

Critical Elections in the European Union

-- A Research Programme for the European Election Study 2014 --

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The economic and political crisis in Europe and the associated debates about the future of the Eurozone, the bailout of debtor states, the austerity measures imposed by the EU, ECB and IMF, and the economic consequences of it, all of this has made the process of European integration more salient to ordinary citizens than ever before. These developments have already been key in recent national elections (e.g. in Greece and Italy). They have the potential of transforming the 2014 elections of the members of the European Parliament from lacklustre affairs focussing on domestic politics, to salient electoral contests in which the future of Europe is debated. The 2014 elections may represent a key moment in the history of European Parliament elections, a moment in which the focus of electoral competition will shift from national politics to EU politics. They also have the potential to reshape party competition in the European Union and its member states.

General aim of this research proposal

The general aim of this research programme is, therefore, to assess empirically the political consequences of the current debt crisis for political alignments, at the occasion of the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. Our main heuristic which guides the more specific research questions is that the 2014 EP elections could become a “critical election” in the sense of V. O. Key (1955). More in particular, we are asking whether and under what conditions political oppositions over EU membership and EU policies (shorthand: the EU dimension ranging from outright opposition to full support of EU integration) have become central for political competition in the European multi-level system of governance.

The contribution of this research programme will be threefold. First, it will establish whether the recent growth in importance of the EU dimension (as indicated e.g. by the roll-call behaviour of members of the European Parliament, Hix et al. 2007; and by political experts, McElroy and Benoit 2007), reinforced by the current debt crisis, constitutes the base of a new ideological cleavage and leads to a socio-political realignment (e.g. in the perspective of MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987). Second, it will establish a concise framework under which a potential realignment between socio-political groups and political representation can be studied. The puzzle here regards the dimensionality of the EU space of political competition. The questions to be clarified concern the number and content of relevant conflict dimensions as well as their relative independence. Third, it will put the current politicisation of EU integration into perspective. Processes of cleavage formation and socio-political realignments can only be properly understood in a diachronic perspective which requires as long a time frame as there are data to base it on. For this reason,

the dimensions of political competition at the time of the 2014 European Parliament elections will be analysed in comparison with those in place at both previous EP and national elections. The final result will be a complex picture of electoral competition in the European Union both during European and national elections which covers all the member-countries of the Union and nearly four decades of electoral competition and socio-political alignments – starting from the first EP elections in 1979 and leading up to 2014. This will lay the basis of a thorough (re-)evaluation of the quality of electoral democracy in the European Union, and the future of the political integration of it.

Background

When the first direct elections of the members of the European Parliament was finally organised in 1979, national politics dominated the campaigns and election results. As a consequence, European Parliament elections were said to be little more than second-order national elections in which European issues did not play much of a role (Reif and Schmitt 1980; for a recent review of the subsequent literature Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010). And a quarter of a century later, in the EP elections of 2004, the typical symptoms of second-order national elections could still be identified – if only in the electorally consolidated Western member-countries of the EU (Schmitt 2005).

On the other hand, it is increasingly realised that the process of European integration has finally entered its ‘post-functional’ phase (Hooghe and Marks 2009). We are witnessing fierce political oppositions over both the extent of European integration and the allocation of resources in the common European market. Both these conflicts contribute to what is generally referred to as the “EU dimension” (Baker et al. 2012; Gabel and Hix 2002; Hix 1994, 1999; Hix et al 2007). These oppositions are not contained any longer within national boundaries but extend to ‘a higher level’ of the European multi-level system of governance.

