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**Transnationalizing the European
Parliament
Analyzing the 2018 Debate on Transnational
Lists**

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze arguments made for and against introducing transnational lists in the European Parliament elections. The focus will lie in understanding the arguments made in terms of relevance and performance, with aspects such as political affiliations being regarded as well. The chosen material are speeches from a debate in the Parliament in 2018 regarding a suggestion of implementing transnational lists, as well as a response made to this by the European Commission to which argumentation analysis is applied, as well as the theories of identity, transnationalism and Euroscepticism. While investigating the background of the suggestion policy analysis will also be used. This is done to establish an understanding of what issues the speakers are arguing about.

From the material the analysis and discussion show that the most used argument is regarding representation of the citizens and how this would be affected either positively or negatively by the transnational lists. There is discussion of whether or not there is a common European demos/identity which needs to be represented. In addition, the results show that the way in which the arguments are performed use illustrations more than facts to get the point of the arguments across. However, when it came to political and ideological affiliation it appeared that the material included in this thesis was too narrow to establish any tangible results of how the political groups of the EP are connected to the opinions of the speakers.

Keywords: transnationalism, transnational lists, European Parliament, argumentation analysis

List of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
EP	European Parliament
MEP	Member of Parliament
SEA	the Single European Act
EEC	the European Economic Community
EAEC	the European Atomic Energy Community
ECSC	the European Coal and Steel Community
EPP	European People's Party
ALDE	the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
Verts/ALE	the European Free Alliance Greens
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
S&D	the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
NI	Non-Inscrits

1. Introduction

At present there are many proposals made within the European Union (EU) for improving the democracy of the institution, though there are four main arguments made about enhancing the legitimacy of the EU: to merge the roles of the President of Council and Commission, to nominate lead candidates to the election for the role of EU President, to have transnational lists for the elections of the European Parliament (EP) and lastly to have an increase in the national parliaments role in the EU. This paper will focus on the ongoing debate of the transnational lists and the arguments made both for and against having the lists be a part of the Parliament elections.

The suggestion of transnational lists has been discussed for many years and is still the subject of debate today. It has come to be somewhat of a controversial topic, with a number of arguments for and against. However, instead of providing new arguments, it is also important to look into what has already been said to bring the debate forward. What are the main arguments for and against transnational lists and to what effect are they conveyed? The analysis of this essay will revolve around the debate regarding the report of 2018 by Danuta Maria Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira entitled *Report on the Composition of the European Parliament*, which includes a suggestion of adopting transnational lists into the parliamentary election, as well as a response to the report written by the European Commission.

Previous researchers have made progress in exploring how identity is dealt with in European spheres, e.g. Umut Özkırımlı dealt with the very concept of identity, while scholars like Matthias Koenig and Wolfgang Knöbl assembled researchers who all looked into identity and transnational identities in European media. Though, what these researchers have not done is consider the way in which the Members of Parliament (MEP) deal with identity and transnationalism. Academics such as Sofia Vasilopoulou have made investigations into the question of Euroscepticism within the EU which in some respects have common traits to the debate regarding transnationalism. This too, however, lacks in research done concerning the way transnationalism specifically has been argued about by the MEPs, which is what this essay intends to do. There have been papers written about the debates made in the EP e.g. that of José Plug (see 3.2.), however these papers do tend to focus mainly on the rhetoric of the speeches and less on the content. Thus, what this essay attempts to do is something different within a subject that is

commonly discussed. In addition, the subject of representation in the election and Europeanization are very current issues in the EU which this paper encourages discussing.

The theories used in this essay are tied to the debate in question, e.g. since the concept of transnationality has been argued to undermine the national identity, which in the case of the EU often is tied to Euroscepticism. Meaning that when discussing transnationality, the argument of it threatening the national identity has occurred frequently enough together with Euroscepticism for them to be relevant as theories to this paper. Additionally, in that 'Europeanization' and a European identity are the subject of several arguments in the debate of transnational lists, one must also be acquainted with how nationalism and identity are dealt with in European contexts.

The methods used are argumentation analysis and policy analysis. Argumentation analysis will help the focus to be kept on to what degree the speakers are strengthening or weakening their point by the arguments made, as well as help find the purpose of the arguments. Policy analysis in turn will provide the essay with the tools to grasp the process of policy making so that one may understand how current social and economic issues affect policy makers. This method, however, will be implemented earlier in the paper when presenting the aspects which have brought the solution of transnational lists to be presented.

To understand where the arguments are coming from and what they really are about, we must build a background of previous issues found in the parliamentary elections. This is done in this paper by presenting a historical background as well as facts about how the election system and democratic representation works in the EP, followed by the problematic aspects of the election which have motivated transnational lists as a solution. After this the actual analysis of the essay is performed with the knowledge needed to assess the impact and relevance of the arguments made in the debate. The background will be used in the analysis to draw connections between what the issues have previously been found to be in the EP, and if the arguments made do or do not respond to these issues or make arguments less relevant. Meaning that though there may be many legitimate arguments made in the speeches, they will be considered relevant if they touch upon the reasons transnational lists were suggested as a solution in the first place - which are presented prior to the analysis. In the discussion I will also look into if the ideology of the speakers may have any correlation to the arguments made regarding transnational lists.

1.1. Research Question

What arguments are there for and against introducing transnational lists in the EP election, and how are they presented?

2. Theory

2.1. Nationalism

The EU stemmed partly from a desire for cooperation across borders in Europe. This supranational entity has strived to work as a single decision-making organization and not an assembly of individual countries. However, an issue found amongst the citizens of the Member States in the EU has been how to deal with having the identity and citizenship of their own nation as well as the EU. How is nationalism and identity managed when you are a part of two entities?

2.1.1. Transnationalism

Having a national identity may, as explained, be founded in a sense of belonging based on symbols, culture, and practices. However, to have a sense of ‘us’ there must also be a ‘them’. Some have argued that the communities that we identify with are imagined as these symbols and practices, by creating and establishing an ‘us’ and ‘them’ (further reading Billig 1995).¹ In response to this territorial form of identity, transnationalism has been found as an important phenomenon which works outside the nationally based structure. Transnationalism is not only located in social anthropology but is used when discussing political non-governmental institutions to emphasize the fact that they are working outside the state. The concept of transnational culture works between borders and does not have territorial bounds, and since we find it in different fields of society, it can be deemed complex.²

Applying the theory of transnationalism to the EU is not something new, however it has often been limited to certain disciplines and methods. To explain how transnationalism may be

¹ Franco Zappettini, “The Construction of Transnational Identities in the Narratives of a European Civic Organisation”, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, (2016), 85.

² Zappettini, *The Construction of Transnational Identities*, 85-86.

used as a theory and applied EU one must ascertain the vastness of transnationalism. Vertovec is a professor of sociology and ethnology who defined transnationalism in the following way:

When referring to sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders, businesses, non-government-organizations, and individuals sharing the same interests (by way of criteria such as religious beliefs, common cultural and geographic origins); we can differentiate these as transnational practices and groups (referring to their links functioning across nation-states). The collective attributes of such connections, their processes of formation and maintenance, and their wider implications are referred to broadly as transnationalism³

Recognizing that transnationalism is an act performed by many individual and more than one culture to create connections beyond borders helps describe how broad transnationalism is and thus, that it can be applied to such a large number of people as the citizens of the EU.

Some view the concept of transnationalism as counteractive towards the national identity, as they claim that instead of having a national as well as a transnational identity, transnationalism dilutes the national culture when the borders are blurred.⁴ Referring back to the previous chapter, ethnosymbolism was discussed which in contrast to this belief suggests that if a national identity was constructed by the structure of ethnosymbolism, the phenomenon of transnationalism would not be able to disrupt the national identity. This tells us that there are multiple ways to consider transnationalism and how it affects cultural and national identity, and that though discussions and arguments have been made, there is no single theory that can summarize the experience of transnationalism.

Examples of researchers who have applied transnationalism to European identity and the EU are Thomas Risse and Ana Carrillo-López. While Risse deals with how the European integration has affected the identity of the citizens of Europe, Carrillo-López has done research on how transnationalism has evolved and affected the participation in the EP election. Carrillo-López uses mixed methods to complement statistics while also analyzing interviews.⁵ She deals with transnationality both in the contexts of sociology and political science, to both establish how European identity is perceived and how citizenship ties in with voting behavior. Risse's approach

³ S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

⁴ Zappettini, *The Construction of Transnational Identities*, 86.

⁵ Ana Carrillo-López, "European identity and voting in the European Parliament elections: the effect of transnationalism in post-crisis EU-15" (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2018).

to transnationalism analyzes empirical evidence of cases where transnationalism is found in public spheres.⁶ He identifies the opinions from different parts of Europe on the integration and how transnationalism and Euroscepticism has affected the European political climate.

