

European Election Day:
Synchronizing National Electoral Cycles and Improving Democracy in Europe

Report of the conference

by

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Executive Summary

The “European Election Day Exploratory workshop” organized at the Graduate Institute on September 24-25, 2017, at the initiative of Grégoire Mallard and Miguel Maduro, attained several conclusions. This “European Election Day” should be understood broadly, as various versions of the proposal could all be equally valid. The temporal window during which electoral cycles are to be synchronized may vary (from a day to a couple of months); or the number of EU member-states concerned could also change (from 2 to 27). But whatever its exact form, organizing “in sync national elections” can improve democracy in Europe in three different ways. First, it can give more political agency to European citizens at the European level. Second, it can help the EU defend the integrity of its electoral process. Third, it can improve the efficiency of the decision-making process in EU institutions, especially policy coordination and decision-making among EU member-states within the Council of the EU. The synchronization of national electoral cycles thus seems to be a promising venue to improve the democratic life of the Union.

But the organization of “in sync” rather than “out of sync” national electoral cycles is not a magic fix to all the problems affecting democratic life in the Union. The articulation of this proposal with other propositions aimed at improving the political agency of European citizens thus needs to be better understood. Among the latter, we discussed: 1) the creation of transnational lists for European Parliament (EP) election; 2) the extension of the *spitzenkandidaten* to link not only the designation of the President of the Commission with the EP elections, but also the designation of all Commissioners; 3) the creation of a Eurozone Parliament; 4) the transformation of the Council of the EU into a European Senate; 5) the creation of European parties; 6) the support to European citizens’ initiatives; 7) the constitutionalization of European “public goods” within a European Charter. While some these proposals need to be better thought through, a consensus appeared among participants that the effectiveness of many of these proposals will be affected by the temporality of national electoral cycles, and whether the latter are to be synchronized in some manner or not. It comes therefore as a surprise that the academic and policy literature has largely ignored the articulation between national electoral cycles and the effectiveness of European institutional reforms.

The report thus concludes by asking European think tanks, political parties, European Parliament members, the European Commission, and Ministries of European Affairs in all member-states to start envisioning scenarios to forecast the effects of various forms of organization of in sync electoral national cycles. In particular, forecasts should pay attention to the effects of synchronization on: 1) the ability of European institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council) to exercise an open and effective system of checks and balances; 2) the ability of European institutions, especially the Council of the EU, to better represent the voice of European citizens when they express a desire for change during national elections; 3) the ability to address the problem of the overrepresentation of anti-EU parties in EU legislative institutions (Council and Parliament); 4) the ability to achieve higher voter turnout levels.

Plan of the Report

1. Introduction: Proposal, Method and Goal

Proposal

Method and goal

2. Giving More Political Agency to European Citizens

Problems

Responses to the Main Problems

- Synchronization of national electoral cycles
- Reinforcing the legitimacy and power of the European Parliament (EP).
 - Temporality of the Election of the EP.
 - Transnational Lists for the Election of the EP members.
 - Increasing the Political Check of the EP upon the Commission.
 - Increasing the Accountability of the Council (and Most Specifically the Eurogroup) before the EP.
- Creation of a Eurozone Parliamentary Assembly.
- Transformation of the Council of the EU into a European Senate.
- Creation of European transnational parties.
- Strengthening participatory democracy.
- Constitutionalization of a list of European public goods.

Preliminary Conclusions

3. Defending the Integrity and Fairness of the EU Electoral Process

Problems

Responses to the Main Problems

- Synchronization of national electoral cycles
- Ensuring pluralism in the media.

4. Improving the Efficiency of the European Decision-Making Process

Problems

Responses to the Main Problems

- Synchronization of national electoral cycles

5. Conclusions and Steps Forward

6. Appendix 1: Agenda of the Conference

7. Appendix 2: List of Participants

8. Appendix 3: List of Readings Exchanged Before the Conference

9. Appendix 4: Presentation of the European Election Day Lab

10. Appendix 5: Short Literature Review on the “Democratic Deficit”

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1. Introduction: Proposal, Method and Goal

Proposal

1.1 During this workshop, we forecasted the plausible positive and negative effects of the adoption of a **European Election Day for national elections** on the democratic life of the Union. This European Election Day should be understood broadly, as various versions of the proposal could be equally valid (though they may differ in levels of practicality):

- **Election Day:** may refer to a day, a week, a month, or a couple of months, during which national elections would be organized in Europe. Whatever the exact time frame, the goal is to create opportunities for serious and sustained transnational dialogue between political parties and voters during national electoral campaigns.
- **European Election Day:** the range of European countries agreeing to synchronize their national elections should not be fixed in advance. At the most extreme, we could imagine that all 27 European countries would elect their national government during the same day (or month) and for approximately the same term; at the minimum, we could imagine that only two countries (France and Germany were evoked; but also Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy) would organize their most important elections during the same period (Presidential and legislative elections in France, as the two are now coupled; and legislative elections in Germany in the first example).
 - In between the two most extreme versions of the proposal, we could imagine some synchronization by tiers (as in the case of the U.S. Senate), with 9 countries voting to elect their national government for 4.5 years, another 9 countries voting a year and a half later, and another 9 countries voting yet another year and a half later, etc. This is just one alternative of the same proposal to synchronize national electoral cycles. Of course, participants noticed that these blocks of 9 countries should be constructed so as to avoid the formation of coalitions by geography (like the 6 European Founders + 3 others in Western Europe; Central Europe; and Northern Europe): geographic diversity should be maximized *within* groups of 9 countries.
- **National elections:** these could be elections to either parliamentary or presidential offices, respectively in parliamentary or presidential systems. What matters is that the synchronization concerns national elections that directly impact the formation of a new government at the national level. For

instance, Senatorial elections would not be concerned in bicameral systems (like in France for instance).

- However, some participants have also suggested that the proposal could be extended beyond, as city councils now have incentives to coordinate with one another at the European level (for instance, Berlin and Barcelona, or Paris and Rome, etc.) outside of the influence of their governments, and we could also imagine some synchronization of municipal elections in Europe. The scope of the policy proposal under discussion here is however limited to the coordination of national (rather than municipal) electoral cycles.
- **Mechanism for synchronization:** participants have emphasized that the proposal should be understood as a bottom-up process, in which process of emulation will play the main role if some European leaders start the initiative on a voluntary basis. In its most limited version, the proposal could start by having two (or three) heads of states dissolving parliamentary assemblies and calling for new elections at the same time, in order to defend their new vision for Europe before voters. In stronger versions, the proposal could be turned into law by an “organic law” (as in France’s organic law which changed the length of the President’s office from 7 to 5 years), a constitutional amendment, or a treaty, in which the obligation to synchronize elections together with other EU member-states would be mentioned.
 - Some participants have also noted that in order to reserve the possibility for heads of state or governments to call new out of sync elections in times of parliamentary crisis, those new electoral cycles would need to be either shortened or lengthened (to leave governments who organized out of sync elections the possibility to catch up with the next round of in sync elections).