Thus, the general question for which the research outlined in this proposal is seeking an answer is how the political alignments between social groups and political parties which are currently in place in the EU member-countries will be affected by these developments. *Will the established association between social and political oppositions survive the current turmoil?* It is in this perspective that we are approaching the question of Vladimir O. Key from the 1950s about critical elections. *Are the conflicts along the EU dimension producing lasting ideological configurations that will shape the future of electoral democracy in the EU?*

This must be seen against the background of wide-ranging scholarly disagreements over the nature and content of the basic dimensions of political conflict, and the place of EU issues in this broader framework. Some have claimed that conflicts over the desired character of the EU are the European manifestation of a more general cleavage between winners and losers of globalisation, that are diminishing the relevance of the long established left-right dimension for structuring political alignments (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). Others propose that the conflict over more or less EU

integration is linked with the libertarian-authoritarian conflict dimension¹ through the growing saliency of identity issues (Marks et al. 2006). And last but not least, current EU-related political conflicts over the allocation of resources have been said to resemble the century-old battles over redistribution of wealth from rich to poor, albeit now at a transnational scale (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Thus it is anything but clear where the current politicisation of EU politics leads to; whether it becomes progressively integrated in these old ideological oppositions between the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009, Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012) or remains an independent axis of political competition and controversy (Baker et al. 2012; Benoit and Laver 2006; Hix 1994, 1999). Only by answering these questions can we establish an appropriate framework for gauging the impact that the EU dimension might have on political competition and ideological alignments in Europe.

Conceptual framework

A. The theory of “*Critical Elections*” proposes that elections under certain conditions can have a long lasting impact on party competition. In these elections, the socio-political coalitions that are at the base of the party system are subject to a profound change. New coalitions between (groups of) citizens and political parties are emerging in such elections – a process which is commonly referred to as ‘realignment’. The 1932 election of the president of the US is an archetypical “critical election” – this was when Franklin D. Roosevelt gained the US presidency over his ‘New Deal’ programme in times of a deep economic recession.

An important difference between the US and the European party system with implications for the theory of critical elections is that the latter is not a “genuine” party system, but an aggregation of entrenched national party systems. This aggregation of national parties in EP political groups is made possible by the common history of socio-political conflicts that these national party systems share (Lord 2010; Schmitt and Thomassen 2009, 2010).² Upon that background, it is important to keep in mind that an eventual realignment could change the party systems of a number of member countries simultaneously or indeed add a new party alternative to the EU-wide party system. The central heuristic of this research proposal is the potential of the 2014 EP elections to turn into a “critical election”. We believe that today’s constellation of economic and political conditions are favourable to a realignment along the EU dimension. Whether this is going to happen, and at what level, will be one of the foci of the proposed research programme.

There is another difference between elections in the US and in the European Union. It concerns the role of European Parliament elections in the process of political integration of Europe. The founding fathers already in the 1950s were of the opinion that a politically integrated Europe,

¹Also labeled as materialist/post-materialist (Ingelhart 1990) or new/old politics (Dalton 1996; Franklin 1992) or GAL/TAN (green/alternative/libertarian vs. traditional/authoritarian/nationalist; Hooghe et al. 2002)

²Identified by Stein Rokkan in numerous publications (the most widely cited of which is Lipset and Rokkan 1967), this common cleavage structure of European societies was based on conflicts relating to the religious denomination of citizens, their social class, urban-rural and center-periphery location.

in order to strengthen its authority over its Member States, requires direct elections of the members of a European Parliament (cf. The Treaty of Rome, § 138, 3). In that perspective, the first direct elections in 1979 were regarded as a fundamental event for European democracy. With the Euro crisis, the problem of acceptance of binding decisions becomes quite vivid, and the role of elections as an expression of involvement, legitimacy, and contestation even more important. Longstanding debates about the so-called “democratic deficit” of the EU could be revitalized. The question here will be whether these elections can be more than an indicator of the crisis of European integration and serve as a promoter of political integration. How high turnout is, how much support there is for anti-integration parties, and how this finds expression in the vote choices of citizens – these are the questions, which will be more specifically looked at regarding realignment, representation, party system change. The answers to these questions, however, will also be able to inform us about the future of European political integration.