2.1.2. Identity

Regarding identity there are three theories often used to explain the different perspectives of what makes up a national identity. Some view language or citizenship essential to a national identity, though this is not all that can be taken into consideration. The first of the three theories to regard is primordialism. This theory is used to explain that nationality is a part of human nature, and is generally viewed as “the layperson’s view of nations and nationalism.”⁷ The second is modernism which describes that societies are a modern construction, and though there are different approaches to this theory, they agree that identity needs modern socio-economic structures to exist.⁸ The third is ethnosymbolism which values tradition, symbols, collective memory and the cultural identity.⁹ The last mentioned illustrates how once an identity has been formed through ethnicity and culture, events such as migration, invasion and intermarriage (and perhaps European integration) cannot easily disrupt this identity. There are also theories stating that the different forms of identification have been constructed by society (social constructivism). Researchers such as Brubaker have been approaching this by stating that it is a fact that nationality, classification and social groups are constructed, and that one should focus on finding out the way they have been constructed instead.¹⁰

Another part to consider when discussing identity is citizenship. There are different approaches to what one considers to be their identity, one being related to citizenship. Now, the difference between identity and citizenship can be said to mostly lie in the legal aspect. That is to say: citizenship can be explained to have legal obligations and boundaries, whilst identity would be more related to emotion. This is the definition I will use when discussing citizenship and identity. Though, author Frank Cunningham discusses the discourse regarding citizenship with questions as: “whether citizenship is simply a matter of legal entitlements and responsibilities or

⁶ Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

⁷ Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Palgrave 2017), 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 81-152

⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

carries with it moral and civic commitments and identifications as well.”¹¹ and how to decide who is a citizen and who is not.

Authors Koenig and Knöbl assembled research with a modernist perspective from several scholars on European integration and national identity - which then is put in contrast to primordialism by the researchers. They discuss the fact that the integration has not always been welcomed with open arms but nonetheless they still manage to find “evidence for a thorough Europeanization of national identities”¹² by analyzing media and elite discourse. The researchers used an empirical approach but also what could be considered argumentation analysis and discourse analysis. When studying the national identities in Europe Koenig and Knöbl put emphasis on how religion plays a part in one's national identity and the European integration. However, one of their findings demonstrated that in many countries religion was not valued as essential as other factors. Instead language, citizenship and the nation's institution and laws were viewed more fundamental to the national identity.¹³

2.1.3. Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is, as the name suggests, skepticism towards Europe, often used to describe a skepticism specifically towards the EU. A common opinion with Eurosceptics is the fear of the European integration and a European identity diminishing the national identity, however, this theory is broad including several kinds of Eurosceptics which may be divided into three groups: the first group being those who reject or are against the concept of the institution that is the EU. The second group can be explained to accept the concept or principles of the institution but to not agree with the practice or execution it performs. The last group are those who are more ambiguous, expressing positive response towards the institution and practice but who are against any further European integration.¹⁴ This theory has also experienced an upsurge in use in academic papers due to the increase in European integration. Hence the integration gaining more attention has lead to

¹¹ Frank Cunningham, *Theories of Democracy: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 199.

¹² Matthias Koenig and Wolfgang Knöbl, *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5-6.

¹³ Matthias Koenig, Slawomir Mandes and Sabine Trittler “Religious Dimensions of National and European Identities” *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 137.

¹⁴ Sofia Vasilopoulou, “European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition” *Government and Opposition*, 46, no. 2 (2011), 224.

the opposition gaining more attention as well.¹⁵ There has also been a general interest in drawing connections between political groups and Eurosceptics within the EU in academic research, by assessing the agendas of the theory and comparing them to the agendas of the political families.

Euroscepticism has been explained with a theoretical point of view by scholars such as Paul Taggart who has written several papers on the notion during the last 20 years, though to find research that has used the theory in practice one could look to Sofia Vasilopoulou. Vasilopoulou is a researcher familiar with the subject of Euroscepticism and has done multiple examinations of the theory's occurrence in the EU and EP. In a few of her works she investigates Euroscepticism in the far right of the political spectrum and discusses the aspect of European integration - which, as explained, has been a commonly found subject of discussion. Examples of her works are *Varieties of Euroscepticism: The Case of the European Extreme Right*¹⁶ in which she uses Euroscepticism to examine the rejection of Europe and the EU in relation to political view as well as economic policies, and *The Paradox of Nationalism: The Common Denominator of Radical Right and Radical Left Euroscepticism*¹⁷ where the argument is that the way Euroscepticism's existence in both the radical right and radical left can be explained by the strong presence of nationalism in both ideologies.

3. Method and Material

3.1. Argumentation Analysis

When using argumentation analysis, you first and foremost concentrate on the meaning of the text in question. Even though rhetoric also shares a significant part of argumentation analysis, the first thing that is done is not to analyze how something is said (the text), but what is said (the context). After it has been established what the text is arguing for or against, the analysis can shift focus to the way in which the arguments have been presented. There are different purposes of using argumentation analysis, the first one being the descriptive purpose. This means that the attention

¹⁵ Paul Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems" *European Journal of Political Research*, 33, no. 3 (1998), 363.

¹⁶ Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: The Case of the European Extreme Right" *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 5, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁷ Sofia Vasilopoulou, "The Paradox of Nationalism: The Common Denominator of Radical Right and Radical Left Euroscepticism" *European Journal of Political research*, 51, no. 4 (2012).

lies in reconstructing the argument within the existing contexts in which the argumentation appears. The second purpose is to judge to what degree the argumentation lives up to certain norms (some examples being: sticking to the subject or being as crystal clear as possible to avoid confusion). The third purpose of argumentation analysis is seeking to determine how probative the text is. Meaning, by using this analysis one ascertains to what degree the arguments made actually strengthens or weakens an argument or opinion.¹⁸ The main focus of this essay will lie in the last mentioned purpose, however, the other two will also be used to fully analyze the chosen speeches.

When applying argumentation analysis on the debate of MEPs done in the EP, one quickly realizes that the speeches are on the shorter side. Additionally, the speeches that the parliamentarians make are generally speaking heavy on the side of pathos (the emotional aspect), which means that though my intention is to center the analysis on the logos (the reasoning and logic of the arguments as well as the relevance and tenability) the pathos takes up such a significant part of the speeches that it must still be considered. As explained above, argumentation analysis primarily concentrates on what is said which then is pursued by how it is said. Thus, including the pathos aspect and letting it take up an equal part of the analysis to the logos will adjust the method to the material while still working within the common use of the method.

José Plug is a researcher of argumentation theory and rhetoric who has previously looked into debates made in the EP arguing that the rhetoric of the MEPs in their speeches - and specifically the examples that they use - affect how proposals and legislations are illustrated as well as justified.¹⁹ She explains that it is important to examine if the uses of examples and exemplary cases in the speeches have an underlying argumentative function. Plug argues that the MEPs are aware of the hardship in trying to ascertain if an example they have used is argumentative or not and uses this to their advantage in their statements. The way Plug deals with the argumentation in the EP has similarities to the way arguments will be dealt with in this paper, in that both consider the rhetoric used by the parliamentarians as well as the underlying message of their statements. Having his arguments in mind of the way in which the MEPs use examples in their speeches will give me the background needed to understand the arguments they make so that they may be understood and analyzed more easily.

¹⁸ Göran Bergström, Kristina Boréus, *Textens Mening och Makt: Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig Text- och Diskursanalys*, (Spain: Graficas Cems S.L., 2012), 91–93.

¹⁹ José H. Plug, “The strategic use of argumentation from example in plenary debates in the European Parliament” *Controversia* 7, no. 1 (2010).

3.2. Policy Analysis

Policy analysis was created to help comprehend the process of policymaking and to supply knowledge and information about current social and economic issues to policy makers. It has been defined as “an applied social science discipline which uses multiple methods of inquiry and arguments to produce and transform policy-relevant information that may be utilized in political settings to resolve policy problems.”²⁰ When using policy analysis it is important to remember the question ‘what is the problem represented to be?’ and to be able to use this question one must be able to identify e.g. the source of power and the discourse and resistance that comes with it, however, these approaches are conceptual. Therefore, the meaning of “power” or “discourse” may vary depending on the theoretical approach used in an analysis.²¹ While using policy analysis it is also important to be able to identify what assumptions have been made about the problem, what effects have been produced by the problem, how has it been defended and can it be disrupted or replaced?²²

Within policy analysis we may limit the area of research to public and cultural policy when analyzing an institution such as the EP. This means that when using policy analysis in this essay main focus will be put on policies that affect e.g. citizenship and cultural groups of people affected by policymaking. Policy analysis in itself may be very wide and applied to several areas of study, therefore I find it important to specify the area of policy that will be analyzed, which in this case is transnational lists. In addition, the above mentioned fact that this method is used to identify effects that have been caused by the issue at hand, as well as how it has been defended will be discussed in chapter 5., which is where the main use of policy analysis will be found. Limiting the aspects of policy analysis is important when applying it to the EP and the controversy which have influenced transnational lists, since the material of the topic together with the issues will form a specific area of study which out of necessity will need specific aspects of the method. By making

²⁰ W. N. Dunn, *Public Policy Analysis*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 35.