Method and goal

1.2. The workshop was experimental and exploratory: experimental, as we imagined how the policymaking process in the EU would work IF national elections were synchronized by European member-states (without specifying in which manner it would be done, see above); and exploratory, to the extent that we collectively imagined what the negative and positive effects of such in sync electoral cycles would be. Our aim was to use the proposal as an ideal-type that would reveal policy problems which currently plague the present EU policymaking process. The comparative exercise was useful. Collectively, we have identified a variety of problems with the current way the EU and national policymaking processes are articulated, which we believe need to be addressed at different levels (local, national, European), in robust ways and according to different temporalities. We also explored how this specific policy proposal could be related to other policy proposals currently being debated by European parliamentarians, Commissioners and governments, as well as by civil society actors.

1.3. Here are the following “**calls to action**” that emerged from our discussion, which the establishment of a European Election Day could partially fulfill. These calls to action are threefold:

- Giving More Political Agency to European Citizens
- Defending the Integrity of the European Electoral Process

- Improving the Efficiency of Decision-Making in European institutions

2. Giving More Political Agency to European Citizens

Problems

2.1. Perhaps one of the most pressing and problematic issues for European democracies today is the perception by European voters that they are no longer able to impulse policy change at the European level through their participation in national elections; and at the same time, that most of the policies they can vote upon are no longer under the control of their national government but under the control of European institutions. This perception (true or exaggerated) means that they have lost trust in their political agency. By political agency, we mean **the capacity for a citizen to change the policy course** through his or her vote.

2.2. European citizens exercise their political agency at the European level during elections in at least two moments, indirectly during national elections, and directly during European elections:

- European citizens use their ballots in national legislative (and/or presidential elections) to not only directly express support for new policies at the national level, but also, indirectly, at the European level. Indeed, by electing the new head of state or new head of government who will nominate Ministers, they elect those Ministers who represent their state in the Council of the EU. Thus, they can hope to affect decision-making in the Council (the “first chamber” of the EU legislative branch) by voting during national elections.
 - The new Prime Minister and/or head of state is also in charge of nominating the Ambassador to the EU and his or her technical staff, which means that voters can indirectly affect who is going to negotiate ex ante policy proposals that are later introduced and examined by the Council in Brussels, as European Embassies to the EU play an important legislative role in Brussels.
- During European Parliamentary (EP) elections, which are direct and proportional, European citizens change the composition of this “second chamber” of the EU legislative branch.
 - Participants noticed that the EU has a specific form of federalism which is not without issues, as usually the assembly which is directly elected by the citizens (here the EP) is the “first chamber” in the legislative process, and that the Council of state representatives is usually the “second chamber,” which vets, amends or blocks new laws coming from the citizens’ representatives. At the European level, the order is reversed, which tilts the equilibrium of powers to the advantage of the Council, the indirectly elected chamber, whose competences are also broader than those of the EP.
 - Participants have also all noticed that there is not one model of federalism, but rather, as many “federalisms” as there are federations. Hence, we should not impose another form of federalism (Swiss, German, American, Canadian, etc.) on the European reality and denounce deviations from the model, but rather, discuss the merits of each federal compact for its own sake and according to clearly established and democratically agreed-upon criteria.

2.3. Participants noticed that the fact that national electoral cycles are out of sync **reduces the ability for European citizens to (even indirectly) affect policy change in the European Council**. The indirect AND out of sync mode of designation of Council members safeguards European citizens' political agency only as a "**negative liberty**" (e.g. the ability to refuse to be imposed policies that they dislike), but not as a "**positive liberty**" (e.g. the ability for European citizens to form new majorities and convince other member-states to adopt new policies). Through national elections, European citizens can give a mandate to their new national representatives to the Council to veto policy decisions that require consensus: out of sync national elections give European voters the ability to exercise a blocking power, rather than a power to form new majorities, in the Council of the EU. This is clearly an issue.

- Most of the workshop participants seemed to agree that the **current indirect and out of sync mode of designation** of the members of the European Council (heads of state and governments), of the Council of the EU (27 Ministers in relevant issue-domains) and the Eurogroup (which works as a partition of this Council, with only 19 Ministers of finance and economy, but with an opaque mode of functioning and an unclear legal status, as its existence is not planned by the EU Treaties) has a **negative effect on European citizens' political agency**.
- In turn, the extra burden which the out of sync character of the mode of designation of the Council places on the ability of newly elected Ministers to create new majorities and policy coalitions in the Council may well convince European citizens to resist a shift from "decision by consensus" to "decision by qualified majority voting" (QMV). If this shift was to happen for most policy decisions, European citizens would lose the only chance they have to block policies which they rejected in the context of national elections. However, some participants believed that a move from "consensus" to QMV is necessary to make the Council operate more efficiently. Thus, these two proposals, **the synchronization of national elections** and the **shift from consensus to QMV in the Council**, should go hand in hand.

2.4. The **difficulty of forming transnational policy coalitions** out of national electoral campaigns, which results (partially) from the out of sync character, has broad **negative ideological effects**. Indeed, the emphasis on citizens' political-agency-through-veto (as described above) leads citizens, pundits and politicians alike to associate the fact of **giving citizens political agency** with the **defense of the national sovereignty of states** (through the defense of the veto power of state representatives in the Council). This confusion should be rejected in the public sphere. Thus, we need to link the two following proposals: the **synchronization of national elections** and the necessity to defend European citizens' political agency conceived as their ability **to create new transnational majorities during in sync national elections**.

- If we do not dissociate the defense of European citizens' political agency from the defense of states' sovereign rights, we will leave the ideological terrain wide open to the populist pundits and politicians who would have voters entertain some confusion between "shared sovereignty" as practiced in the EU and "loss of citizens' political agency." The two issues are analytically

distinct. For instance, voters may exercise their political agency precisely by asking for more federalism (however that term is to be understood) and more shared sovereignty in the economic and social realms at the European level.