B. *The dynamics of structural realignments.* American research suggests that a structural realignment between voters and political parties requires several conditions to be fulfilled: a) a change in the political agenda, which is typically induced by a significant and lasting change in the socio-economic problems facing a country – e.g. by a severe economic crisis, a war, or the collapse of the environmental system; b) changes in the composition of social and/or ideological coalitions underlying political parties; c) an increased visibility of those changes in the electoral arena; and d) the growing embeddedness of these changes in the party system. This is the route on which structural realignments along new dimensions of political contestation and electoral competition are said to take place (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987).

This offers a framework within which political realignments can be traced. The increasing politicisation of the EU dimension at the level of the European Parliament has already been acknowledged (Hix et al 2007; McElroy and Benoit 2007). Beneath those parliamentary representations of socio-political conflicts at EU level, there is only scattered theoretical and empirical evidence of a politicisation of European integration at the level of mass publics (de Vries 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). Attitude towards EU have been found to be, by far, less important predictors of electoral behaviour than the classical left-right dimension (de Vries et al. 2011; Hobolt et al 2009; Hobolt and Wittrock 2011) or even “green” issues (Tillman 2004). It is against this background that the current debt crisis has the potential to act as a catalyst of change (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Carmines and Stimson 1986; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987; van der Eijk and Franklin 2004).

The first signs of such realignments are already visible as the EU dimension became the focus of party competition in recent national elections. In the 2012 and 2013 elections of members of national parliaments in both Greece and Italy (and maybe also in the Netherlands) the EU debate was the central axis of electoral competition: positions that parties took on this axis seem to have had a decisive impact on their electoral fortunes. We also notice growing electoral support, in elections at different levels of the European multi-level electoral system, for political parties which

base their electoral appeals on the rejection of EU membership, fight immigration, cultivate traditional social values and emphasise ethnic nationalism. The parties in question here are conventionally labelled “far right” (e.g. Jobbik in Hungary, True Fins in Finland, UKIP, Sweden Democrats, Front National in France, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, The Danish Peoples Party) but related issues and policies are making their way towards the centre of national governments (e.g. FIDESZ in Hungary, ODS in the Czech Republic, or the Conservatives – a significant part of them in any case – in Britain).

C. *The puzzle of dimensionality.* Positions of political actors on ideological cleavages can be associated or they can vary independently. Moreover, the relation between ideological cleavages can change over time so that formerly independent dimensions become associated with one another, presumably as a function of changes in the relative saliency of such dimensions.³ The EU dimension has frequently been argued to be orthogonal to other political conflicts such as the left-right dimension (with its socio-economic and cultural sub-dimensions; Baker et al. 2012; Hix 1999). Others have argued that the EU dimension has become increasingly correlated with, or even integrated in the old political divisions (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012).

What is needed here is a comprehensive re-analysis of the dimensionality of ideological conflicts which structure the space of political and electoral competition in the multi-level system of the EU. This re-analysis will look at the inter-relationship of different ideological dimensions as a variable rather than as a constant, and try to identify context conditions under which they are more or less independent from one another. The saliency of EU issues is one such context. The growing policy scope of the Union is another and possibly related one (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2009). The duration of EU membership (e.g. Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995) and, only spuriously correlated with it, the socio-political legacies of communism in the Eastern member countries (e.g. Vachudolova and Hooghe 2009; Schmitt 2010) are additional contexts which are expected to affect the dimensionality of the ideological space within EU member-countries.

This re-analysis will comprise a wide variety of already existing data as well as data that will be newly collected in the framework of the present research proposal. Post-electoral survey data and textual data (i.e. party programmes) will be related to one another so that independent measures of policy pledges of political parties and the policy perceptions and preferences of their voters can be compared with one another.