²¹ Carol Bacchi, Susan Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: a Guide to Practice*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 27-28.

²² Bacchi, *Poststructural Policy Analysis*, 20.

sure that the particular parts of policy analysis that are relevant are used, the analysis itself keeps a certain level of relevance and focus.

The way policy analysis has been used by researchers can e.g. be found with Justin Greenwood and Christilla Roederer-Rynning who have been researching the opinions on the EP which have challenged the legitimacy of the institution itself as well as interest in the EP.²³ What they do is instead of concentrating on the legislative power, focus on the social arguments and issues that have been voiced about the EP. Just like the intention of policy analysis this helps further the understanding of the climate which may have an effect on the policy makers and the way of policy making. As already explained it is important to keep in mind what the issue has been presented to be, which Greenwood and Roederer-Rynning does by having that part of policy analysis as their focal point.

3.3. Material and Delimitations

*Report on the Composition of the European Parliament*²⁴ by Danuta Maria Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira was presented to the Parliament and debated in February of 2018. The report includes suggestions about how to improve the composition of the EP, partly due to the British exit from the EU and includes the suggestion of introducing transnational lists in the election of Parliament which will be the focal point of this paper. I will also include a response from the European Commission on the report and decision made by the Parliament, since it too includes official comments made on the report in question. In this response I will concentrate on the statements made about the concept of transnational lists and the Commission's suggestions and opinions on the subject. The reason for choosing this report was to make this paper as relevant as possible by including the latest suggestion of transnational lists, in addition, I wanted the paper to only use official statements. Therefore, the parliamentarians themselves and the official statement of the Commission are the subject of this analysis.

The report in question includes suggestions other than that of reserving seats for transnational lists, which are: how to distribute some of the seats fairly between the existing

²³ Justin Greenwood, Christilla Roederer-Rynning "Power at the expense of diffuse interests? The European Parliament as a legitimacy-seeking institution" *European Politics & Society* 21, vol. 1 (2020).

²⁴ European Parliament. *Report of the composition of the European Parliament*. Committee on Constitutional Affairs. 2017. Accessed May 2, 2020. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0007_EN.pdf

Member States and to preserve a number of seats for any future expansion of the EU. Thus, the available result of the voting is on the report as a unit and on the Parliament as a unit, therefore, there is no table available of how each party voted or the single suggestion of transnational lists to be analyzed and discussed.

Unfortunately, the debate I will focus on in my analysis has not been translated to English, as this is not something that is done to debates in the EP anymore. Therefore, I have limited myself and my analysis to the statements and arguments that were made in English. This means that there are several speeches and statements that will not be included in this paper, due to there not being an official translation made. It is stated that the translators' interpretations in the video clips available of the debate should not be used to quote the speakers as they do not represent the speakers and the interpretations are only meant for the other MEPs to understand what was currently being said when the debate occurred. I have also made the decision to not include the speeches made in the debate that speak about the aspects of the report not regarding transnational lists, as well as those who agree with the concept of transnational lists but not with e.g. the timing. Meaning that the arguments I will include are only those which bring arguments for and against transnational lists to the debate. Thus, the number of speeches which will be included are nine, the ones disregarded because of not being about my topic etc., though spoken in English, being eight, and the ones not included due to the language barrier being 52 (including blue card questions and responses). Therefore, it is critical to have in mind that the speeches included in this analysis may not be considered representative of the entire debate or the parliament as a whole. E.g. the fact that more speeches against transnational lists than for transnational lists are analyzed may not be representative of the proportion of speeches that were against and for in the full debate.

The speakers who are included are as follows: Danuta Maria Hübner who was the co-rapporteur of the report and part of the EPP group; Guy Verhofstadt of the ALDE group who was the former Prime Minister of Belgium; Josep-Maria Terricabras, a Catalan professor and philosopher of the Verts/ALE group; György Schöpflin of the EPP group, who was a Hungarian professor of politics; Paulo Rangel who is a jurist and currently the vice-president of the EPP group; Diane James who is NI in the EP and part of the Brexit Party in the UK; Bill Etheridge of the EFDD group who is part of the UK Brexit Party; Alfred Sant who is the former Prime Minister of Malta and part of the S&D group; Max Andersson who is a Swedish politician of the Verts/ALE group.

4. Background

4.1. Historical Background

When it comes to the history leading up to the EU, there are some events that are crucial to consider to understand how the election of EP functions today. Though the EU was established in 1993, the thoughts of having an institutionalized cooperation between the countries of Europe had already been a topic of discussion for decades, thus, the idea of a federal European union was not radical in 1993, but a product of something that had been in the works for a while. The effort to create a cooperation back in the 1940's was particularly supported by 'the Six' - Belgium, France, Germany (West), Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.²⁵ Mostly western European countries were involved in the idea of a union, though with conflict of how far the integration was to go, and even within this faction they were split into the 'inner six' and 'outer seven'. The establishment of the EU in the 1990's changed this, with the help of SEA (1986).²⁶

Though the tension existed in previous attempts at creating a union, the EU's basic institution has its foundation in the architecture introduced in the Treaties of Rome (1957). At this point 'the Six' wanted to establish the EEC and the EAEC, which were to contain a few institutions: a Commission, an Assembly, a Court of Justice, and a Council which is what we can see as a foundation in the EU today. The Assembly almost immediately started to refer to itself as the European Parliament.²⁷ With the Treaty of Rome, the Assembly (which had already been established in 1952 within the ECSC) gained more influence as they now had the right to be consulted on Commission proposals that afterwards would be adopted by the Council. However, the members of the Assembly at this time worked only part-time as they also served as national parliamentarians. This in turn limited the chamber of fulfilling its legislative mission and led to the legitimacy of the Assembly to be lightly dismissed.²⁸

²⁵ David Phinnemore, "The European Union: Establishment and Development" in *European Union Politics*, ed. Michelle Cini, Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borrágán (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-14.

²⁸ Charlotte Burns, "The European Parliament" in *European Union Politics*, ed. Michelle Cini, Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borrágán (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 156.

As the Communities was created, it still mostly surrounded ‘the Six’ and later some of the ‘outer seven’. They were still, however, all western European, and countries such as Greece and Turkey were not considered as they had not yet the level economic development to compete in the common market. It was not until the early 70’ that ‘the Six’ became nine, with the additions of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. A few years later it was established that there were to be direct elections to the EP and the applications of Greece, Spain and Portugal became active. Though the MEPs were now directly elected and earnest about integration, the general interest in some Member States was not great.²⁹

The Assembly grew in influence since the first direct election to the (now called) European Parliament were held in 1979 and has used its title as the only directly elected EU institution to press for more power. Today it is considered to be on the same level of authority, when it comes to legislation and budget, as the Council. The EP also has the ability to scrutinize the Commission and hold them to account.³⁰

4.2. European Parliament Election Structure

The elections to the EP have been held every five years since 1979. The idea of the Parliament is that it should be first and foremost about politics, not nationality which is why the elections work a bit differently than to the national elections of the Member States. For example: if an EU citizen is resident in another EU state than their own, they have the right to vote in the local and European elections, but not the national. An EU citizen may also stand to be elected in any EU state, even if they are not national (that is to say, a German citizen can also be elected as a MEP in e.g. Denmark).³¹

Democracy is often a term applied to governing political institutions within national states, however, it is not limited to this definition. Democracy may concern any regime which includes collective decision making, which is why democracy as a term also can be applied to the EU and the EP.³² The issue in the democracy of the EP has often been in regards to representation of the

²⁹ Phinnemore, *European Union Politics*, 15-19.

³⁰ Burns, *European Union Politics*, 156.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

³² Stijn Smismans “Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union” in *European Union Politics*, ed. Michelle Cini, Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borragán (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 339-340.

citizens of the Member States, that is to say that the EP suffers from a democratic deficit as the citizens do not feel represented in the parliament.

The representation in the elections have since 1999 been founded on proportional representation. However, how many people each MEP represents may still vary from country to country depending on how the election is organized. For example, in the UK the elections are held regionally and so the MEPs each represent the (on average) 5 million citizens of each region, whilst in Italy where the vote is national each MEP represents ~57 million citizens.³³

The current rules used regarding the election of MEPs are that of the Electoral Act of 1976 (amended in 2002 and 2018), though the process of the election is not necessarily uniform in the Member States. The electoral rules do encompass principles and perimeters; however, they leave the Member States with room for national legislation, which in turn makes the process less equitable. Aspects in which the election varies between the Member States are, for instance: the minimum age for voting, the practical methods (voting by post, embassy or via e-voting), and even if the election is obligatory or not. Another important aspect that is nationally enacted is that of disenfranchisement - that is, a citizen being deprived of their right to vote after living a lengthy period outside their state. The effect of this lack in a uniform process has created an inconsistency and has even created a divergence of treatment of citizens within the EU, depending on the Member State.³⁴

5. Aspects Influencing a Transnational Solution

This chapter presents issues and problematic aspects of the EU and EP which have been part of regular discussion in which a transnational solution has been suggested. Thus, this chapter helps to identify in what ways social and economic issues have shaped policy makers and the question of transnationality within the EU, which are relevant to the debate analyzed.

