

# **Polarizing Without Politicizing: The Effect of Lead Candidates' Campaigns on Perceptions of the EU Democracy**

**Robert Rohrschneider**  
Department of Political Science  
The University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
USA  
[roro@ku.edu](mailto:roro@ku.edu)

**Hermann Schmitt**  
Politics, University of Manchester and  
MZES, University of Mannheim

**Sebastian Adrian Popa**  
MZES, University of Mannheim and Doctoral School of Political  
Science, Public Policy and International Relations, CEU

Paper prepared for presentation at the EES 2014 Conference, November 6-8, 2015, MZES,

University of Mannheim.

Has the presence of *Spitzenkandidaten*—“lead-candidates”—in the 2014 European parliamentary election achieved its desired goals? A clear objective of the development of this new institutions was to personify the EU and thus to make the Europe-wide polity more palatable to voters. In the long run, so the argument goes, visible candidates will convey to electorates the fact that they have a choice in the European parliamentary election, via the policy reputation of candidates and their parties. Ultimately, this was to increase interests in the election, raise turnout during the election, and help reduce the perceived distance between the EU and voters after the election. In short, hopes were pinned to the expectation that the EU becomes more relevant and democratic. Has this objective been achieved? This paper adds to an answer of this question by analyzing whether evaluations of lead candidates influence voters’ evaluations of the EU democracy.

Normatively, a positive influence of candidates on perceptions of the European Union is sorely needed after the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression raises questions about the ability of the EU to represent the preferences of mass publics. Since 2008, non-elected actors, like financial markets and international economic organizations like the IMF increasingly shape public policies especially in crisis countries. Citizens in Greece, Portugal, and Spain have clearly noticed this development as they not only demonstrate against austerity policies but increasingly support new political parties that articulate this loss of sovereignty. The success of SYRIZA in Greece symbolizes this turn away from pro-EU parties in Europe. Other countries may experience similar political developments as the popularity of the Italian M5S and, more recently, the Spanish Podemos is fueled by a growing disapproval of the way the EU has designed financial rescue policies. In short, current economic conditions raise the marked possibility that national and EU-wide institutions increasingly fail to articulate the interests of mass publics.

The recent crisis, therefore, puts the quality of democratic governance at the EU level into sharp relief. Nowadays, national governments struggle all too often with the conflicting preferences of

international economic actors, governments in other Euro-member countries, and their domestic constituencies. This tension in the governance of the Eurozone reinforces criticisms about the weakness of the EU's parliament, the dominance of the EU's executive institutions, and the EU's lack of public involvement in the evolving constitutional design of the EU. This makes it all the more important to assess whether the presence of lead candidates successfully conveyed to publics a sense that the institutions of the EU care about public's preferences— a declared goal to feature lead candidates. In this spirit, both the European Parliament and the European Commission hoped that this institutional innovation would mobilize voters to take a greater interest in European elections and strengthen the electoral connection between voters, parties, and the European parliament. While the attempt of the Parliament to impose the lead candidate of the victorious group as Commission President was met with some opposition in the Council, the EP ultimately won the inter-institutional battle when Jean-Claude Juncker was designated as the successor of Manuel Barroso and the next Commission President. However, this leaves the question of what impact, if any, the innovation of candidates competing for the Commission presidency had on the nature of the elections in particular and on mass perceptions of the EU democracy in general. We begin our analysis by describing European voters' perceptions of the lead candidates.

Then, our theoretical considerations of the influence of lead candidates in the 2014 election on the EU's democratic profile led us to consider two models. A first one, which we call the "polarization" model argues that candidates can have a *twofold* influence on public perceptions of the EU. On one hand, it may enhance the EU's democratic image if lead candidates spur positive perceptions of the EU. This is clearly what well-meaning proponents of this new institution envisioned. But *Spitzenkandidaten* can also rouse negative feelings about the EU, namely when they remind those with skeptical views about integration what they actually dislike about the European Union. In short, in an unanticipated twist, the presence of lead candidates may not just have the desirable effect of mobilizing pro-EU

sentiments but may actually reinforce criticisms about the EU among those with negative priors about integration. We contrast the polarization model with a “politicization” model which predicts that instead of seeing a polarized response, we may actually see a more familiar partisan response to lead candidates: those who identify with the party of the lead candidate, like their candidate and think it’s a good idea to have his/her candidate personify the EU; those who identify with a different party or belong to the camp of independents, do not support the candidate in question. The partisan model takes the central role of domestic parties as its starting point and suggests that the institution of *Spitzenkandidaten* has little independent effect on perceptions of the EU in one way or another.