Responses to the Main Problems

2.4. Participants discussed a wide range of responses to tackle the loss of political agency that European citizens have experienced in the present context of increased budgetary austerity, spreading xenophobic discourses and fears, and rising populist parties opposed to the rule of law and democratic values. To improve European citizens' political agency, the following proposals were discussed:

- **2.4.1. Synchronization of national electoral cycles** (or European Election Day). As said, **in sync national election campaigns** (whichever practical form they take) would allow European citizens to hope that their participation as voters will have a greater impact on European policies (and hence on their concrete life, as most economic policies are decided at the European level, especially in the Eurozone), as neighboring EU member-states would be running similar campaigns at the same time within the Union.
 - The possibility to have a relatively large number of countries running parallel national elections would be especially impactful if the Council moved from consensus to QMV. Then, getting 5-9 countries to run parallel national elections could prove decisive to incite voters to be involved in transnational campaigns with common policy options across the right-left divide, or on more issue-specific ideological divisions.
- **2.4.2. Reinforcing the legitimacy and power of the European Parliament (EP).** European citizens exercise their political agency in Europe by directly electing their representatives to the EP, where Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are indeed supposed to represent citizens (rather than their state). Thus, changes brought to the European Parliament (its mode of designation or its relation to the Council and Commission) were discussed by many participants, who made the following proposals:
 - **2.4.2.1. Temporality of the Election of the EP:** At first, the issue of the temporality of EP elections may seem a nonissue, as EP elections are held at the same time in all EU member-states. However, some participants discussed the possibility of not only synchronizing national elections across Europe (see first point), but also synchronizing national elections AND European Parliamentary elections. This second kind of synchronization would solve a problem that one participant called the “structural anti-EU bias” that results from the fact that most EP elections are held when national governments are in the middle of their term : EP elections are thus often midterm elections, and like in any midterm elections, they tend to rally the discontents to a greater extent than the mainstream voters. First, during EP elections, citizens vote mostly “against their government” rather than in favor of specific policy proposals expressed for the future of the EU. Second, like midterm elections, they usually have low turnout, further decreasing the legitimacy of the EP. As a result of these two mechanisms, most anti-EU parties (which, like the FN in France, are largely underrepresented in the national assembly because of the lack of proportionality in national suffrage)

are overrepresented in EP elections when their candidates are under-represented in national elections -- which is not always the case anymore. Thus, by synchronizing national electoral cycles first, and national elections AND direct European parliamentary elections second, we would avoid national issues dominating EP elections, and populist parties entering so massively the EP. Some participants believed this double synchronization would give more credibility and legitimacy to the EP. However, other participants suggested that the “anti-EU bias” of EP elections might vary across countries (it is especially strong in the UK and France, where protest parties are prevented from accessing national parliaments due to restrictive electoral laws), and that it may be dependent upon national histories and electoral systems. Thus, more reflection is needed to assess the link between national and EP elections.

- **2.4.2.2. Transnational Lists for the Election of the EP members.** Many participants discussed and welcomed the idea of having a portion of the MEPs come from European “transnational lists of candidates.” The first seats granted to transnational European lists could be taken from the basket of the EP seats that the UK will let go as a result of Brexit, but that number could be even broader, if every nation agrees to reserve some seats for these transnational lists. Then, European citizens would exercise their political agency by choosing one name on their ballot for the EP election in the “national” lists (usually with names of representatives of purely national parties) and a second name belonging to the “European transnational list.” Giving a large portion of seats in the EP to the latter is important, as the transnational party lists would need to be coordinated at the European level to shape their program, and they would hence run campaigns on European themes, rather than campaigns that try to crystallize a protest vote on narrow national issues.
- **2.4.2.3. Increasing the Political Check of the EP upon the Commission.** Most participants welcomed (with a few exceptions) the new development known as spitzenkandidaten in the designation of the President of the European Commission, which, since the election of the last President, is no longer solely under the control of heads of states in the European Council, but dependent upon the results of the EP elections, with the assumption that the leader of the European party with the most votes would become the President of the Commission. Various improvements to this principle of spitzenkandidaten were discussed. In particular, one participant proposed that 1a) not only should the President of the Commission be the party leader of the party having received the most seats during the last EP election; 2) but also, that all the Commissioners should be chosen among the MEPs elected on the European “transnational lists”; 3) and that in the latter, the future Commissioners should count among the first 27 names appearing on these lists, who should come from all 27 member-states (in order to avoid the overrepresentation of “big” states on transnational lists). Another participant proposed that 1b) the President of the Commission should not be the party leader of the party having received the most seats (“first past the post” principle), but the party leader who is the most likely to form the largest coalition.
- **2.4.2.4. Increasing the Accountability of the Council (and most Specifically the Eurogroup) before the EP.** Participants also discussed the possibility that the Eurogroup (the 19 Eurozone Ministers of Finance) would report of its negotiations regarding the management of debt-related issues and

macroeconomic policy before the EP, especially before the MEPs of the 19 Eurozone member-states (with the 8 non-Euro member-states attending public hearing but without the right to vote or question the Ministers' decisions). In so doing, the proposal would eliminate the most blatant nondemocratic practices in Europe, which concern the vulnerable populations affected by austerity policies (most specifically in Greece). These populations have no recourse to overturn policies adopted by the Eurogroup, which does not account for its policy decisions before national or European parliamentary assemblies. Although many liked this proposal, others equally liked the proposal to create a separate Eurozone assembly to create accountability for Eurozone policies (see 2.4.3).

- **2.4.3. Creation of a Eurozone Parliamentary Assembly.** An alternative to the empowerment of the EP (specifically the Eurozone MEPs and possibly MEPs elected on transnational lists) with the ability to question policy decisions and force the Eurogroup to be accountable before the public, would be to create a Parliament of the Eurozone. Some participants liked this proposal better than the previous one, although it wasn't clear that a strong majority among participants supported it. The main argument made in favor of the Eurozone Parliament is that the adoption of the euro—and the subsequent Eurozone crises—have created a giant leap forward in terms of political integration, which has not yet led to the creation of a democratic structure at the level of the Eurozone. Indeed, the Eurozone decision-makers are mostly heads of state and finance ministers acting in the European Council and Eurogroup (or the head of the European Central Bank), and they largely evade accounting for their decisions before their own national parliaments when their decision concerns another EU member-state (for instance, Greece); or before the EP, which lacks the prerogative to question the Eurogroup on its decisions (as the latter is not a legal entity planned by the EU treaties). Hence, a Parliament of the Eurozone, with representatives of the national parliaments and of the EP (maybe the transnationally elected MEPs?) would increase such accountability of the Eurogroup. Skeptics who preferred proposal 2.4.2.4. argued that adding a new Eurozone Parliament would further complicate the European policymaking structure, making it incomprehensible to most European citizens; that it would make the only body directly representing European citizens (e.g. the EP) largely irrelevant in the management of the Eurozone economic, fiscal and social matters; that it does not tackle the most important reform today, which is the reform of the Council of the EU. Furthermore, if citizens indirectly elected parliamentarians of the Eurozone Parliament through national elections, these parliamentarians would mechanically represent the same parties as the Ministers seating in the Council of the EU, thus resulting in a high risk of collusion and lack of accountability at the European level. Thus, many participants seemed to prefer the solution presented in 2.4.2.4.
 - Still, if the idea of a Eurozone Parliament was to gain more attraction in the near future, then the synchronization of national electoral cycles in Eurozone member-states (many of which are parliamentary systems) would become even more pressing. Indeed, these national elections would not only elect the new representatives of states in the Council (heads of government and Ministers), but also the members of this Eurozone Parliament. If these national elections were out of sync, it would then be particularly hard to form

new majorities—for the reasons we witnessed during the Greek crisis, when Greeks were “left with elections but no choice,” as their vote was largely insufficient to form a new majority against austerity in the Council. Indeed, when they voted in out of sync national elections, the Greek citizens only changed one vote in the Council of Ministers (or the Eurogroup), which was largely insufficient to change the political climate (to the contrary, it may have hardened the position of the others). The same would be true in the Eurozone Parliament if national electoral cycles continued to be out of sync.