D. *Critical elections and the quality of representative democracy.* According to the populist vision of democracy (Riker 1982) at least, the quality of political representation is a function of the relative “issue congruence” between representatives and represented (Thomassen 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). In somewhat more mundane words, this relates to the question whether the elected do what their electors want them to do. In the multi-level electoral system of the EU, this question applies to both the national level (where policy decisions are taken that are relevant for the inter-governmental path of political representation in the Council) and to the EU

³ Conceptually, the left-right schema has been characterised as an imperialistic political code which continuously updates its meaning elements by absorbing and integrating new political conflict lines as they become salient (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; for some recent empirical evidence supporting this claim Schmitt and van der Eijk 2009);

level (where policy decisions are taken that are relevant for the transnational path of political representation in the European Parliament; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

Critical elections and realignments between societal demands and their political representation are likely to follow “representation failures”: the lack of issue congruence between electors and elected, or the absence of electoral representation altogether for groups of citizens that found themselves deprived of “meaningful choices” (Wessels and Schmitt 2008) in previous elections and abstained as a consequence. From the point of view of effective political representation, therefore, critical elections and realignments are expected to be good things.

The political consequences of such ideological realignments might not be entirely positive. Located on the far right and far left as they are, the rise of anti EU parties to the point that they become the third (Jobbik 2010, True Finns 2011) or even second (SYRIZA 2012) political power in a country might indeed improve the effectiveness of political representation. However, it could endanger, at the same time, the functioning of democracy and the prevalence of the rule of law (*Rechtstaatlichkeit*) more generally.

E. Critical elections and the mode of party system change. One perspective to look at the EU party system, actually the one favoured in this research proposal, focuses on the common roots of national party systems in a cleavage structure which is broadly compatible all over Europe. This allows the formation of an EU party system which essentially consists of an aggregation of national party systems of the EU member countries. This perspective assumes that the issues at stake in the plenary and the committees of the European Parliament are not so different from what is discussed and decided upon in national parliaments (isomorphic issues – Bartolini 2005; normal issues – Schmitt 2007), so that the national party systems are a fair representation of relevant issue positions. The other perspective concentrates on EU specific issues preferences for which are arguably not very well represented in the current group structure of the European Parliament (Andeweg 1995). This must not constitute much of a problem for effective political representation as long as EU specific issues are neither very numerous on the EP agenda, nor very salient (and thus endorsed by a permissive consensus between representatives and represented, see Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). The recent politicisation of EU integration has changed this happy state of affairs drastically.

Already in the past, however, have EU-sceptical groups been constituted in the European Parliament and integrated the delegations of a number of like-minded national parties. Because of the small numbers of their members, these groups have never played a major role in the EP decision-making (Corbett et al. 2011). A possible realignment could take one of two different routes (or both). First, Euro-sceptic parties could emerge and/or grow in national party systems of a plurality of different member countries and strengthen these or similar Euro-sceptic EP groups after the next elections (a recent example here is the near success of the AfD in the last federal election in Germany). The second route is that (some of) the member-parties of the main political groups of the EP – like those of the EPP, socialists, liberals, or greens – may react responsively in the face of a growing Euro-scepticism among their core electorates and adapt their position on the EU

dimension accordingly. This could pull these political groups towards the Euro-sceptic pole of party competition. However, such developments may also threaten the relative cohesion of EP groups on EU issues, and in the end question the integrity of these groups. This way, a potential realignment might also happen at the level of the EU party system if and when (members of) national party delegations would be changing their EP group affiliation (e.g. if and when – some of – the Germany CSU-MEPs would leave the EPP and join the *European Conservatives and Reformists*).

F. EP elections and the context of realignments. Studying a possible realignment at the occasion of the 2014 EP elections will offer the possibility of investigating the contextual determinants under which the EU dimension emerges as the central axis of competition. In all likelihood, this EU dimension of electoral competition will not be equally salient in all of the 28 EU member-countries. Against this background, the analysis of 28 simultaneous elections across the EU will offer the possibility to identify the factors that contribute to the salience of this dimension and encourage an ideological realignment along this conflict line. Taking advantage of the cross-country variance we can identify possible economic and institutional characteristics that nurture such realignment.