On the whole, our study finds support for the polarization model but little evidence for the partisan mechanism towards a growing politicisation. Our analyses clearly show that the presence of lead candidates has had a polarizing effect on citizens’ perceptions of EU democracy, with important implications. For one, lead candidates do not just shape the views of those who support integration but affect those who oppose it as well—something that cannot have been intended by either creators of the institutions nor lead candidates themselves. What is more, the effect we find emerges even though all major candidates are widely known to be pro-EU. We suspect that if a lead candidate with a distinct anti-EU image—like Nigel Farage—had run in the parliamentary election, the polarizing effect would have been even larger. (We will address in the conclusion the thorny question of whether this means the experiment ought to be abandoned.)

### ***Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliamentary Elections.***

At the heart of this reform of the EP electoral process was a constitutional innovation in the Lisbon Treaty’s article 17, which stated that the results of the European Parliament elections should be taken into account when selecting a Commission President. To reinforce this link, the member parties of the major political groups of the European Parliament decided to each rally behind a common lead

candidate. Hence, for the first time in the history of direct elections of the European Parliament, the extra-parliamentary party organisation of five major political groups of the European Parliament offered voters a choice regarding the next President of the European Commission: Jean Claude Juncker (European People's Party, EPP), Martin Schulz (Party of European Socialists, PES), Guy Verhofstadt (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE), Ska Keller and José Bové (European Green Party), and Alexis Tsipras (Party of the European Left). Two euro-sceptical EP groups -- the European Conservatives and Reformists (headed by the British Conservatives) and the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy group (headed by the British UKIP) – did not present lead candidates.

Both the European Parliament and the European Commission hoped that this innovation would mobilize voters to take a greater interest in European elections and strengthen the electoral connection between them. While the attempt of the Parliament to impose the lead candidate of the largest group as Commission President was met with some opposition in the Council, the EP ultimately won the inter-institutional battle when Jean-Claude Juncker was designated as the successor of Manuel Barroso and the next Commission President. However, this leaves the question of what impact, if any, the innovation of candidates competing for the Commission presidency had on the nature of the elections in particular and on the nature of representation at the EU level in general.

### **Perceptions of Representation.**

In order to assess whether lead candidates mobilize citizens to turnout to vote and enhance positive evaluations of the EU's democratic performance amid the crisis is born out in the 2014 European parliamentary election, we need to consider its conceptual components. Chief among them is a perception that the EU articulates the interests of citizens since democratic representation is a core requirement of western democracies (Dahl, 1989; Pitkin, 1967). The extant research literature suggests two general mechanisms through which representation occurs and which may underlie citizens'

perceptions of the representative process: a substantive and a procedural dimension. Substantively, political representation means that political systems deliver those goods that people prefer, at least some of the time. From this perspective, representation of publics in the EU requires that the interests of citizens partly reflect their policy preferences. For this reason, much representation research includes evaluations of the economy as a predictor of representation perceptions (Bartels, 2008; Rohrschneider, 2005).

Representation also means, however, that citizens have a fair chance to obtain something they value—even if they end up not getting it. For most people realize that they cannot obtain preferred goods all the time given the competition for scarce resources. For that reason, they must have a sense that they had a fair chance to obtain goods they prefer (Dahl, 1989; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Tylor 1989). If they do, they may well evaluate the democratic performance of a regime positively even if they did not obtain preferred policies. Thus, both substantive and procedural aspects form the basis for citizens' assessment of whether a system articulates their interests.

Given the complexities of political representation in modern democracies, most research stresses the substantive component. For example, studies that examine the degree to which parties and voters agree on issues and ideologies are at their core concerned with whether institutions deliver products that match the preferences of mass publics (Dalton et al., 2011; Powell, 2000; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2006, 2012; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997). Other analyses compare the position of electoral pledges made by parties to the ideological preferences of voters (Adams et al., 2004). A more recent stream of research stresses the procedural foundations of regime evaluations (Rohrschneider, 2002, 2005; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000).