³³ Burns, *European Union Politics*, 164.

³⁴ European Parliament “European Union electoral law: Current situation and historical background”, accessed April 30, 2020. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642250/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)642250_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642250/EPRS_BRI(2019)642250_EN.pdf)

5.1. Election and Campaign Structure

The division of groups in the EP are shaped by political views, the political groups are thus cross-national, as their focus is first and foremost on ideology, not nationality. There are currently seven political groupings in the EP, and some MEPs not being affiliated with any group. Burns suggests that the EP almost always votes politically instead of nationally, and that there is only limited evidence that shows MEPs ‘going native’.³⁵ Essentially what Burns is stating is that though the elections are nationally organized with national parties in mind, there is little to no issue found within the EP regarding MEPs being biased due to their nationality today.

Though a MEP should not act on behalf of their state but of their ideology, the fact that the elections are limited to nationality could yet become problematic. As explained, it is possible for MEPs to be elected in another nation than their own, however most of the MEPs promoted in the elections are linked to the national political parties. As quoted by Burns: “election campaigns are organized and financed by domestic political parties rather than by the European political groups. Thus, candidates do not seek re-election as a member of the S&D or EPP, but as a French Socialist or as a German Christian Democrat.”³⁶ And while, as Burns explained, MEPs do not act on behalf of their nationality but their ideology, this campaign structure allows for the focal point to lie in nationality during the election period.

Though the EP has seen an increase in influence in the EU, the election is not entirely uniform in its process throughout the Member States. While the essential principles of the election are those of the 1976 Electoral Act, many aspects are adjusted to the national laws in the respective states. Since there is a lack of uniformity in the election, there is a difference in how the European election is treated by EU citizens depending on the nation. This has affected the EU in that there is less of a European identity and more of national identities working together. Therefore, several reforms and suggestions of reforms have been made regarding how to make the election more unified.³⁷ The idea of a transnational list for a pan-European constituency was first introduced in the Anastassopoulos report in 1998, as a solution to this very issue. The lack of a ‘European

³⁵ Burns, *European Union Politics*, 161-163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁷ “European Union electoral law: Current situation and historical background”, 1.

dimension' motivated proposals to be introduced to enhance the 'Europeanization' of the electoral process.³⁸

However, the specific subject of transnationalism has been under a continuing deliberation and has become a controversial subject of debate. On one hand, reforming the elections with a transnational state of mind is seen as the next step in the direction of 'true Europeanisation', but on the other hand it is argued to worsen the relationship between the citizens and their elected representatives. Attempts to include transnational lists have been made in both amendments of the Electoral Act (2002; 2018) but was not adopted in either case.³⁹

The concept of transnational lists was introduced again as a response to this structural issue in 2011/2012 in reports made by Andrew Duff,⁴⁰ with the intention to introduce a pan-European constituency which would have 25 seats reserved in the Parliament. This was also created due to the issue where citizens did not feel represented by the Parliament and though several parties did advocate this solution of 2011/2012 it was not adopted.

5.2. Turnout

The number of citizens participating in the EP election has repeatedly been a subject of discussion. The turnout has generally undergone a decrease since the first election in 1979, though, during the recent election of 2019 there was an increase overall. One might point out that the election of 2014 also was subject to an increase of participation in some of the Member States, however, the total percentage of turnout was 0.36 percentage points lower than the previous election in 2009.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the election has experienced the first case of an increase in participation since 1979 and though this might spark optimism for the EP, the turnout is still generally speaking low and yet an issue being discussing.

One might argue that one of the reasons the Parliamentary elections have faced such a small number of turnout is the representation of MEP to citizen. The amount of people each MEP

³⁸ Ibid., 11.

³⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁰ European Parliament, *Motion for a European Parliament Solution*, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, 2012, Accessed May 3, 2020. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2012-0027+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

⁴¹ European Parliament. "Turnout: 2019 European Election Results: European Parliament." Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/>

represents varies depending on the country - as already mentioned - as the elections are structured differently in the Member States. When considering the MEPs who represent a large number of citizens Burns comments that the people may feel less connected to their chosen representative.⁴² Meaning that when partaking in a nationwide type of election instead of a regional the voters may feel more disconnected to the chosen MEP, which in turn could be a reason for why the turnout is low.

Another issue with the participation is that the EP election has been considered as essential as the national elections in the Member States. Scholars have tried to respond to the issue of a lack in participation by trying to assemble evidence of an emerging European identity, though with mixed results. In fact, the dedication to a European integration is rarely found in the population of the Member States, other than amongst professionals working within transnationality.⁴³

5.3. Brexit

Brexit has been a cause of discussion regarding transnational lists. In preparation of the United Kingdom leaving the EU there was debate about how to handle the 73 vacant seats that the UK possessed in the EP. There were deliberations if the seats should be lost or distributed between the Member States or a combination of the two.

A proposition made was that while some seat should be distributed to the Member States, a number of the vacant seats should be reserved for a transnational list. The EP did reduce the number of MEPs after the United Kingdom's leave with the motivation that this would leave room for any potential enlargements in the future or potentially "members elected on transnational lists in a joint constituency".⁴⁴ Having a joined constituency was suggested in the same report: Report on the Composition of the European Parliament,⁴⁵ though this aspect ended up not being voted through. The response and arguments made around this particular report is what will be analyzed below.

⁴² Burns, *European Union Politics*, 164-165.

⁴³ Koenig and Knöbl, *Religion and National Identities*, 5.

⁴⁴ European Parliament. *Report of the composition of the European Parliament*. para. 8.

⁴⁵ Valentin Kreiling, "A More Democratic European Union: Propositions and Scope for Political Action" No. 212. Policy Paper. Jacques Delors Institut: Berlin. 2018.

6. Results and Analysis of Debate Regarding Transnational Lists

When the report in question was voted through in 2018, the suggestion of decreasing the number of seats from 751 to 705 and to distribute 27 seats to some Member States was voted though and the suggestion of reserving seats for transnational lists was however, not adopted. As far as political parties go the support that the European Council received in 2018 - regarding transnational lists establishing a space for public political debate - was supported by France and southern European states. The EPP and the Visegrad Group however, were against this idea as they considered the notion of transnational lists to be an ‘elitist’ act.⁴⁶ In very loose and broad terms, this indicates that around 2018 the general parties in support of transnational lists were left-winged while those against it were right-winged. However, this concept is still a controversial subject of discussion and the differences in opinion does not only lie between political parties but may also lie within a single political group.

6.1. Arguments For Transnational Lists

6.1.1. Common Arguments and Traits

The most commonly found argument in the debate of transnational lists is that of the representation of the citizens. In the speeches by Danuta Maria Hübner and Guy Verhofstadt this argument is brought up with the claim that transnational lists will improve the representation of citizens of the EU. Hübner begins by stating that the proposed composition in the report does respect proportional representation, and that in addition the proposition provides a balanced representation which ensures a fair distribution of seats. This argument is continued with the assurance that the suggestion of transnational lists provides the ability to address the under-representation currently found in some of the Member States. Verhofstadt concurs by also arguing that transnational lists will improve the of representation of citizens and does so by explaining that having two votes - one for national candidates and one for transnational - will keep the bond between citizen and national MEP and EU strong. In other words, he expresses that the transnational lists will not only increase representation but will also maintain the link between citizens and the EU while not diminishing the national identity.

⁴⁶ “European Union electoral law: Current situation and historical background”, 11

If transnational lists were to improve the representation of citizens or not is not an easy question to answer, since the suggestion was not voted through and therefore there is no data of the system in practice. However, the speakers show a confidence that transnational lists would, indeed, better the situation as well as solve the issue of under-representation. As presented, there has been research done by Risse⁴⁷ and Carrillo-Lopez,⁴⁸ which found that national and transnational identities may work together within Europe, which supports Verhofstadt's statement that transnational lists would not disrupt the balance between the two, or lessen the national identity, which is a concern found with Eurosceptics.

The entire argument of representation is relevant to bring up in this debate. Not only is it part of the report itself and the suggestion of transnational lists, but it is an issue which has been found within the EP and its election system. By bringing up issues relevant to the subject, the speakers display awareness of the topic being discussed. In this case Hübner and Verhofstadt argue for transnational lists, but even if a speaker was to argue the opposite, the act of responding how the subject affects the relevant issues demonstrates that the speaker is informed, which in turn gives the speaker credibility.

6.1.2. Danuta Maria Hübner

The debate begins with the co-writer of the report Danuta Maria Hübner (EPP) giving a speech. She starts by commenting on the current situation by stating that the MEPs Parliament are already direct representatives of the citizens and that the motivation for the report was to make sure that the distribution of the seats left after Brexit would be fair. With the proposition the rapporteurs do not only wish to reserve seats for transnational lists but also to leave some open for any future enlargement of the Union. Continuing with an economic aspect Hübner states that reducing the seats by placing them on hold for an eventual future expansion would lead to resources being saved to be used for 'other purposes' which in turn, she claims, would send good signals to the citizens. She ends her speech with the fact that the report in question received 80% support within the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, and states that she hopes to see this large of a majority in the

⁴⁷ Risse, *A Community of Europeans*.