As the conflicts along the EU dimension are partly fuelled by the increasing control of European institutions over national governments in the context of the debt crisis, the national economic and budgetary condition is one of the main factors that might help us to understand cross-country variations. To be more specific, we expect that the EU dimension will be more salient in countries that had to implement harsh austerity policies in order to fulfil the criteria for receiving economic support from abroad. On the other hand, citizens in countries that contributed to the bail out of fellow EU members may reject the regulatory and re-distributional policies as they were implemented by EU institutions which might lead as well to an increase in the saliency of the EU dimension in those environments.

But in all likelihood, it is not the economy alone that can add to our understanding of cross-country variation. Differences in the structure of party competition might also cause differences in the saliency of the EU dimension. In countries where relevant parties are polarised on the libertarian vs. authoritarian dimension of political conflict, identity issues could further amplify the conflicts over redistribution in the multi-level system of governance between the “winners” and “losers” of EU integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Marks et al. 2006; Vachudolova and Hooghe 2009). Nationalist and EU-critical discourses are expected to be strengthened by the recent economic turmoil, which might boost the salience of the libertarian vs. authoritarian dimension along euro-positive vs. euro-sceptical lines.

In addition to economic and institutional characteristics, we also expect regional differences. In the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, party systems and party alignments are still significantly weaker, the volatility of voters between elections is higher, and durable partisan ties are significantly less common (Agh 1998; Sikk 2005; Tavits 2005, 2008; Whitefield 2002; Zielinski 2002). This is expected to facilitate realignments, simply because existing alignments are less

stable. It also suggests, however, that those realignments will be of a different kind, as they are expected to have less of a structural – i.e. durable – quality.

The final result will be a complex (re)analysis of electoral democracy in the European Union from the first European Parliament elections onwards.

Data collection

The research questions addressed in this research proposal concern the political forces at play during the direct election of the members of the European Parliament in late May 2014. Central actors in the electoral arena will be citizens (voters and non-voters), political parties, and the media. Mobilised by the competing candidates and parties, and informed by the media, the attitudes and behaviour of citizens will be at centre stage. The central task in terms of data collection will thus be the realisation of a series of nationally representative post-electoral surveys among eligible citizens in 28 EU member countries.

Electoral realignments are based on significant changes in the issue agenda that is dominating a particular election (or a series of successive elections), on the policy positions that political parties take in the face of those changes, and on the problem solving competence that is ascribed to them. In terms of survey content, therefore, the proposed post-electoral surveys will focus on the salient issues and problems that are associated with the EU dimension of electoral competition at the time of the 2014 elections. Chaired by the applicant, a task force of the EES Working Group will develop the questionnaire in more detail when the elections come closer. In any case, however, the survey will include additional questions regarding respondents' trust in the institutions of the EU multi-level system of governance, as well as their evaluations of the performance and their legitimacy beliefs regarding those institutions. In addition, indicators measuring the social background and socialisation of respondents, their partisanship and general ideological outlook, as well as their past and present voting behaviour – both regarding electoral participation and party choice – will also be included.

In order for an ideological realignment to take place, a major issue or problem needs to emerge in the citizenry, and forceful and credible solutions for them need to be presented by one or more of the competing political parties. This supply side of electoral choices is often being studied through the lenses of citizens – by focussing on their perceptions of issue positions and problem emphases and their competence evaluations regarding the different choice options that present themselves in a particular election. However, there is a growing concern about the problem of endogeneity that is inherent in this research strategy (e.g. Brady 2011; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2010). The use of independent sources of information about the issue positions and problem emphases of competing parties is probably the best way to get round those problems. Two tools that have been used in the past to that avail are surveys among MPs and candidates standing for office in a particular election, and quantitative content analyses of the election programmes (party manifestos) of the competing parties. A third is the estimation of political parties issue positions by

expert surveys. Efforts will be made to realise one or more of these instruments in addition to the representative post-electoral survey.