### **Representation and lead candidates.**

Against this backdrop, how may the presence of lead candidates influence citizens' evaluations of the EU's democratic performance? The core idea was to politicize and personalize the choice into the EP election campaigns by having competing Commission President candidates with alternative political agendas nominated by Euro-parties, and in turn by having the winning party group nominate their Candidate as the future President of the Commission(Hix, 1997, 1998). In a word, lead candidates may enhance perceptions of substantive representation. Such a change was expected to lead to "public identification of the policy options on the EU table ... In short, there would be democratic politics in the EU for the first time" (Hix, 2008: 164). These hopes were also echoed by both the Parliament and Commission, which expressed the expectation that the Candidates would contribute to creating a direct link between EU citizens and the future president of the Commission (European Parliament 2012; European Commission 2013;).

In addition, a general expectation was that lead candidates would increase perceptions of procedural representation by increasing the accountability of the Commission, and more generally the democratic legitimacy of EU policy-making. In other words, the EP elections would now allow voters to provide the EU executive with a genuine democratic mandate, and to subsequently reward or punish the office holders for the relative realization of this mandate. The increase in electoral accountability in EP elections would also contribute to the legitimacy (so-called input legitimacy) of the European Union (Schmitt, Hobolt and Popa 2015; Hobolt, 2014). There is, in short, a substantive and procedural mechanism which links perceptions of political representation at the EU-level to the competition among lead candidates.

Clearly, the intent of the EU was to strengthen the EU's legitimation of abstract and remote institutions to citizens. By putting a 'face' on the competing Europarties/EP party groups, so the argument goes, lead candidates personify the programs and platforms of their respective political parties (both on national and EU levels). This is all the more so the case because the candidates of the

larger parties were well-known politicians that occupied visible offices in the institutional framework of the EU (e.g., the presidency of the Eurozone in the case of Juncker and of the European Parliament in the case of Schulz). Backing up the importance of leadership cues is a significant strand in the research literature about the influence of candidates. Several studies suggest that cleavage-based partisan identities decline and that individual candidates become increasingly important in shaping the policy image of parties in national elections (Aarts et al., 2011; Amanda, 2011; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). Voters increasingly judge parties on the basis of who articulates programs effectively, rather than relying on their partisan heuristics to decide which parties to support. Consistent with this argument, one cross-national study shows that both party identities and individual entrepreneurship reinforce each other in shaping perceptions of representation in western democracies (Wagner and Weßels, 2012). When parties and candidates are perceived to agree on policies, then voters are especially positive about the effectiveness of the representation process.

There are, then, plenty of political and theoretical reasons to suggest that lead candidates help to link citizens' interests and policy preferences to the prime EU executive, the Commission. They put a face to Europarties/EP party groups. They personify programs. They may thus reduce the perceived distance between parties and voters to the European Parliament. If this is indeed the case, then we would expect that, all else being equal, voters who are aware of the lead candidates are more likely to evaluate the EU's democratic performance positively than citizens who are unaware of their role:

*Hypothesis 1 (legitimization hypothesis): All else being equal, citizens who are aware of the lead candidates are more likely to evaluate the democratic performance of the EU positively than citizens who are unaware of their role.*

As plausible as the reasons underlying the legitimization hypothesis are, however, there is another possibility. It is conceivable—indeed likely we argue—that the campaign activities of broadly EU positive lead candidates<sup>1</sup> *polarize* supporters *and* opponents over the EU. For the legitimization hypothesis (advocated by the EU) contains a “positive mobilization” bias: it assumes that lead candidates will remind voters of the virtues of the EU. This may no doubt be the case—but it does ignore the possibility that critics of the EU are equally reminded by the EU’s flaws via lead candidates.