- **2.4.4. Transformation of the European Council into a European Senate.** A large number of participants seemed to agree that this proposal would be a most welcome development considering the current power that the Council holds, and the opacity of its discussions. But the desirability and plausibility of the proposal was not discussed in itself, but in relation to the main topic of our discussion: the synchronization of national electoral cycles. Indeed, if the Council of the EU morphed into a European Senate (modeled loosely after the Swiss Council of States), it would mean that member-states would no longer be represented by Ministers appointed after national elections (some of whom have never run in electoral campaigns, as they were directly appointed by heads of government), but by Senators elected during special elections (a number to be specified per country). Direct election of Senators would certainly increase their accountability before European citizens, but it would thus raise the question of how and when such direct elections should be held.
 - Temporally, these Senators would be elected 1) either at the same time as MEPs (an option that may be the least interesting as it risks creating majorities with too much power at the European level, since it would be the same party majorities sitting in the EP and in the Council of the EU); or 2) at the same time as national governments are elected, with voters putting two names on their ballot, one for the government, one for the European Senator (but then, if national elections continue to be out of sync, the same problem of majority formation and stability of the Council that are experienced today will be repeated in the new institutional version of the Council); or 3) the election of Senators could follow a separate electoral cycle independent of both national elections and EP elections. The third solution may be preferable, but participants did not have the time to discuss the comparative merits of each option, and whether the third option would implicate organizing one common election for the whole Senate (as in the current EP election), or if the Senate should be elected by tiers, as in the case of the US Senate. Here, the risk of a “midterm election effect” in which opposition parties get a bonus over mainstream parties should be considered. Also, adding a separate electoral cycle would add another election to an already high number of elections in Europe, which may lead to low turnout: one participant mentioned that, on average, European citizens are called to vote twice per year in the Union. Thus, some participants mentioned that elections of this Senate could be indirect.
 - Another proposal that was mentioned but little discussed (for reasons of time) was that the principle of *spitzenkandidaten* should also be applied to the election of the President of the Council. There are two different ways to envision this: 1) in the present situation, elections of the EP would then not only determine the designation of the President of the Commission, but also the President of the European Council; 2) if the Council of the UE was to

morph into a Senate, directly elected by European citizens, then the elections to the Senate could determine who is the President of the European Council and the President of the Eurogroup.

- In line with this idea, one participant also proposed that if the Council of the EU was transformed into a European Senate, the party leader who would obtain the majority in the Senatorial race in one member-state should have competence over all policy matters in the Senate and thus account for his or her decisions to the national parliament (as he would be acting on behalf of the member-state), and that the other representatives in the Senate would distribute seats in the Senate Commissions. This system would avoid dispersing accountability among Ministers, many of whom never come to their national parliaments to account for the decisions they make in the Council of the EU.
- **2.4.5. Creation of European transnational parties.** Some participants mentioned the slow mutation of traditionally national parties (as well as NGOs) into truly European parties. Having truly European parties would give more voice to European citizens, first, in direct European elections (EP elections), and second, in indirect elections (the Council). Today, there is a far-from-perfect equivalence between the programs of European parties represented in the EP and the programs of national parties who compete in the EP elections. One participant mentioned for instance that there was no truly “social-democratic party” in Hungary, whereas such a political color has been traditionally extremely important in the EP. This situation deprives European citizens of their political agency, as the national composition of their party system leaves them sometimes unable to vote for the programs that will eventually be defended in the EP by the parties represented at the European level. Second, this problem is less dramatic in indirect elections, but if the Council was to morph into a Senate, then the problem would affect both chambers, which shows that some serious reflection is necessary.
 - Some participants discussed the pros and cons of organizing **European-wide primaries** for the EP elections (and possibly, later, for the elections of Senators if the transformation of the Council into a Senate ever occurs). Such primaries would indeed push for the creation of European parties with transnational party platforms. They would also help generate the sense that a “European public sphere” exists. At the same time, other participants mentioned that the ability for European politicians to campaign in many different European countries largely depends on their ability to raise a large amount of money, and that the system would thus privilege richer parties/candidates (and that strict electoral rules regarding electoral finances would need to be imposed). Bringing the proposal closer to the theme of the discussion, one participant also mentioned that the US primaries offered a model in which the electoral calendar (although centered around the US Presidential elections) was not completely synchronized, and that both parties (Republicans and Democrats) in charge of organizing primaries only partially synchronized primary elections, showing the importance of timing in the reflection on the possible establishment of primaries in the European context.
- **2.4.6. Strengthening participatory democracy.** The European Citizens’ Initiatives that require one million signatures from European citizens were

discussed as a good tool that should be further used by NGOs and civil society actors to encourage European citizens to exercise their political agency.

- The comparison between federalisms in the EU and in Switzerland is telling. Indeed, one participant noted that the importance of participatory democracy in Switzerland somehow balances the problems of representative democracy: if Swiss citizens (particularly women, in certain Cantons) have sometimes lacked the ability to exercise their political agency through elections, they have compensated by exercising it through participatory democracy. Of course, the scale in the two cases is different.
- **2.4.7. Constitutionalization of a list of European public goods** to which European citizens are entitled (European Charterism). Some participants emphasized the need to enshrine the defense of citizens' political agency in such a Charter. More generally, participants have suggested that it would be particularly useful to list the 10 to 20 public goods that European institutions should create and protect, in addition to the three "public goods" that were the focus of our discussion: 1) empowering European citizens; 2) defending the integrity of the European representative democracy; 3) improving the efficiency of decision-making at the regional level. For some participants, this list of 20 public goods could have quasi-constitutional value. While this specific proposal was not debated at length, most participants seemed to agree that we should force ourselves to relate proposals of institutional reform (such as 2.4.1. to 2.4.4.) to the concrete outputs for citizens that would be made possible through such proposed reforms. Indeed, institutional reforms at the EU level are not interesting (and are sometimes incomprehensible) to the majority of European citizens if they are not linked to concrete outputs or public goods.
 - One participant emphasized that the said Charter could list, among other public goods, the historical fact that the EU gained legitimacy in the 1990s by promising European citizens of new EU member-states to safeguard their newly acquired rights against the possibility of a quick return to authoritarianism.

Preliminary Conclusions

2.5. Independent of the question of which institutional European reform was privileged by each participant (a Europe with a strengthened European Parliament, the transformation of the Council into a Senate, a Eurozone with a new Parliament, etc.), most agreed that all proposals should incorporate in their reflections on institutional reform a concern for: 1) the synchronization of national electoral cycles between EU member-states; 2) the synchronization of national electoral cycles and direct EU electoral cycles (EP elections, and possibly future European Senatorial elections); 3) the public goods that European citizens seek to gain from their participation in the democratic life of the Union.