Last but not least, the media are an important third actor in the electoral process. This role has increased in a situation in which “parties on the ground” are losing organisational strength and communicative competence. Today, media do not only affect what their audience is “thinking about” but can also, by way of priming and framing, and sometimes at least and within limits, shape and alter the policy mood of the citizenry. The media has therefore the potential to substantially impact on a process of ideological realignments. In order to capture this, we plan to record and analyse the media content of the most important news media in every member-country over the last three weeks of the campaign. In addition, we aim at recording and analysing the relevant content of social media communication of EP candidates and their followers.

Including pre-existing data

While a realignment might actually manifest itself in one “critical election”, it might also be considered to be the end-point of a longer process in which the relative positions of demand and supply in existing electoral alignments progressively diverge. In the framework of empirical analyses of political representation, such developments are referred to as representation failures (e.g. Thomassen 1994). This is why the analysis of potential realignments requires a longer time frame – a diachronic perspective which allows tracing the evolution of voters’ and parties’ positions on the EU dimension, as well as their perceived salience of and emphasis on this dimension of political conflict. While this will not require the collection of additional data, it will involve a comprehensive re-examination of existing data. This re-examination can be based on the survey data that were collected at the occasion of previous elections of the members of national parliaments⁴ as well as the survey data of the European Election Studies that were collected at the occasion of European Parliament elections.⁵ Finally, the content of election manifestos that political parties have issued at the occasion of previous elections of the members of national parliaments⁶ and of the European Parliament⁷ will also be compared over time.

⁴ The data of national elections studies are currently harmonized and integrated by the TEV COST Action which is chaired by the applicant <www.true-european-voter.eu>. A first comparative dataset is scheduled to be available by 2014.

⁵ The relevant data base here is the survey evidence that has been produced by the series of European Elections Studies <www.ees-homepage.net>. One aspect of this is both significantly under analyzed and of particular relevance for the current research program: the comparative analysis of the evolution of the salience of EU issues both cross-nationally and over-time which can be based on the re-analysis of answers to open-ended questions on the most important political problems.

⁶ The MRG/CMP/MARPOR data base is relevant here. It contains content codes for the manifestos of all relevant parties that participated in national first-order elections held in Europe since the end of WWII. This data base is now hosted by the WZB in Berlin; the applicant is in close working relations with the PIs of that study.

⁷ Relevant here is the *Euromanifesto* database which is directed by the applicant and hosted by the MZES at the University of Mannheim.

Methods

Two main groups of methodological tools will be extensively used: methods that are suited for the analysis of large N survey data sets (i.e. voter, candidate and media study), and specific techniques for the analysis of textual data.

A) Methods specific to the analysis of large N survey data

- Presentation of the data collected in the proposed research program using tables, figures, cross-tabs, visual display techniques etc., to convey estimation assumptions, robustness of associations, or variation in the raw data.
- Factor analysis (exploratory and confirmatory) as well as MDS and IRT models will be used to evaluate the dimensionality of the ideological space in the countries of the European Unions and its evolution over time
- Pooled time series cross section (TSCS) methods used to analyse the evolution of the pro/anti EU dimension across time and countries.
- Multilevel modelling for analysing the substantial cross country differences in the structure of political competition

Logistic and polychoric models will be used for categorical and ordinal data.

B) Methods specific for text analysis

- Coding of party manifesto from 28 EU countries according to one centrally developed Coding Scheme and the quantitative content analyses of party manifestos. Unit of analysis here is a party manifesto, i.e. the issue emphases and policy positions of one party at the occasion of one election.
- Computerized text analysis (based on statistical algorithms as used e.g. in Word Score or Word Fish) for the analysis of raw manifesto data. These methods will be especially useful for the identification of relevant dimensions of party competition.

