and S. Van Hecke (2021), “Explaining the reform of the Europarties’ selection procedures for Spitzenkandidaten”, *Journal of European Integration*, 1–24.
- Wyles, J. (2014), “Cameron’s defining moment on EU-UK relations”, *Politico*, 2014-06-18.