The reason is this. Voters do not evaluate the EU and candidates in a vacuum. Instead, many of them hold either positive *or* negative priors about the EU, especially several years into the economic crisis which moved many voters from ambivalence about the EU outright into the camp of critics (Bernauer and Vatter, 2012; de Vries, 2013; Roth et al., 2013). Accordingly, because lead candidates are evaluated against voters’ general predispositions about their views regarding the EU both supporters of the EU as well as opponents may be influenced by the presence of the lead candidates. On one hand, since the lead candidates are well-known EU-proponents who unequivocally support Europe’s integration, proponents may indeed be encouraged to think that the EU is articulating their interests more effectively via visible politicians. On the other hand, however, opponents, who are aware of the pro-EU stance of lead candidates, may also be reminded by the perceived flaws of the EU given that the lead candidates do not offer a choice to EU-critics. In short, the presence of lead candidates may raise the salience of pro and anti-EU arguments among voters, depending on their predisposition towards the EU. Thus, there is a distinct possibility that the presence of lead candidates not only generates more positive judgments about the EU’s democratic performance, but also more negative judgments about it *as a result* of the broadly positive EU stances of the lead candidates:

---

<sup>1</sup> This holds at least for the candidates of the three major political groups – EPP, Socialists and Liberals, which are the ones on whom we focus in this paper. However, we could not test the recognition of the lead candidates of all five parties (we left the Greens and the Far Left out), and two outright Euro-sceptic groups did not present lead candidates to start with.

*Hypothesis 2 (polarization hypothesis): All else being equal, citizens who are aware of the lead candidates will evaluate the EU more positively or negatively, depending on their prior EU views.*

But previous EU attitudes are not the only ones which could moderate the effect that recognizing the lead candidates may have on the perceptions regarding EU's democratic performance. As previously mentioned partisan identities have the potential to reinforce the effect of candidates evaluations in shaping perceptions of representation (Wagner and Weßels, 2012). And this is not at all surprising given that it is widely accepted that citizens tend to evaluate the political arena through a partisan lens (Bartels, 2002; Bartle and Bellucci, 2009; Campbell et al., 1960). To be more specific partisanship provides a sense of "we feeling" that is stronger than other psychological constructs and attitudes (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Lazarsfeld et al., 1949) and which has a considerable influence on how citizens perceive the political world (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009; Campbell et al., 1960; Lodge and Hamill, 1986). Some might argue that party competition at the EU level is not yet fully developed given that national parties rather than genuine EU parties compete in the election, and that partisanship therefore might have only a limited role to play. Previous research has shown, however, that "partisanship structures political attitudes and behaviors even in 'party-averse' electoral environments" (Samuels and Zucco, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. This is even more so when we take into account that three most important list leading candidates, which are also the focus of this paper, belong to the three party groups which are most supportive of the EU – the Christian-democrats, the Social-democrats and the liberals (Benoit and Laver, 2012; Helbling et al., 2010; Hix, 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen, 2009). Therefore we expect that the supporters of these three EU-positive party groups (more specifically the supporters of their national member parties) who are aware that their party is participating in the race for the EC presidency will have a higher propensity to consider this race as improving democratic legitimacy of the

---

<sup>2</sup> But even in such a party-averse context we would at least expect that partisans are more likely to recognize the lead candidate of their European party group who is running for Commission presidency.

EU. This is especially the case for supporter of the two largest party groups (i.e. EPP and S&D) whose candidates – Juncker and Schulz – stood a real chance to succeed in the EP nomination for presidency of the European Commission. All in all, partisan attachments combined with the recognition of party candidates for the presidency of the European Commission are expected to politicize the existing division between parties regarding the evaluations of the EU.

*Hypothesis 3 (politicization hypothesis): All else being equal, citizens who are aware of a lead candidate will evaluate the EU more positively or negatively, depending on their party attachments.*

We note here that if we should find evidence supporting this third hypothesis it would also indicate a further politicization of the EU, as partisan differences driving the electoral competition at the national level would now become relevant at the EU level through the campaigns of the lead candidates. There is a clear tension between this and the second hypothesis which suggests that the impact of lead candidates on evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU depends on prior EU attitudes rather than the national party context. Thus, if we would find support for H2 but not for H3 this might indicate that the lead candidates managed to polarize the EP elections without necessarily politicizing them along the classical partisan cleavages – we could be witnessing a process of polarization without politicization. This, in turn, would suggest that lead candidates do more damage than they repair: they introduce new tensions without, however, reinvigorating those partisan mechanisms that can “compete and compromise” at the EU-level.