⁴⁸ Carrillo-Lopez, *European Identity and Voting in the European Parliament Elections*.

vote happening that day, as well. Again, Hübner states that this is to ensure fairness in representation of the citizens.⁴⁹

Hübner provides a number of arguments, as well as the purpose of the report. At several times in her speech she mentions the distribution being ‘fair’ which indicates that this is something that either is the core of the suggestion, or that it is a matter which needs convincing. In her arguments she does not only speak about representation but brings up the notion of economic advantages, however the statement that saved resources would be used for ‘other purposes’ is vague. The point may be that the money saved can be used for a variety of projects, but the way it is used signals an uncertainty or obscurity. Even if the economic aspect is not an issue to be ignored, it is not a core argument of her speech, therefore, even if the argument is not very convincing it does not debase the speech very much. The support from the Committee on Constitutional Affairs is used to show that this suggestion of transnational lists is a matter which is wanted and not taken out of this air. The selection of a credible committee is used to convince the other MEPs that since this want is found in a trustworthy institution, the topic itself is also trustworthy. Whether or not this was deliberate, the statement itself and placing it at the end serves strategic purposes, as the speech ends with a credible notion. However, it is not the Committee which will be represented by transnational lists, therefore a study of interest with the citizens would be more useful.

6.1.3. Guy Verhofstadt

A speech in favor of this report was made by Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE). He begins by presenting the opinions of Wilfried Martens (former Prime Minister of Belgium) whom he calls a “very dedicated European”⁵⁰ and a supporter of transnational lists. Verhofstadt comments that Martens knew the stakes of the situation and that to make sure Eurosceptics and populists would not end up on top, a strong connection between the citizens and Europe has to be maintained. According to him there has not been made serious arguments against it, and in fact federal states are in favor of the concept and puts the separatists as the people against it. Furthermore he argues that the way

⁴⁹ European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*. 2018. 38. Accessed April 20, 2020. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2018-02-07_SV.pdf

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

to “beat the populists”⁵¹ who would benefit from transnational lists, is by establishing the transnational lists and supports this by stating that: if democracy was good for populists you would not get rid of democracy. Finally, Verhofstadt responds to the argument that transnational lists would only be beneficial to large Member States, with that all countries should be included on the transnational lists and that amendments would ensure accurate representation. He finishes with the statement: “Altiero Spinello, the father of this European Parliament, would turn in his grave if we missed this unique opportunity.”⁵²

Verhofstadt does not lack in length in his speech and neither in his number of arguments. He begins by citing another person, therefore presenting his own opinions in the voice of someone else, who perhaps possesses credibility in the Parliament. Doing this, like Hübner’s use of presenting support, directs the attention to the fact that transnational lists are something wanted and useful for the EU. He brings his point forward by answering arguments against the suggestion, which creates a sense that he is aware of critique made on the subject. He does bring up aspects in which transnational lists would be advantageous other than representation, e.g. the Spitzenkandidaten process. This combined gives the audience the impression that he is familiar with several sides to the debate and is able to respond to them. However, since this is a speech, not an open discussion, the arguments against and the advantages he presents are most likely carefully selected. Verhofstadt also points out who belongs to the opposing side by mentioning Eurosceptics and populists. Though this might not be the intention, this act compiles the competing side which does not only imply that all Eurosceptics and populists are against this matter, but it implies that you are like them if you share their opinion on the subject. Meaning that to prove that one is not a Eurosceptic or populist, one should not be against transnational lists. Verhofstadt finishes like he began by voicing the opinion for transnational lists through a known person to the Parliament, to the same effect.

6.1.4. Josep-Maria Terricabras

The next speaker arguing for transnational lists was Josep-Maria Terricabras (Verts/ALE), who puts emphasis on how this concept will be a step further towards a single European constituency.

⁵¹ Ibid., 42.

⁵² Ibid., 42.

He voices how having the opportunity to vote for MEPs from different states will promote a feeling of belonging and general interest for Europe with the citizens. Terricabras states that the transnational lists could create solidarity and redistribution of wealth as well as increase the European public sphere. He continues by expressing how this will give the opportunity for a more democratic system with a bottom-up mindset. He finishes by putting emphasis on the opportunity they had that day to put into use a beneficial proposal.⁵³

Terricabras' speech was shorter and more to the point, nonetheless it included several aspects. Instead of representation he puts emphasis on the European sphere, and European interest and the sense of belonging with the citizens. Thus, it shows the audience that he values the European identity and argues that this suggestion will strengthen this identity, which is a relevant part of the transnational identity debate as already explained. Terricabras puts the focus on the citizens' perspective by also mentioning transnational lists would promote a 'bottom-up' way of thinking, as well as a redistribution of wealth - however, neither of these arguments are elaborated. By using the example of Åland, he provides the audience with instances - which is implied as successful - that the EP should pursue.

6.1.5. The European Commission

The European Commission made a response to the Parliament five days later on several matters, one being the report of transnational lists and how the Parliament voted. The Commission expressed that a transnational constituency would indeed reinforce a European dimension since the candidates would have the opportunity to reach citizens across the Member States. The Commission continues by stating that - though it has been debated - transnational lists would create more space for European public debates and discussions as well as more visibility for the European political parties. They also put emphasis on how, if transnational lists were to be implemented, it would be of importance to ensure that the MEPs should be able to communicate as much and as close as possible with the voters so that they were to be represented properly but also for reasons of accountability.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁴ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council*. 2018. 6-7. Accessed May 1, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-institutional-options-for-making-the-european-union-work-more-efficient_en.pdf

This is different to the speeches made in the debate on the 7th of February, since this was a response written a few days after the voting had been concluded. As it is not in the form of an argumentative speech, more focus will be put on the meaning of the arguments rather than the way they are stated. The European Commission has a different credibility to the MEPs who debated the report, since they were speaking as individuals while the Commission replied as a group of people. Meaning that the response is the result of several voices and opinions coming to an agreement and working together, which makes the statements perceived as though this is the judgement and want of many. The Commission begins by expressing the extent of changes that have to be made to ensure that transnational lists could be implemented. This is followed by conveying that this suggestion would give the opportunity for more public European debates to be created, which in turn implies that this would create the space for a larger interest for Europe with the public.

6.2. Arguments Against Transnational Lists

6.2.1. Common Arguments and Traits

The speakers arguing against transnational lists have also had the argument of representation in common. The first speaker is György Schöpflin who states that the suggestion of transnational lists assumes that there is a European demos which requires to be represented through this method. He continues by explaining that there being “European demos just waiting to be represented”⁵⁵ is a misconception, and “to claim the contrary is an illusion”.⁵⁶ Sharing this opinion is Bill Etheridge who describes the same situation of there not being a European demos, and in addition explains that there already is a difficulty with representation in some Member States which will not be fixed with transnational lists, as people from other states are unable to represent the citizens any better than those from their own state. Alfred Sant agrees with the last part of that statement as he too argues that people from different Member States are not able to represent the interest of people further away from themselves, in particular those in smaller Member States. This implies that transnational lists are more beneficial to those in large Member States. Another argument about representation comes from Max Andersson who describes that transnational lists will alienate the

⁵⁵ European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*, 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

citizens since they will no longer be accurately represented by a party with their needs and preferences in mind.

What these arguments convey is that the interests of the citizens can be linked to their national community and therefore a person with an outside perspective will be less able to represent these interests in the same manner a more local parliamentarian could. This notion may be true in the instances where e.g. questions and legislations affect larger Member States and smaller Member States differently and a MEP living in a larger Member State has difficulty understanding the perspective of the citizens living in the smaller Member State they hypothetically are representing. However, it would be questionable to state that this would be the case for every MEP. The speakers show confidence that there is no European demos which is in need of representation, and that the transnational lists would not inspire any European demos to be created. Therefore, not only would this suggestion fail to improve the issue of democratic deficit, but it strives to represent something non-existent.

The speakers show an awareness of relevant issues by not only discussing representation, but several issues within representation in the EP. The entire dispute of democratic deficit and representation is, as explained in section 5.1., one of the factors which inspired the solution of transnational lists. The arguments for transnational lists e.g. by Hübner and Verhofstadt came to the conclusion that there is a common identity which needs representation, but by opposing this, the speakers against transnational lists demonstrates the fact that there is still an ongoing debate of identity and whether or not there is a transnational identity within the EU. Meaning that having a debate illustrates that as of now, there is no definite answer about a European demos existing. Therefore, stating that ‘there is no European demos’ as Schöpflin does, is not something which can be verified.