3. Defending the Integrity and Fairness of the EU Electoral Process

Problems

3.1 The second pressing issue that participants discussed is the need for the European Union and its member-states **to defend the integrity of its electoral process**. Two participants detailed how majorities in certain EU member-states have played on a variety of tools to change national electoral rules to their benefit. They showed how populist parties, once elected to the national government, have tried (successfully) to permanently lock in their temporary grip on the national government by passing electoral reform. They noticed that, to the extent that the EU relies on an indirect procedure to designate members of the Council, these challenges to the democratic life of certain nations threaten not only the integrity of the electoral process at the national level, but also the integrity of the designation process at the EU level.

- Participants detailed the variety of tools that some newly elected populist governments have used to ensure the permanence of their hold on national offices. The example of Hungary was discussed at length, but other less problematic examples exist among EU member-states. For instance, national governments can strip citizens of their right to vote by making it difficult for citizens who reside abroad to participate in elections. Governments can also extend citizenship to groups of sympathetic would-be-voters identified on the basis of party affiliation or ethnic lines (for instance, ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary or even outside the EU were granted the right to vote by the Hungarian government, which tilted the election to its benefit). They can rezone electoral districts in order to optimize chances that electoral results will play favorably for their party: new forecasting electoral technologies and legislative action can thus be combined to produce particularly deleterious effects on electoral fairness.
- The case of Hungary was mentioned to illustrate what happens when all these tools are used at the same time, but other cases were also mentioned. Indeed, it has become a widespread practice for governments elected to power to redistrict electoral zones on behalf of “administrative simplification” and budgetary responsibility (for instance, reducing the number of elected parliamentarians). Most of these electoral changes, even if checked by opposition parties, are legal, but they may lead to biases in the election results, thus threatening the integrity and fairness of the electoral process.

3.2. Redistricting practices are also a means to enforce party discipline and quash democratic debate within parties themselves. Indeed, newly elected parliamentarians (either from the majority in power, or from the opposition) may think twice before criticizing their government if the government has the ability to redraw the geographical boundaries of their electoral base (and hence its political composition), or even further, to erase their jurisdiction through a reduction in the number of parliamentarians.

3.3. The duty to check that national electoral reform does not distort the fairness of the electoral process may seem to fall under the sole responsibility of specific national institutions within these member-states (constitutional courts, national parliaments, electoral commissions, etc.). Then, unsurprisingly, no check would need to exist at the EU level (either by the European Commission, Parliament or Court), according to the principle of subsidiarity. Most participants seemed to find this diagnosis and the

related situation to be an aberration. Indeed, national elections do not only involve the future direction of the national government of the concerned EU member-state, but also the policy of the EU: so far, national elections remain the (indirect) designation procedure on which the EU has relied to designate the members of its Councils (the Council of the EU and the European Council). Thus, the EU has an equal interest in ensuring the fairness of national elections as citizens of the nation in question. Thus, ensuring EU-level checks on the fairness of national elections would not violate the principle of subsidiarity, and would ensure that checks are effective.

- Moreover, the manipulation of national election results through the manipulation of national electoral laws is typically a problem (with both national and European dimensions) that calls for a response from both the European Union and from European member-states. Indeed, national institutions, not all of which are as independent as they should be (in particular, electoral commissions) are usually ill-equipped to denounce the manipulation introduced in the electoral process by a government. Indeed, the electoral agencies are often weak or directly under the jurisdiction of Ministers (typically, the Minister of Interior).

Responses to the Main Problems

3.4 Various proposals for what the EU could do to ensure the integrity and fairness of the (indirect) designation process of members of the European Council and Council of the EU (the two most powerful institutions of the Union) were discussed, starting with the European Election Day:

- **3.4.1. Synchronization of national electoral cycles** (or European Election Day). Some participants believed that the organization of in sync national elections would have a positive effect on the ability of the Union to defend the integrity of its (indirect) designation procedure to the Council. Indeed, European citizens, like any other citizens of the world, are more attentive to the political affairs of their country (and of their neighbors) at the time when their national parties are campaigning during national elections: after a cycle of campaigning (that typically lasts a year), citizens can grow tired of the media attention to political affairs, and thus transition from political passion to political apathy. After national elections are over, political passions diminish, and citizens follow less intensely what their government is doing, not to mention what other EU governments are doing. Thus, in sync national elections organized by a few neighboring EU member-states would ensure that electoral results are publicized when all their citizens exercise the greatest vigilance: when they pay the most attention to politics, not only to electoral results in their country but also abroad. In sync elections would then maximize the probability that attempts to manipulate electoral results by one European government would be picked up by the electorate of a neighboring country, and that the latter would lobby their own government to denounce the other's electoral manipulation. Indeed, foreign nationals of a neighboring EU country will be able to argue that national electoral results not only affect the citizens of the country in question, but also the political dynamics in the European Council and Council of the EU, and therefore, themselves.

- **3.4.2. Ensuring pluralism in the media.** Pluralism in the public sphere is an essential condition to ensure the integrity of the electoral process. Knowledge of electoral law reforms, and possible associated breaches to the fairness and integrity of the electoral process, is mediated by public access to such information. In countries where the media is controlled by private interests close to power, or directly by the national government, access to information is difficult for citizens. A consensus seemed to emerge among participants that the absence of a European media (which has long been noticed since the beginning of the EU) represents a key weakness for the EU to ensure that all citizens have sufficient information to protect the fairness of their electoral procedures. The EU institutions should thus pay more attention to this question, and work to exploit a variety of means (internet and other digital media) to reach out to European citizens.
 - One participant emphasized that the case of Hungary highlights how difficult it has become for opponents to the majority in power to denounce (and even to be aware of) the electoral reforms currently introduced by the majority in power.
 - Another participant emphasized that if journalists were made aware that national elections are also European elections to the extent that they bring new members to its Councils, all European journalists would understand that they play a key role in denouncing the electoral reforms that are passed before national elections in any country of the EU (if the latter introduce partisan biases). The synchronization of elections may help move the issue to the top of the media agenda. Also, some trainings could be directed to make journalists more aware of the importance of electoral reform within EU member-states.

4. Improving the Efficiency of the European Decision-Making Process

Problems

4.1. Some participants emphasized that the out of sync character of national elections has negative repercussions on the efficiency of the Council of the UE. Indeed, many decisions in the Council are postponed until after a new election brings together a new majority in one of the 27 EU member-states, especially when it is likely that the Minister representing the concerned member-state will no longer be in the government after the election. In many ways, the lack of synchronization of national elections means that the Council has permanently one or two “lame ducks” (to use the US terminology) among its members (Ministers)--a situation that is particularly problematic when the decision-making rules require decision by consensus.

Responses to the Main Problems

4.2. Participants discussed possible solutions to this problem, in particular:

- **4.2.1 Synchronization of national electoral cycles.** The organization of in sync national elections would of course solve this problem, as the Council

would then have a clearer mandate, and a clearer time horizon to accomplish it. Most participants agreed that this effect would greatly benefit the Council.