#### **Data, measures and methods.**

The present paper is one of the first that uses the European Election Study (EES) 2014 Voter Study (Schmitt et al. 2015). This is a nationally representative post-election survey that was realised in each of the 28 member countries of the EU. This study continues the EES tradition of post European Parliament election surveys which started in 1989 (and actually in 1979 with an added section to the questionnaire of the “fall Eurobarometer” at the time). It is worth mentioning that for the first time in the history of EES, this study was commissioned in collaboration with the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit of the European Parliament. The EES part of the study was funded by a consortium of private foundations<sup>3</sup> and benefited in addition from the generous support of TNS Opinion. The data collection was carried out by TNS Opinion in collaboration with its local partners between 30 May and 27 June 2014 (it started five days after the European Parliament elections and lasted for four weeks). The sample is representative at the country level and consists of roughly 1,100 respondents in each EU member country, the total sample size being 30064<sup>4</sup>. All the interviews were carried out face to face (by way of Computer Assisted Personal Interviews, or CAPI)<sup>5</sup>.

Excluding demographics, the survey contains approximately 60 question units, summing up to a total of 220 items. The core of the questionnaire is similar to that of the EES 2009 Voter Study, including traditional items such as left-right and pro-anti EU self- and party- placements, a propensity to vote (PTV) battery, media use items, an open ended “most important issue” question, and so on. One of the main innovations of the 2014 study entails a battery inquiring about respondents’ recognition of the lead candidates (or *Spitzenkandidaten* as they often were called using the German expression) of the three major political groups at the EU level. A second innovation is a focus on the

---

<sup>3</sup> Lead by the Volkswagen Foundation and supported in addition by the Mercator Foundation, the Swedish Riksbank Foundation, and the Portuguese Gulbenkian Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> The exceptions are: Malta, Cyprus and Luxembourg where only approximately 550 respondents were interviewed. Furthermore in Germany the sample was 1648 (consisting of two representative samples for West and East Germany) and the United Kingdom where the sample was 1442, of which 338 interviews were conducted in Northern Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> More details regarding the study can be found at <http://eeshomepage.net/voter-study-2014/>

effects of the economic crisis. A third is that this study uses issue questions in co-ordination with the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2015, therefore allowing for a direct comparison between expert placements of political parties and self-placements of these parties' voters<sup>6</sup>.

The perception of representation at the EU level is conceptualized by taking into account the procedural aspect of representation and measured as an additive index of three items that captures the subjective evaluation of EU's democratic performance. These three items are: whether R trusts in the institutions of the EU, whether R perceives that the European parliament takes into consideration the concerns of citizens, and whether R perceives that one's voice counts in the EU. All items are measured on a 4 point scale ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree", the reliability score of the index is 0.74 (for further details regarding question wording see Appendix 1).

The main instrument which we use to measure the perception of the *Spitzenkandidaten* (i.e. lead candidates) is a "name-party" recognition battery. This requires respondents to identify which EP party group or which national party supports the nomination of the three most important candidates: Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt. Although the question is not put in an open-end format, the respondents were offered four response options and thus not only the three that applied to one of the candidates but also a fourth and false one: "Socialists & Democrat (S&D)" (identified e.g. in Germany by mentioning the SPD), "European People's Party (EPP)" (identified in Germany by the CDU/CSU), "Liberals and Allies Group (ALDE)" (identified in German by the FDP) and finally "The Greens" (identified in Germany by Die Grünen)<sup>7</sup>. The correct answer was therefore neither a trivial one nor easy to guess. In addition, in order to further discourage guessing, the "Don't know" option was also offered. All in all, the battery does not only measure the (subjective) familiarity with the *Spitzenkandidaten* but it

---

<sup>6</sup> The master questionnaire in both English and French is available at the following link: [eeshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Master-Questionnaire.pdf](http://eeshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Master-Questionnaire.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> In countries where two or more parties were expected to join an EP group, the biggest party was mentioned. In countries where there was no party supporting one of the four EP groups, only the name of the EP group was provided.

also tests the ability of respondents to associate them with a specific party. We can safely assume that those who respond correctly to these items are aware that the candidates represent electoral alternatives competing for the EP nomination as President of the European Commission. As the three items are highly correlated and constitute a reliable scale (the alpha level computed based on polychoric correlation is 0.88) we chose to build an additive index<sup>8</sup>.