6.2.2. György Schöpflin

The first speech made against transnational lists was spoken by György Schöpflin (EPP). He begins by confessing that he has not made it a secret that he considers transnational lists a bad idea. He states the several reasons for it being so starting with representation which he follows by the statement that there have been no citizens expressing that they wish to be represented by a transnational list, and that the concept of transnational lists is a top-down, elitist system. He argues that the notion of transnational lists creating a European consciousness is an assumption at best

and a fatal one at that. He states that the MEPs elected by transnational lists will create a larger distance between elected and citizen, since they will be more remote from the people, which in turn will be harmful to the reputation of the Parliament. Schöpflin finishes by explaining that in addition to this, the concept will be undemocratic since the MEPs will have nobody to answer to or be held accountable to and therefore will have “power without responsibility”.⁵⁷

Though Schöpflin states that he has several reasons for being against transnational lists his speech includes two arguments, the first being the - already discussed - representation, and the second being the accountability of the MEPs elected with this system. His argument is that since they will not represent anyone because there is no European demos they will have the power of a parliamentarian but without the responsibility of one. His arguments are focused on the core of the report and not just in the details, he questions the very reason for why it is needed, but also comments on the execution of the systems. By explaining that the very foundation of the suggestion is flawed, the process itself will be unable to function in a proper way. Structuring his speech from the foundation leading to the details is a very efficient way of getting several points across without losing the focus or the red thread of the speech. His arguments are also tied to the same theme of representation and the consequence for the citizens, which makes it easy to pinpoint the core of his speech and his values.

6.2.3. Paulo Rangel

Paulo Rangel (EPP) also argued against transnational lists. He opens his speech by first condoning the distribution of seats stated in the report followed by voicing his concern of the transnational lists. He explains that the democracy existing in the EU is trustworthy with a balance of majorities and states. He continues to argue that transnational lists are a “constitutional Frankenstein monster”⁵⁸ which does not exist in a single federal state, and points to the fact that since Verhofstadt could not name an example, this is true - though Belgium comes close. Rangel, like Schöpflin, argues that the system uses top-down elites which actually would divide the EU’s public sphere, contrary to what was said by the speakers for transnational lists.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 45.

The core of Rangel's speech is similar to Schölpflin's in that he questions the need for transnational lists in the EP, however the speech itself is heavier on the pathos and rhetorical side. Stating that the EU is trustworthy with a balanced representation as it is today, implies that this is something which would be disrupted or changed if transnational lists were to be implemented. He uses several questions in his speech to move his argumentation forward with phrases such as 'do we really need ...' and 'why should we...'. By posing these questions in a way which puts the flaws of the suggestion in focus, Rangel manages to shift the attention from questioning why this system should be implemented to why these flaws should be implemented. Rangel also replies directly to Verhofstadt who spoke before, questioning the fact that this is a system which exists or is wanted in federal states. Being aware of the arguments on the side opposite to one's own illustrates that the speaker is prepared with answers, which in turn indicates an understanding of the subject.

6.2.4. Diane James

Another speech against transnational lists was spoken by Diane James (NI) who begins by comparing the proposal in question to George Orwell's 1984. She continues by stating that the proposal works against the transparency of the EU by having "unelected, unselected MEPs occupying those transnational seats."⁵⁹ James also explains that with this suggestion of the transnational lists comes the eradication of national sovereignty. She argues that the proposal in question is anti-democratic and will get to its objective through transnational seats. She ends her speech by expressing that since the EU openly critiques itself and tries to look for the reasons of why there is a democratic deficit, which, she states, can be found by reading this report.

Though this speech by James is on the shorter side, it includes several arguments and techniques. Her main claim is that the national identity will be lost in the case that transnational lists would be used in future elections and that the suggestion itself is un-democratic because of the lack of transparency it will cause. Though sourced facts are not commonplace in the speeches included in this analysis, James' speech is lacking in the explanation of her statements. She states that the MEPs of the transnational lists would be unelected, which can be interpreted to mean as Max Andersson argued that the candidates for the seats will be selected by European parties which

⁵⁹ Ibid., 48.

would be un-democratic. However, the statement she makes is on the vaguer side, meaning that this interpretation may not be accurate to what her intended message was, which in turn makes her speech unclear. She does keep her speech relevant by bringing up the discussion of national identity being lost in the transnational system, which as discussed has been an ongoing controversy argued by Eurosceptics.

6.2.5. Bill Etheridge

Bill Etheridge (EFDD) argues that the seats left by the UK should be left empty, disagreeing with the distribution of the seats to other Member States. He goes on by explaining that transnational lists are a bad idea because of how it would take the entire aspect of democracy further away from the citizens. Etheridge again states that in his opinion the seats should be left empty “as a monument to the absolute betrayal of democracy and of the British people that is taking place.”⁶⁰ Altogether his speech did not hold many arguments against the transnational lists, as he instead continues to critique the democracy of the EU and the debate structure in the Parliament as well as argues that UK citizens should not have to pay tax to the EU without representation.

The message delivered by Etheridge in his speech is that how un-democratic the EU and EP are and why he is for the British exit, rather than the report at hand and the concept of transnational lists. He does argue that transnational lists are not democratic, and that they will not improve representation, partaking in the common arguments found in this debate. In his arguments he puts the focus on the people’s perspective by several times expressing how this suggestion brings democracy further from the citizens. However, other than this his arguments are focused on Brexit and his disagreement with some aspects of the process. The fact that the main part of Etheridge’s speech is not about the subject at hand (the report) but instead about an event which this suggestion has no influence over, as well as the structure of debates in the Parliament, signals a lack of focus on the current topic. As have been explained, Brexit was one of the aspects which brought the suggestion of transnational lists to be formed, thus mentioning it gives the speech a certain level of relevance. However, the way in which Etheridge speaks about it indicates that he does not argue about how the seats should be dealt with in regard to transnational lists, but rather just states his displeasure about the democracy in the EP in general.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

6.2.6. Alfred Sant

The next arguments against transnational lists were spoken by Alfred Sant (S&D). He claims that the adjustment of seats will in fact not make the citizens' commitment to the Parliament increase. He presents the fact that the last elections of that time had all seen a decrease in turnout. The effect of transnational lists will not bring the citizens closer to the MEPs, but the opposite, and voting for someone they do not know from "party lists that cross country borders will sound like a gimmick".⁶¹ Sant explains that, in addition, the concept will shift focus from the daily concerns the citizens may have. He also brings up the notion that the MEPs would be harder to hold accountable, which in turn will create an even larger distance between citizen and MEP. He finishes by arguing that the distance created could only be fixed if the candidates were elected directly, and not through any lists - neither national nor transnational.

This speech includes a few arguments which have not been included by any other speaker, as well as strategies which are not very commonly found in this debate. Sant, in contrast to the other speakers, brings up the aspect of turnout in the EP elections, and how transnational lists will in fact not improve this. The turnout of the elections is another issue which has motivated transnational lists to be used as a solution, which makes the speaker considered as informed on the subject. He argues that since the suggestion will not create a stronger bond between MEP and citizens, it will consequently not increase the turnout as the interest in Parliament will stay unaffected. In this argument Sant also includes a statistic which shows the percentage of participation in voting. Numbers should be carefully considered depending on e.g. the source being used, however any number is helpful in illustrating a point, which we also saw in Hübner's speech. Sant also uses the word 'gimmick' to express that this suggestion is not beneficial but more 'for show', and in addition argues that the MEPs thus will be harder to hold accountable. Though the arguments tend to jump from one to the other without transitions, the speech includes several perspectives and kinds of arguments which demonstrates that the speaker has been considering more than one feature of the transnational lists.

⁶¹ Ibid., 58.

6.2.7. Max Andersson

Max Andersson (Verts/ALE) then spoke against transnational lists, stating that they would take away power from the citizens and the parties of the Member States to be gained by the leaderships of the European parties instead. Andersson argues that transnational lists will make it so that the power would lie with the European parties to decide who is on the list and what policy should be used within the party and that the national parties would feel pressure to align themselves and their policies to the European parties. He explains that by alienating the citizens they will instead be forced to vote for a MEP who represents a European party. He finishes by urging to vote against and for the other parliamentarians to “learn something from Brexit”.⁶²

Andersson’s speech is also one of the shorter ones, though his opinions are clearly expressed. His core argument is about power, stating that the transnational lists will draw the power away from the citizens and their national parties by placing the decision of who will be on the lists, as well as the decision of what policies will be in focus in the hand of European parties. By using these arguments Andersson shows that his interest lies in the concerns of the people being represented, as well as keeping the power and the decisions with the citizens. By also presenting the situation in which national parties have to align their opinion to those of the European parties, the speaker demonstrates awareness regarding the issue of national identity against a transnational identity.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The debate regarding the suggestion of transnational lists from the *Report on the Composition of the European Parliament* included a number of arguments and opinions, as well as different approaches to the practice of argumentation. Though, it is difficult to assess any clear resolution of which side of the debate was the most successful in relaying their arguments. However, commonalities were found in what arguments the speakers choose to talk about, in that close to all of them discussed representation, and if there is or is not a common European identity which needs this representation. I found that within these subjects, the speakers on both sides tended to use

⁶² Ibid., 63.

similar arguments to their peers on their respective side, and at times close to the same wording e.g. with Schöpflin and Etheridge who both state that there is no European demos.