- One participant however cautioned that partially synchronized national elections (with a system of tiers, with 9 EU member-states voting successively at different periods of time) would be greatly preferable to the most extreme version of the European Election Day proposal (all 27 countries holding their national elections on the same day). Indeed, she noted that the last time EP elections were held, the European Commission (whose composition depends on EP electoral results, because of the *spitzenkandidaten principle*) stopped functioning during the last 6 months before the EP elections. Similarly, if all 27 countries held in sync elections, the Council would become a “lame duck” Council during the last 6 months before the in sync elections, making it very vulnerable to international or European crises (like the migrant crisis or the sovereign debt crisis). In any case, the lame duck principle can never completely be eliminated, whichever electoral system is chosen: synchronizing national elections is just a tool to decrease its effects, and the specific mode of synchronization should be chosen with the goal of combating the worst effects of the lame duck principle.

5. Conclusions and Steps Forward

5.1. In the present anarchic state of out of sync national electoral cycles, national elections fail to give European citizens a chance to fully exercise their political agency at the European level. The out of sync character of national elections makes it hard for European citizens to mobilize their energies across national boundaries during national campaigns. It also makes it hard for new majorities to emerge in the Council of the EU. The permanent succession of elections among EU member-states also threatens the effectiveness of the Council. Thus, most if not all participants saw great merit in pursuing discussion of the European Election Day proposal. As one participant said, the European Election Day idea has the merit of linking a high principle (improving democracy in the Union) with a simple policy tool (organizing in sync national elections). This high principle, or “public good,” could also be listed along with other public goods that the EU is supposed to bring to its citizens.

5.2. At the same time, the synchronization of national elections is not a miracle solution to all problems affecting the democratic life of the Union. Other proposals for institutional reforms at the EU level need to be examined and adopted so that European citizens can be given maximum political agency at the European level. The articulation between the European Election Day idea and other propositions of institutional reform thus needs to be better understood. Among the latter, we discussed: 1) the creation of **transnational lists for European Parliament election**; 2) the extension of the *spitzenkandidaten* to not only link the designation of the President of the Commission with the EP elections, but also the **designation of all Commissioners**; 3) the creation of a **Eurozone Parliament**; 4) the transformation of the Council of the EU into a **European Senate**; 5) the creation of **European parties**; 6) the use of **European citizens’ initiatives**; 7) the **constitutionalization of European “public goods”** within a European Charter. While some these proposals need to be better thought through, a consensus appeared among participants that the effectiveness of many of these proposals will be affected by the temporality of national electoral cycles, and whether or not the latter are to be synchronized in some

manner. It comes therefore as a surprise that the academic and policy literature has largely ignored the articulation between national electoral cycles and the effectiveness of European institutional reforms.

5.3. In conclusion, European think tanks, European Parliament members, and the European Commission, as well as Ministries of European Affairs in all member-states should seriously consider the desirability of the European Election Day idea. Most participants also emphasized that political parties should be made aware of the proposal, and of the benefits they could get (in terms of party registration for instance) from the adoption of in sync elections. Discussing the gender quota reform as a useful precedent, one participant also emphasized the tactical advantage of forming expert groups with insider support in the European Commission and the European Parliament.

5.4. Future reflections on the proposal should flesh out possible **synchronization scenarios** and their effects on various key outcomes related to the democratic health of the Union. In particular, forecasts should pay attention to the effects of various synchronization scenarios on: 1) the **ability of European institutions** (Commission, Parliament and Council) to exercise an **open and effective system of checks and balances**; 2) the ability of European institutions (the Council of the EU for instance) **to adapt their policies**, especially macro-economic policies, **to the new demands of the European electorates** expressed during national elections; 3) the ability to address the problem of **overrepresentation of anti-EU parties in EU legislative institutions** (Council and Parliament); 4) the ability to improve **electoral turnout levels**.

- Participants also noted that the last round of national elections in Europe (in Austria, France, and Germany, to mention just a few) somehow has created a “natural experiment,” which should be used to assess some of the effects of the European Election Day proposal in the near future. Even if this partial synchronization is random, it may have important effects on the functioning of the Council of the EU, and the ability of the European Council to advance new European institutional reforms.
 - Some participants noticed that the random synchronization between French and German national elections has already produced some positive effects in terms of policy coordination: for instance, newly elected French President Macron waited to know the results of the German election before pushing forward a range of policy options he wants to discuss with European leaders during the next term (4 years for the German government, 5 years in France). It is also important to assess whether European policy coordination at the European level will be made easier by such random synchronization in the next 5 years: if it proves positive, then, the European Election Day proposal should be given very serious consideration.

Appendix 1: Agenda of the Conference

European Election Day Exploratory workshop

Graduate Institute, Geneva

September 24-25, 2017

Organized by

Grégoire Mallard

Associate Professor, Graduate Institute

Miguel Maduro

Professor of Law, European University Institute

- First day Arrival of participants (Sunday, September 24)**
- 14:00-17:00 Pre-event meeting with EUROPÆUM students (discussion of readings)
Room P1-501 Maison de la paix
- 19:30 Welcome and dinner with workshop presenters
Café du Grütli, Rue du Général-Dufour 16, 1204 Genève
- Second day European Election Day Exploratory workshop (Monday, September 25)**
- 9:00-9:30 **Welcome and Introduction/s to the workshop**
Parc Barton, 132 Rue de Lausanne, Amphithéâtre Jacques Freymond
Grégoire Mallard (Associate Professor, Anthropology and Sociology, Graduate Institute), Shalini Randeria (Director of the Albert Hirschman Center on Democracy, Graduate Institute, Rector of the Institute for Human Science, Vienna), Thomas Biersteker (Director of Policy Research, Graduate Institute),
- 9:30-10:45 **First Panel: European Election Day: The End of an Aberration in a Normalized Federalist Regime?**
Renaud Dehousse (Director, European University Institute), Daniel Halberstam (Professor of Law, University of Michigan), Maya Hertig (Professor of Law, University of Geneva), Christophe Möllers (Professor of Law, Humboldt University), Miguel Maduro (European University Institute)
- How do federalist regimes (either US, or Swiss, or German ones) organize the elections at the federal and state level? Can democracy survive in a federal union without uniting around the one-time expression of the popular will?
- 10:45-11:00 Coffee
- 11:00-12:30 **Second panel: European Election Day: Danger or Solution to the Good Functioning of European Institutions?**
Mercedes Bresso (Member of European Parliament), Antoine Vauchez (Professor of Political Science, University La Sorbonne), Annabelle Littoz-Monnet (Associate professor of IR/Political Science, Graduate Institute), Nico Krisch (Professor of Law, Graduate Institute)

What would be the expected effects of a European Election Day (or European Election Month) on European institutions? How would such a synchronization affect the decision-making process at the EU level? Would it reinforce inter-governmentalism? Could it also reinforce the European Parliament and Commission? Should a new assembly of the Eurozone be created, would it be even more desirable to synchronize national parliamentary elections? Should these elections be held at various times in order to renew various segments of EU-level institutions (for instance, a third of the members of the European Council or future Eurozone assembly)? Could complete or partial synchronization of national elections create chaos in the European Council or in a future Eurozone assembly?