We measure the attitude of the respondents towards the EU by using an 11 point scale indicator, ranging from 0 “European integration has gone too far” to 10 “European integration should be pushed further”. This is a trend indicator that was commonly employed in the European Election Studies from 1999 on, to measure both the position of citizens and their perception of the location of nationally relevant parties, towards the EU (e.g. Schmitt, 2010; Thomassen, 2009; van der Brug and van der Eijk, 2007).

As it might be argued that the effect of recognition only captures the level of political knowledge or political engagement of the respondents, we control for this possible endogenous effect by including the level of political interest in and knowledge about the EU in our models. Furthermore we also control for a number of factors that have been previously associated with attitudes towards the democratic performance of the EU: perceptions of the democratic performance of the respective member country, and respondents’ education, age, gender, church attendance, union membership, perception of personal economic situation, subjective social class and employment status (cites)<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, at the country level, we also control for the quality of governance (QoG) in a given country (measured using an additive index of the six Worldwide Governance Indicators: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption) and the wealth of a given control, since both factors were shown to impact at

---

<sup>8</sup> Using a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondents recognized any of the candidates and 0 otherwise, revealed substantively identical results.

<sup>9</sup> For a complete description of all variables used in this paper see Appendix 1.

perception about representation at the EU level (Rohrschneider and Loveless, 2010; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000).

All variables were rescaled to a range between 0 and 1, thus allowing for straightforward evaluation and comparison of the strength of their effects (see online appendix for a complete description of all variables).

In order to test our hypothesis we make use of a series of multilevel regressions. We use random intercepts and random slopes for the variables measuring candidate recognition and grand mean centering for aggregate level variables (Enders and Tofighi, 2007). The analysis is conducted in R, using the lme4 package version 1.1-7.<sup>10</sup>

### **Empirical Analysis.**

Table 1 shows that the proportion of respondents, who recognized the candidates (i.e. was able to link them to the correct party). The overall recognition rates are far from being impressive. While the two front runners, i.e. Junker and Schulz, are recognized by 17% and 19%, respectively, of the respondents in our sample, only 9% of the sample was able to recognize Guy Verhofstadt. Of course there are significant country differences as the candidates were better known in their countries of origin and the countries that have the same mother tongues with the candidates.

**[Table 1 around here]**

We report the results of our analysis in Table 2. The Empty Model, which serves as a baseline for comparison, shows that around 13% of the variance in the subjective evaluation of EU's democratic performance is at the country level.

---

<sup>10</sup> Simultaneous analyses were conducted using STATA13 and HLM6.01 which yielded virtually identical results.

**[Table 2 around here]**

The results in Table 2 reveal that the unconditional effect of recognition is not only statically insignificant but also very close to zero. This is to say that recognising the candidates – or not – has little to do with citizens’ evaluations of EU democracy. This finding therefore does not support our first hypothesis. Of course, this is the first time lead candidates ran as the ‘face’ of their party and it may well be the case that future elections will produce stronger effects. Substantively, this finding means that the 2014 election did not produce one of the two desired outcomes that the designers of the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure had envisioned.<sup>11</sup>

We find further evidence undercutting the optimistic premise of H1 when we examine the “polarization” hypotheses. To this end, in Model 3 we added an interaction term between those who are aware of lead candidates and the general orientation of respondents about the EU. The marginal effects graph provides considerable support for the idea that lead candidates primarily reinforce prior orientations about European integration (Figure 1), rather than overcoming them. On the one hand, citizens who support more European integration in general evaluate the democratic performance of the EU positively when they are aware of the role of lead candidates. This may be because they agree with the policies these candidates symbolize, thus reinforcing citizens’ prior beliefs; it may also be because they are aware that the choice of the EC President is (at least to some degree) a result of a competitive electoral process in which they have a voice, which further legitimizes the EU.

**[Figure 1 around here]**

---

<sup>11</sup> We are talking about the desired outcome of a closer democratic linkage; the other desired outcome was an improvement of electoral mobilisation at the occasion of EP elections which we found was modestly achieved (see Schmitt, Hobolt & Popa 2015).