Now, as Zappettini explained there are some who view transnationalism as working against the national identity,⁶³ which we may typically find with Eurosceptics, as demonstrated by Vasilopoulou,⁶⁴ and e.g. in James' speech when she states that transnational lists will lead to the "extinguishing of national sovereignty".⁶⁵ If the work collected by Koenig, Mandes and Trittler is to be applied, aspects such as language and citizenship are fundamental to the national identity, which means that transnational lists would not necessarily threaten this, in contrast to James' beliefs. In addition, Özkırmılı explains that ethnosymbolism states that identity can withstand events such as migration and intermarriage cannot easily disrupt one's identity,⁶⁶ which in turn may mean that transnationalism or European integration cannot easily disrupt the national identity. However, what Schöpflin and Etheridge are trying to convey is that there is no common European or transnational identity at all. However, Verhofstadt argues that a European demos that needs to be created since it "cannot arrive by accident"⁶⁷, which suggests that Verhofstadt agrees with the fact that there is not European demos, but that a purpose of transnational lists is to help bring it forth. Thus, in his view the argument of there not being a European demos does not work as he states that this was not a group to be represented but an identity to be created. This view of a social group works within the mentioned theory of social constructivism which discusses that the groups one identifies with have been constructed by society,⁶⁸ and the difference in opinion in this debate could be due to the speakers having a difference in opinion on the entire concept of constructed social groups.

As we found by researching the background of transnational lists, there are additional issues other than representation that are relevant to the discussion which were not as present in the chosen speeches. These being e.g. aspects such as campaigning, which was not talked about, or issues like turnout, which was barely mentioned by the speakers with the exception of Sant. The issue of democratic deficit does have to do with the representation which is argued about in these speeches, though the fact that candidates campaign as 'French democrats' or 'German socialists'

⁶³ Zappettini, *The Construction of Transnational Identities*, 86.

⁶⁴ Vasilopoulou, *European Integration and the Radical Right*, 224.

⁶⁵ European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*, 48.

⁶⁶ Özkırmılı, *Theories of Nationalism*, 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

is an issue which could have been highlighted more, as this is still relevant to the current EP election structure. This indicates that the issues of interest to the speakers were theoretical aspects such as national and transnational identity, rather than the practical aspects. This might be due to the speakers assuming that the other MEPs are already aware of the practical issues with the election. This also does not necessarily mean that the practical aspects were disregarded subjects in the debate overall, since not all speeches from the debate were included in this analysis, though it does illustrate that these were not prioritized by the speakers analyzed in this paper.

As explained in Plug's research parliamentarians have been found to use examples and illustrations in their speeches which are hard to assess regarding if they have an underlying argumentation or not.⁶⁹ In this case we find this as the speakers tend to present such examples and illustrations without a source or much explanation. Thus, the examples they used were utilized to bring their own opinion and argument forward, rather than to educate about the subject in question. The parliamentarians tended to make statements such as: 'this makes the suggestion democratic' and 'this makes the suggestion un-democratic' respectively, without explanations of 'how'. This, as Plug explained, could be consciously used, imaginably so that the listener cannot criticize the speaker over something which was never said. Having this kind of ambiguity is not favorable when assessing the credibility of a speech; as explained by Bergström and Boréus one should consider how well a speech lives up to certain expectations, such as being as clear as possible to avoid confusion,⁷⁰ which by this argument the speakers do not. It could be that the speakers expected the audience to be familiar with their argument or interpret their underlying or implied evidence and therefore did not state them out loud, however, one cannot say as a fact what the intention of the speaker was. It is clear, though, that more pathos than logos was used in their speeches due to this lack of evidence and surplus of illustrations, e.g. Rangel stating there being a "trustworthy democracy here in the European Union",⁷¹ which is implied transnational lists will disrupt, or Verhofstadt's statement "Federal states want it."⁷² which is not followed by any concrete example. This also shows that this method of speaking is used on both sides of the debate.

As mentioned before, the general support transnational lists had seen had been on the left wing of the parliament and the opposition found in the right. If we were to divide the speakers

⁶⁹ Plug, *The strategic use of argumentation*.

⁷⁰ Bergström, *Textens Mening och Makt*, 91–93.

⁷¹ European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*, 45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

analyzed into their into their respective political group, we do get mixed results. Co-rapporteur Hübner is part of the EPP, which have been of the general opinion against transnational lists. Two of the analyzed speakers against transnational lists are Schöpflin and Rangel, who were part of the EPP as well and demonstrated the typical mindset of the party. Though as explained, this subject is yet controversial and differences in opinion. The rest of the speakers for transnational lists were Verhofstadt, of the ALDE group which was a liberal-centrist group and Terricabras of the Verts/ALE group, who were mainly green-oriented but also for European integration, which reflects his opinion on the matter. However, Andersson who also was a member of the Verts/ALE group was against transnational lists, again demonstrating the disagreement within parties. Sant who also spoke against transnational lists was of S&D, who are left-winged. The final two who spoke against transnational lists were more conventional in their opinions as Etheridge was of the EFDD group and though James is NI they were both a part of the UKIP in the UK. Thus, happening to include two British people who were both for Brexit and therefore can be assumed to be against European integration and transnationalism, out of nine speakers considered can create the image of transnational lists being generally disapproved of. However, the speeches analyzed are from a small portion of all the speeches made, therefore this factor, as well as the speakers' political affiliations cannot be considered as definite.

With this analysis I set out to analyze the debate of whether or not to implement transnational lists into the EP election. What I found was that the speakers in question had similarities in the subject of the arguments they provided to the debate, as well as the way in which they presented their arguments with examples and illustrations. Their opinions were in some cases representative of their political affiliations, though not in all cases, which was expected due to the controversy of the subject. With this paper I hope to have brought a better understanding of the background of the arguments used in this debate as well as a better understanding of the way in which the parliamentarians argue. By focusing research on the field of the EP where politics and identity share an arena, this essay has helped to expand the interest in the polarization between those for and against European integration. It is important to shed light on the current issues of the EU and to identify the arguments which steer the way democracy will be dealt with within the institution.

8. Further Research

The matter of representation is still a relevant question which will most likely stay as a subject of discussion for the foreseeable future. Events such as the current pandemic has also had an effect on the subject as the ways e.g. the different Member States have responded to the situation has highlighted the issue. To widen the area of research in this thesis one could expand the material to the statements made in the other languages than English, as well as statement which are not official e.g. by including policy papers and media reports from both pro-EU participants and Eurosceptics.

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Appendix

Speeches used in this essay, appearing in the order they were held the 7th of February 2018.

Danuta Maria Hübner, rapporteur.

“Mr President, today we will vote on the composition of the European Parliament for the European elections of 2019. In times when democracy as a system is called into question by some, elections are the most important expression of citizens’ democratic will. The European Parliament directly represents its citizens in the European Union, so we as Members of Parliament form the direct link between citizens and the Union, and it is the prerogative of the European Parliament to propose its composition to the European Council and to have a final say on the European Council decision for each legislative period. A distribution of Parliament’s seats that is fair, that follows subjective principles and that respects the EU Treaties was the objective that we as co-rapporteurs set ourselves when we were entrusted with this task. We listened to the concerns of our colleagues in the House and the Member States and proposed a composition that fully respects the principle of digressive proportionality, as required by the Treaty. This principle ensures a fair and balanced representation of citizens by Member State. Observance of this principle, in combination with the distribution of some of the UK’s vacated seats, allows us to address the under-representation of some Member States in the House. Brexit has undoubtedly created a new situation for the Union that affects the composition of our House. One of the most populous Member States is leaving the Union, and we believe that this should be reflected in the future distribution of seats. We have the opportunity here not only to address the problem of under-representation of some Member States but also to leave a number of seats available for future enlargements and, depending on the creation of the proper legal basis, for the creation of transnational lists for European elections. By reducing the size of Parliament from 751 to 705 Members, we would also allow for savings, thereby freeing up resources that can be used for other purposes. I think these are the right signals to send to our citizens. Brexit has also made our task more challenging due to legal uncertainties as to the precise date and terms on which the EU acquis will cease to apply to the UK. That is why we have also envisaged a fall-back option in case the UK has not formally withdrawn from the Union by the time of the next elections. In conclusion, I would like to highlight that this report garnered 80% support in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. I hope that we will manage to achieve a large majority in today’s vote in plenary as well, in order to ensure fair representation of our citizens. I call, in this regard, on the European Council to take heed of the European Parliament’s position with regard to its composition.”

György Schöpflin, on behalf of the EPP Group.