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:45 **Third Panel: European Election Day: A Condition for Setting a European Agenda?**

Gilles Grin (Director of the Jean Monnet Foundation), Daphne Büllsbach (European Alternatives), Martial Foucault (Sciencespo Paris) Stéphanie Hofmann (Professor of IR/political science, Graduate Institute), Fabian Breuer (European Investment Bank),

How could political parties benefit from the synchronization of national legislative or presidential elections? How would the ideological/political landscape change as a result of such synchronization? Would political parties be forced to Europeanize their agenda? What other alternatives may exist for developing a European Agenda?

14:45-15:00 Coffee

15:00-16:15 **Fourth Panel: European Election Day: An Unrealistic Pathway in the Constitutional Landscape of Europe?**

Kim Lane Scheppele (Professor of Sociology and International Affairs, Princeton University), Rui Tavares (Associate Researcher, Center for International Studies, ISCTE Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), Eléonore Lépinard (Associate professor, Social Sciences, University of Lausanne).

What are the main constitutional blockages and challenges that would prevent the synchronization of national elections? Is the existence of parliamentary and presidential regimes in Europe a threat to such synchronization? Would such a reform be necessarily a constitutional reform or could it be just a reform of electoral laws? Should it be adopted in the context of the ratification of a new Treaty to Democratize the European Union?

16:15-17:00 **Round-up**

17:00-18:30 Break

18:30-20:00 **Plenary Session: The Future of Democracy in Europe: Rethinking the Role of Elections in a Multilevel Polity**

Amphithéâtre Ivan Pictet, Maison de la Paix

Public event organized with the Director's Office of the Graduate Institute

Welcome Message : Grégoire Mallard (Associate Professor, Graduate Institute), Shalini Randeria (Director of the Albert Hirschman Center on

Democracy, Graduate Institute, Rector of the Institute for Human Science, Vienna), Thomas Biersteker (Director of Policy Research, Graduate Institute)

Chair: Grégoire Mallard (Graduate Institute)

Participants: Daniel Halberstam (University of Michigan), Kim Lane Scheppelle (Princeton University), Rui Tavares (Center for International Studies, former member of the European Parliament), Antoine Vauchez (University La Sorbonne)

20:30 **Dinner with workshop presenters**
Le Restaurant, Maison de la Paix

Third day **Departure of workshop participants (Tuesday, September 26)**

Supported by

The Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, Graduate Institute
The Programme for the Study of International Governance, Graduate Institute
The Director's Office, Graduate Institute
The Fond National Suisse



Appendix 2: List of Participants

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Appendix 3: List of Readings Exchanged Before the Conference

- **Mercedes Bresso and Elmar Brok.** *Report on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty*, European Parliament, 2014
- **Daphne Büllsbach, Marta Cillero, Lukas Stolz.** “*Shifting Baselines of Europe*“, European Alternatives
- **Renaud Dehousse and Nicolas Monceau.** “*La réactivité démocratique de l’Union Européenne*“, L’Harmattan, 2016/4 no 54
- **Renaud Dehousse** “*Constitutional reform in the European community: Are there alternatives to the Majoritarian avenue?* », West European Politics, 1995
- **Daniel Halberstam.** “*The Bride of Messina: constitutionalism and democracy in Europe*”
- **Stéphanie Hennette, Thomas Piketty, Guillaume Sacriste and Antoine Vauchez.** “*For a Treaty Democratizing Euro Area Governance – (T-Dem)*”
- **Stéphanie Hennette, Thomas Piketty, Guillaume Sacriste and Antoine Vauchez.** “*European parliamentary sovereignty on the shoulders of national parliamentary sovereignties: A Reply to Sébastien Platon*”, 2017
- **Danuta Maria Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira.** *Draft Report on the composition of the European Parliament*, 2017
- **Éléonore Lépinard and Ruth Rubio Marín.** Forthcoming. “*Completing the Unfinished Task? Gender Quotas and the Ongoing Struggle for Women’s Empowerment*” In *Transforming Gender Equality: The Irresistible Rise of Gender Quotas in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- **Paul Magnette.** “*Ten Thoughts on the Treaty Democratizing the Euro Area*“
- **Lorenzo Marsili and Niccolò Milanese** “*Ten Years of European Alternatives*”, European Alternatives, 2017
- **Dominique Rousseau.** “*La crise en Europe: un défaut de politique*”
- **Dominique Rousseau.** “*Pour une Constitution européenne*”, Article Le Monde, 1998
- **Dominique Rousseau** “*Le Brexit ou le momemnt constituant européen*” La Revue de l’Union Européenne, 2015
- **Kim Lane Scheppele and Miklós Bánkuti.** “*Legal but not Fair: Viktor Orbán New Supermajority*”, 2014
- **Kim Lane Scheppele.** “*Hungary: An Election in Question. Part I: The Political Landscape*”, Paul Krugman blog, The New York Times, 2014
- **Kim Lane Scheppele.** “*Hungary: An Election in Question. Part II: Writing the Rules to Win – The Basic Structure*”, Paul Krugman blog, The New York Times, 2014
- 2014
- **Kim Lane Scheppele.** “*Hungary: An Election in Question. Part III: Compensating the Winners*”, Paul Krugman blog, The New York Times, 2014
- **Kim Lane Scheppele.** “*Hungary: An Election in Question. Part IV: The New Electorate (in which Some are more Equal than Others)*”, Paul Krugman blog, The New York Times, 2014
- **Kim Lane Scheppele.** “*Hungary: An Election in Question. Part V: The Unequal Campaign*”, Paul Krugman blog, The New York Times, 2014
- **Rui Tavares.** “*L’ironie du projet européen*”
- **Rui Tavares.** “*The European Promise*”
- **Antoine Vauchez** “*Pour un traité de démocratisation de l’Europe. Pourquoi ? Comment ?*“ Article Libération, 2017
- **Antoine Vauchez** *Draft Treaty On The Democratization Of The Governance Of The Euro Area (« T-Dem »)*

Appendix 4: Presentation of the European Election Day Lab



European Election Day Lab



Project Leads: Grégoire Mallard

Timeline: ongoing

Keywords: European national elections, European institutions, European democratisation

Partners: European University Institute

Abstract:

Democratic passions could flourish differently if they could express themselves in rhythm. For people to dance together, the music has to start at the same time for everyone. Similarly, for the European peoples to feel part of the same political community, the elections by which they bring their representatives to power should be held simultaneously. Although this principle already guides the elections to the European Parliament, each European people still follows its own rhythm when they elect their national government and thus their representatives to the most powerful institution in charge of policymaking at the European level: the European Council. This asynchrony, so we hypothesize, may engender some dissatisfaction with European policies and processes among European voters.