On the other hand, citizens who reject further integration and are mindful of the role of candidates are more negative about the EU's democratic performance. In other words, for individuals who believe that "European integration has gone too far" the marginal effect of recognition is statistically significant and negative. Evidently, for these respondents, the three candidates that we could include in our analysis are just representatives of the "EU establishment" and a reminder of the flaws of the system. Far from being a uniformly positive effect then lead candidates clearly polarize the pre-existing fault lines over EU integration. These findings are not driven by any of the three candidates in particular. The results presented in Table 3 show that the interaction between support for EU integration and recognition of a specific candidate is the same across all three candidates (see Models 5, 7 and 9 in Table 3).

**[Table 3 around here]**

The results presented in Table 3<sup>12</sup> mostly speak to our *politicization hypothesis* (H3). Here we find that in a context where it is national rather than genuine EU parties who are competing in the electoral race, (national) party attachments are still relevant as perceptual filters. Partisans are more likely to recognize the lead candidate of their European party group (see results in Appendix 3). However, we find no evidence to support our politicization hypothesis. Across all the three main party groups we did not find any statistically significant difference in EU democracy evaluations between the partisans who recognize "their" lead candidate and those who are not aware that such a candidate is

---

<sup>12</sup> It needs to be noted that as there is no party that is part of the EP party group in the UK, there cannot be any partisans of an EP party in this country. Therefore in Model 5 and Model 6 UK was excluded from our analysis and the N of countries dropped to 27. The same issue can be noted in the case of liberal (ALDE) parties in Greece, Hungary, Latvia and Malta. Therefore in Model 8 and Model 9 these countries were dropped from the analysis. Nevertheless keeping these countries in the analysis reveal an identical pattern of results.

competing for the presidency of the Commission. This suggests that the polarization effect we uncovered in the previous table is hardly driven by partisanship.

**[Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 around here]<sup>13</sup>**

We do find a marginally significant interaction between partisanship and recognition in the case of the S&D supporters (Model 5). However, contrary to the politicization hypothesis, Figure 2.1 suggests that this result is not driven by S&D partisans. The statistically significant difference is found among those who are not SD partisans. This could still be S&D voters or sympathisers of course. In their case we note that recognizing Schulz has a positive impact on the evaluation of EU's democratic performance. We might read this as an indication that Schulz – other than the two other *Spitzenkandidaten* that we could include in our survey instrument – was able to reach well beyond his core clientele.

But be that as it may, this finding generally does not add support to our politicisation hypothesis (H3). In the case of S&D partisans there is no statically significant difference between those who recognize him and those who do not. The same pattern can be noted in the case on Junker (Figure 2.2) and Verhofstadt (Figure 2.3). Their candidacy for the presidency of the EC did not have an impact on evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU among the partisans of the parties supporting their candidacy. The other side of the coin should also be mentioned, however: the campaign activities of these candidates did not exacerbate existing partisan conflicts as recognizing the lead candidates did not have a negative impact for those who are not particularly close to any of the parties which supported the candidacy of Junker, Schulz and Verhofstadt.

All in all we found no evidence that the lead candidates were able to politicize the European Parliament election along the classical partisan fault lines. The only aspect that moderates the effect of

---

<sup>13</sup> In these figures we plot the difference in the predicted evaluation of EU's democratic performance between those who recognize a candidate and those who do not recognize him depending on their partisan affiliations.

recognizing the candidate is previous attitudes towards the EU. Therefore we could safely say that the presence of lead candidates did indeed manage to polarize attitudes towards the EU, but contrary to the expectation of the European Parliament and the European Commissions, this institutional innovation did not manage to politicize the EP elections, at least not along partisan lines.