“Mr President, I congratulate the two co-rapporteurs. I think they have done an excellent job on a very difficult file. I, for my part, want to focus on the transnational list. I have made no secret of my view that, as far as I am concerned, the transnational list is a bad idea. Here are my reasons. There are several. First, the transnational list (TNL) is based on an idea that out there somewhere

there is a European demos just waiting to be represented, and that the TNL will do just this. This is an error. There is no European demos and to claim the contrary is an illusion. Have European citizens ever been asked if they want to be represented by a transnational list? Again, the answer is no. So, in real terms, what we are looking at is a top-down, elite-driven project, presumably starting from the belief that, if the transnational list comes into being, so will the European demos. Why on earth should it? It is a fatal assumption that the TNL will generate a supranational European consciousness. If anything, those putatively elected on the TNL will be remote from the electorate, and that will not do the reputation of this Parliament any good. It's magical thinking that the transnational list will somehow produce the European demos. If the transnational list does happen, then this Parliament will have 27 free-floating MEPs answerable to none. They will have power without an electorate, they will have power without accountability and power without responsibility. So where are the checks and balances? I shouldn't have to say that power without responsibility is the high road to arbitrariness. That, if you ask me, is about as undemocratic as it gets."

Guy Verhofstadt, on behalf of the ALDE Group.

"Mr President, first of all I want to thank the rapporteurs for their work, for their wisdom and for their patience in this long discussion. You may remember the former president of the European People's Party who was my predecessor as Prime Minister of Belgium and who was, I can say quite easily, a very dedicated European, Wilfried Martens. Wilfried Martens was a true believer in and defender of transnational lists and he understood what was at stake: he understood that without a strong link between the citizens and Europe, eurosceptics and populists would in the end always win the game. And he understood that transnational lists will not alienate the citizen: quite the contrary. Why? Because, in the proposal that you have before you, people will have two votes. One vote is for a national candidate, for a national list, to keep the link between the citizen and his or her MEP; and a second vote is for transnational candidates, to strengthen the link between the citizen and the European Union. In my view, this is the only way to create what I call a European demos – which cannot arrive by accident, or spontaneously of itself – and I think it is also needed to make the Spitzenkandidaten process really democratic. Today the Spitzenkandidaten process is still undemocratic and nontransparent, a backroom deal within political parties or between political parties. What Spitzenkandidaten alone will not deliver, and what transnational lists will deliver because they complement the Spitzenkandidaten process, it is that it becomes a democratic process. It will be the people, the citizens, who will decide on the Spitzenkandidaten and the President of the Commission. I have not heard any serious arguments against it. People say federal states don't have it: wrong! Federal states want it. My country, Belgium, is a federal state and many want a federal constituency. It is separatists who make war against it. A second example is the United States of America: a federal state. It's because there is no single constituency that it is Mr Trump who is President and not Hilary Clinton, who received three million votes more than Donald Trump. Secondly, another argument I hear is that transnational lists are good for populists. I have to tell you that is also wrong. You could argue that democracy is only good for populists,

so let's abolish democracy and let's abolish elections. I can tell you one thing: that's nonsense. You have to beat the populists, not to fear them, and to do that you need transnational lists. The third argument, that transnational lists are only good for big Member States, is also wrong. No political party can afford to participate in elections without putting all the countries on the transnational list. What counts is not size, Mr Rangel, what counts is the vision, the passion, the commitment of all of us. That is what counts. And let us be honest about big Member States. Our colleagues from Spain, Poland, France, Italy and Germany today need at least double the number of votes received by us representatives of small and medium-sized Member States, but I nevertheless tabled, together with Pascal, an amendment to ensure that small and medium-sized Member States will be represented on the list. I am concluding. I know you're a very tough President, Mr Wieland. Let's not waste this historic opportunity. Brexit will never come back. Never again will we see half of the Member States in favour of this European constituency. And finally, Mr President, Altiero Spinelli, the father of this European Parliament, would turn in his grave if we missed this unique opportunity."

Paulo Rangel (EPP).

"Mr President, we fully support the composition and allocation of seats designed by the co-rapporteurs, but we are very worried about the transnational list political recommendations in this report. We have managed to build a sound and trustworthy democracy here in the European Union, where there is an equilibrium and balance between majorities and states. If we accept the constitutional Frankenstein monster that is the transnational list, we accept something that does not exist in any federal state, as Mr Verhofstadt has proved here today because he cannot give one example of it, not even in Belgium that has quite a similar system. If we are not a federation, why should we have a joint constituency that not even federations have? Do we really need, in order to build a democracy in the European Union, to have a top-down elite selected and co-opted by European parties, or – what is really very dangerous – put forward by European movements of national parties that can divide, even in regional terms, the European Union's public sphere? Please think about it and vote against the transnational lists paragraph."

Diane James (NI).

"Mr President, welcome to the European Union's 2018 incarnation of Georgia Orwell's 1984. This proposal completes the end-stage of the European Union project – national sovereignty smothered and, finally, the first open, and equally transparent, step towards a truly federalist Europe with a political governing body, with seats given to unelected, unselected MEPs occupying those transnational seats. The goal of the United States of Europe as a concept is well documented. The extinguishing of national sovereignty is also well recognised. We now have absolute clarity, though, with this proposal and the dangerous and thoroughly anti-democratic suggestion of getting to that objective via transnational seats. The European Union openly questions and frequently questions itself, asking why there is a democratic deficit among Member States. You've only got to look to this report and the detail within it to answer that question."

Josep-Maria Terricabras (Verts/ALE).

“Mr President, transnational lists are an important step in the process towards a single European constituency. Having the opportunity to vote for a list with candidates from different Member States helps to create in the imagination of citizens a sense of European general interest and a feeling of belonging. Transnational lists can open the window to the creation of solidarity and a redistribution of wealth and can reinforce the idea of a European public sphere. All in all, we are debating something that can strengthen democracy. We have an opportunity to reinvigorate the European project and to rethink it, especially from a bottom-up perspective – for instance, by allowing Member States to assign seats to regions having legislative powers. This is today the case in the Åland Islands and tomorrow it could be the case in others. It is a matter of political will. Today, the European Parliament has a chance to deliver a beneficial, transformative proposal.”

Bill Etheridge (EFDD).

“Mr President, we have a debate today about picking over the carcass of the folly of UK Membership of the EU. We see all sorts of solutions and ideas being put forward to split up the seats that the UK will thankfully be vacating. The real thing that should be happening here is that those seats should be left empty. The truth of the matter is that when you put forward ideas such as transnational lists what you actually do is take the semblance, the pretence, of democracy even further from the citizens. It is hard enough to get around a huge region like my own in the West Midlands and to be seen, and to let people know they have got a representative. Do you really think you can represent people in different countries on the same mandate? It is, frankly, impossible and it takes it further and further from the people. Of course, what has been achieved by the negotiations between the EU and the nest of traitors in the UK Government is a period called the transitional period where, during that time, EU rules and regulations will apply. British taxpayers’ money will still come to the EU but we will have no representation whatsoever. These seats should remain empty as a monument to the absolute betrayal of democracy and of the British people that is taking place. This could not be further from the dream of governance for the people, by the people, of the people. It is not happening. The demos is not there. This is not democratic. You look to bring people to a parliament where, if there is any semblance of debate you have to hold up a card. It is then up to the President on the day whether or not it is accepted, and then it is up to the person to whom you are asking the question whether they are prepared to answer the question. How on earth can you kid anyone that this is democracy? Quite frankly, the people of the United Kingdom have seen what is going on and this year we, the people, in the United Kingdom, will rise and in a democratic revolution we will say no to this, no to taxation without representation, and no to further treatment of the UK as a vassal state of the EU. The time is coming.”

Alfred Sant (S&D).

“Mr President, my one question concerning the making of adjustments to the seating arrangements in this Parliament is this: as a result of these adjustments, will European citizens feel more committed to this Parliament? At present, they are not. This Parliament and its Members project too distant an image among our constituents. Participation in the last three elections dropped to close to 43%. Given Brexit and the openings for EU enlargement, the proposal to maintain national entitlements for seats is the right thing, but then the proposal also is to create new transnational constituencies in order to bring Parliament closer to the voters. This approach will have the opposite effect. It will continue to dislocate perceptions about the European Parliament away from the daily concerns of citizens, especially in smaller Member States. Being asked to vote for people they do not know or care about on party lists that cross country borders will sound like a gimmick. Chosen by political groups, these MEPs will only be accountable to their party chiefs, generating a greater distance between voters and elected MEPs. This distance can probably only be eliminated if Members of this House are directly elected and not through their position on party lists whether national or – least of all – transnational.”

Max Andersson (Verts/ALE).

“Madam President, transnational lists are a magnet that will draw power away from citizens and their parties in the Member States and give it to the leadership of European parties. That is why some people like them, but this is not going to be good for democracy. The European parties will decide who gets on the list. The European parties will decide what manifesto they run on, and the national parties will be under enormous pressure to align their policies with the policies of their European party. This will alienate the voters, who will no longer be able to vote for a party in the Member State that represents their policies and their preferences. Instead, they will have to vote for someone who in reality represents a European party. Let’s oppose it: let’s learn something from Brexit.”