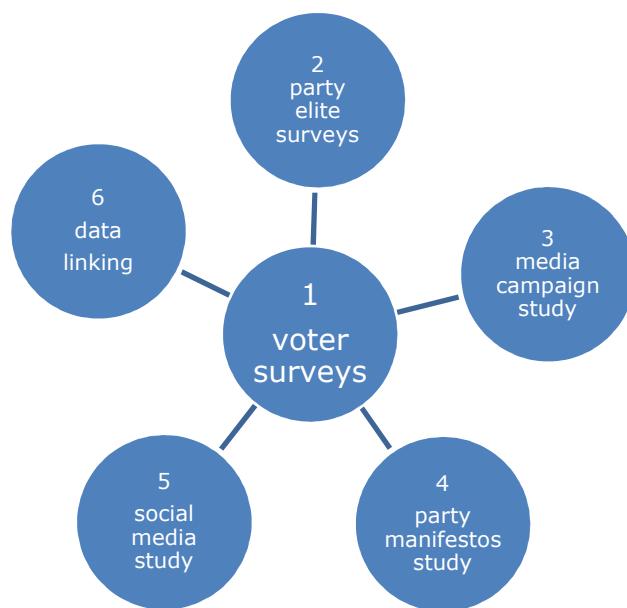
Project structure

The EES research group has an outstanding record in both the management and analysis of cross-national survey data and in the collection, coding and analysis of multi-lingual textual data bases such as the Euromanifestos database. It consists of a team of recognized electoral researchers from top European universities (see the attached list of national collaborators of the EES). It is important to mention that this research group – with an appropriate mixture of stability and change in membership – carried out the series of European Election Studies from 1979 on, including the so far most comprehensive one in 2009 which is said to represent a benchmark for cross-country electoral research(for more details see www.piredeu.eu).

The central element of the study is the representative post-election survey conducted in each of the then 28 EU member countries, which can be thought as the “fixed star” of this research programme which is surrounded by a number of “satellites” (see the graph below which tries to

visualise this galactic scenario). These satellites, while far from indispensable, are expected to add value to the findings of the star. Equally, the findings of satellites will be informed and actually only fully intelligible in conjunction with the star. Three satellites are of a substantial nature – the party elite survey, the media campaign analysis, and the party manifesto content analysis. Two additional satellites, while equally important, are of a more ancillary nature – one in charge of data linking (of the findings of study components one to four) and the other in charge of co-ordination and dissemination of the overall study. It is important to note that these additional elements of the overall research design are not applied for in this research proposal. They will only be carried out if additional funding can be secured. The EES working group is pursuing those complimentary funding perspectives.

Graph



Prospective outputs of the project

This project aims at two classes of output, publications and data. In terms of publications, edited volumes and special issues of journals on the questions outlined in this research proposal are planned. These publications be based on the 2014 Voter Study data, but include additional information from the satellite studies as indicated above. There will also be an important diachronic dimension of comparison which will be based on analyses of previous EES and *Eurobarometer* surveys, the series of *Euromanifestos* from 1979 on, and past media content analyses conducted in the context of the EES which also go back to 1979. In addition, a number of articles will emerge which will analyse, among other things, the diachronic evolution of the political conflict over

European issues, the salience of the EU dimension and ideological realignment and the dimensionality of political contestation at EU level.

The main output of the project in terms of data will be the EES 2014 Voter Study dataset which will integrate the post-electoral surveys carried out at the 2014 EP elections. This database will consist of approximately 28000 cases (approximately 1000 respondents from each of the 28 EU countries). The questions which we plan to include in these surveys will focus on the salient issues and problems and their association with the EU dimension of electoral competition at the time of the 2014 European Parliament election and subsequent national first-order elections.⁸ In addition the questionnaire will include items regarding respondents' trust in the institutions of the EU multi-level system of governance as well as performance evaluations and legitimacy beliefs regarding those institutions. Last but not least, the routine indicators measuring the social background and socialisation of respondents, their partisanship and general ideological outlook, as well as their past and present voting behaviour (participation and party choice) will also be included. In case complementary funding can be secured, the data based on the content analysis of party manifestos, the survey among party elites and the media content analysis will also be made available (see www.ees-homepage.net for examples of the data sharing policy of past European Election Studies).

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⁸ These issue questions are planned to be pre-linked with available expert survey information in order to circumvent possible endogeneity problems and save scarce resources on the data collection side.

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