Based on this observation, we believe it is worth examining whether the institution of a “European Election Day” for all legislative elections in Europe could bring more transparency in European policymaking and a stronger sense of “voice,” to use Albert Hirschman’s phrase, among European voters. The synchronization of national elections in Europe no doubt raises problems of an immense complexity at constitutional and political levels, but new bold proposals are needed to achieve both a democratization of European institutions and an Europeanization of public debates. For instance, the “Lab” will critically engage with presently debated proposals for EU reform, such as the creation of a Eurozone budget and Eurozone Parliament, as the creation of the latter (being composed of representatives of national parliaments) would make the issue of the temporality of national parliamentary elections even more relevant.

This project thus gathers jurists, sociologists, political scientists and policymakers to assess in laboratory-like conditions the worth of various proposals aimed at synchronizing national legislative elections at the European level.

See more information on:

<http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/research/centresandprogrammes/hirschman-centre-on-democracy/research/projects/european-election-day-lab.html>

Appendix 5: Short Literature Review on the “Democratic Deficit”

The last two decades have been marked by debates about the “democratic deficit” in international organizations in charge of regulating but also furthering economic globalization. The European Union (EU) is a case in point. After the Second World War, European integration has helped newly established democracies strengthen democratic values in Europe, in large part thanks to the increasing role of supranational judicial institutions in charge of defending individual rights (Halberstam 2008), and by offering national executives the opportunity to search for compromises between their national interests (Moravcsik 1998). But constitutional scholars have remarked that the process of EU integration has recently meant an increase in executive power (with Ministers being represented in the EU Council, and government delegates being appointed in the Commission) and a decrease in national parliamentary control over policy formation and implementation (Scheppelle 2006; Halberstam 2010). This lack of national parliamentary oversight has encouraged the proliferation of opaque forms of governance, which do not respect constitutional law standards of clarity and formality (Mallard 2014).

A few political scientists inspired by rational choice theories of representation deny the existence of such a “democratic deficit” (Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002), as they argue that the EU should do no more than offer an intergovernmental forum for the expression of conflicting national interests in search of issue-specific compromises. But most scholars, media commentators, policymakers and concerned citizens have argued that the current EU governance framework is in dire need of reform to allow more democratic expression of “voice” (Dehousse 1995; Follesdal and Hix 2006; Habermas 2009; Maduro 2013). Political theorists in particular have criticized the functioning of the EU institutions for failing to generate wide public deliberation over the direction of policy (Habermas 2009) -- something that is seen as an essential condition of democratic life (Manin 1986). Political sociologists have underlined that the EU increasingly operates through opaque forms of governance sharing between EU institutions (Council and Commission) and a wide net of informal networks of consultants and lobbies, which capture the agenda-setting and policy decisions. This tendency has increased with the advent of the Eurozone, whose informal structure (containing 19 out of the now 27 members of the EU), operates in the shadow of EU institutions (European Central Bank, networks of Eurozone Finance Ministers, etc.), which try to shield their authority from the disrupting power of national electoral cycles (Maduro 2013; Vauchez 2014).

One solution to address the lack of parliamentary control over EU policymaking has been to strengthen the role of the European Parliament: in the designation of the top appointees to the European Commission; in the approval of EU budgetary decisions; and the co-decision procedures associating the Council (Follesdal and Hix 2006). But this rebalancing of power has been limited in scope, and it has largely failed to extend to the decisions taken by the more opaque Eurozone institutions. Furthermore, these reforms have not helped national parliaments get back the authority and oversight they have lost. Constitutional law scholars and political scientists have thus started to collectively imagine treaty solutions to redress some of the most blatant problems created by the governance of the Eurozone (Maduro 2013), by asking governments to buttress the legitimacy and authority of national parliaments against that of central European institutions, by creating for instance an assembly of the Eurozone, constituted of representatives of national parliaments (Hennette, Piketty, Sacriste, Vauchez 2017). Still, the policy discussion is only starting and is far from having generated a consensus over the most desirable policy options.

This conference thus takes this question of the EU democratic deficit seriously by mobilizing the expertise of key constitutional law scholars, political scientists and sociologists involved in the debate over the necessary EU democratization. It builds upon the reflections of past scholars who see in the discrepancy between national and European processes of

decisionmaking the main source of concern for the democratic life of Europe, by addressing a little-mentioned aspect of this complex question: Does the temporality of national electoral cycles in general (and their lack of synchronization at the national level in particular) participate in emptying national democratic institutions of their legitimacy and power to voice and implement credible alternative European political agendas? If so, would some form of re-synchronization between national electoral cycles help generate new opportunities for European peoples to “voice” their concerns, elect credible alternative majorities in the EU institutions, and redress some of the issues pointed by past scholarship on the EU democratic deficit?

This attention to the temporality of national electoral cycles (rather than to the formal competencies of institutions) represents a new way to address the problem. If political scientists have long noticed that parties collude to keep the European agenda off the domestic agenda during election cycles (Hix 1999), they have failed to relate it to the lack of synchrony in electoral cycles at the national level. They have also failed to link the latter to other negative effects that might affect the functioning of EU institutions, and European citizens’ affective relationship to the European project: for instance, the perceived (and most often real) inability of newly elected governments to challenge the dominant policy paradigms and majorities in EU decision-making bodies. Indeed, in the present state of a-synchronized national (legislative) electoral cycles, it is predicted that a new government elected at the national level with a mandate to change policy directions at the European level will fail to turn its electoral promises into reality, as it will face, respectively 26, and 18, other national governments, in the European Council, and in the Eurozone institutions, whose mandate has not been renewed, and whose attitude toward policy change may be at best skeptic and at worst openly dismissive. If European peoples had the opportunity to vote on national legislative elections on the same day, and therefore renew the European Council (and the future, if improbable, assembly of the Eurozone currently under discussion) at once, then, we could hypothesize that dynamics of policy change would play out quite differently at the EU level.

Thus, we hypothesize that the lack of synchronization between European national elections leaves European peoples with formal elections, but little possibility to initiate change as far as the direction of the most important (EU) economic policies affecting their welfare is concerned. The only opportunity for European peoples to vote on the same day and after a shared period of campaigning occurs during European Parliamentary elections; but the paradox is that European voters know that the European Parliament largely lacks the formal authority to challenge and change policies decided by the EU Council and Eurozone institutions. Elections in Europe thus no longer offer a choice between different alternatives other than “exit” (as proposed by extreme right and some extreme left parties) or “loyalty” (proposed by the rest of center parties); and the option of “voice,” in the language of Albert Hirschman (1970), seems to have vanished. This may explain the widely experienced disaffiliation of European citizens toward the EU project, as they lack a temporal cycle during which to express their shared democratic passions -- e.g. those passions stirred by the prospect of winning an election that matters. The lack of a comprehensive understanding of how electoral temporalities at the national level influence the political parties’ ability to produce new common European agendas, as well as to form new stable majorities in European institutions, is thus not only problematic for social scientific research, as it continues to leave the question of temporality of political action unaddressed, but also for policymaking.

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