### **Discussion.**

For many, the 2014 European Parliament election was characterised by the spectacular success of a number of Euro-sceptical parties. The French Front National and the British UKIP are examples from the far right, but Syriza in Greece did well too, as did the Spanish movement/party Podemos – the latter two being located on the far left of their national political spectrum. Even in the relatively stable party system of Germany could a Euro-sceptical party (AfD) for the first time secure a respectable number of seats in the European Parliament. But as impressive as these results are, only time will tell whether this was the most important aspect of the direct election of the members of the European Parliament in 2014. The series of direct elections of MEPs starts in 1979. Beforehand, EP members were appointed by national parliaments (following the group strengths in the respective national parliament proportionally). From 1979 on, national parties campaigned in European Parliament elections largely autonomously. They followed national agendas and were only loosely co-ordinated by the often vague programmatic platforms of EU-wide political parties and EP political groups. This changed profoundly 35 years later when for the campaigns of the eighth direct election of EP members five of seven consolidated European parties (EP groups) nominated lead candidates, or *Spitzenkandidaten*, to organise a central election campaign. This innovation in the 2014 EP election not only was meant to link the election result to the selection of the Commission president; it also intended to further the integration of the Europarties and the harmonisation of their EP election campaigns.

Direct elections to the European Parliament have come a long way over these years. Against this historical background, our central research question in the present article was whether this procedural innovation had an effect on citizens' perceptions of the performance of representative democracy at EU level. We investigated whether those who correctly identify (and thus recognise) the lead candidates are more favourable about the performance of EU democracy than those who do not. Our main findings, in a nutshell, are the following. First of all: given that euro-sceptical parties did not present such lead candidates, we find that recognizing them in their role in the race has a polarising effect. EU positive citizens applaud this development and evaluate the performance of EU democracy more positively than those who are more sceptical about the virtues of European integration and find themselves left out of the race of the lead candidates. Unfortunately, however, when viewed from the intended goals, the presence of lead candidates backfired, or at least had the unintended consequences of galvanizing those voters who are generally opposed to integration. These voters are reminded of what they dislike about the EU, and thus are more negative about the EU's democratic capacity than they would have been without the presence of *Spitzenkandidaten*. Secondly, against the high hopes of both the Commission and the Parliament regarding the capacity of the lead candidates to involve EU citizens in the investiture of the president of the European Commission through the election of the members of the European Parliament, we found that this institutional innovation fell short of this intended politicization of the EU electoral arena. As far as we can tell, partisan differences which drive the perception of electoral politics at the national level remained alien to popular evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU. While this institutional innovation unintentionally contributed to the polarisation of citizens on the EU dimension, it did not succeed in contributing to the politicisation of EU politics along partisan lines.

Overall, then our assessment about whether the procedural innovation of lead candidates helps the EU to overcome its diagnosed democratic deficit (see for many Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Hix, 2008) is fairly skeptical for the time being. The polarizing tendency that we identified in the interaction of EU

support and candidate recognition is worrisome for those who support greater integration. One of the main reasons for this might be that the campaigns of the lead candidates – at least as far as we could measure it – did not articulate a credible Eurosceptical position that no doubt does also exist in the EU citizenry, and did receive quite some electoral support. But we must not forget – 2014 was just the beginning. A more complete field of lead candidates might enter in the campaign in 2019, including in addition to those political forces that ran in 2014 some prominent Eurosceptical political actors. And the effects that we do find might increase in strength when the lessons from 2014 are learned – by the candidates themselves, by the national parties that support them, and last but not least by the inter-institutional coordination between Parliament, Council and Commission. The Parliament’s motto for the 2014 election was “This time is different”. We do expect by the time of the 2019 election of the members of the European Parliament that the electoral process will again be different—and display by then an increased effect of lead candidates on citizens’ electoral mobilization and on their evaluations of political representation at EU level.

## References.

- Aarts K, Blais A and Schmitt H (eds) (2011) *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adams J, Clark M, Ezrow L, et al. (2004) Understanding Change and Stability in Party Ideologies: Do Parties Respond to Public Opinion or to Past Election Results? *British Journal of Political Science*, Cambridge University Press, 34(4), 589–610.
- Amanda B (2011) *Platform or Personality?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bartels LM (2002) Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions. *Political Behavior*, Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, 24(2), 117–150.
- Bartels LM (2008) *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bartle J and Bellucci P (2009) Introduction: partisanship, social identity and individual attitudes. In: Bartle J and Bellucci P (eds), *Political Parties and Partisanship*, New York: Routledge, pp. 1–25.
- Benoit K and Laver M (2012) The dimensionality of political space: Epistemological and methodological considerations. *European Union Politics*, 13, 194–218.
- Bernauer J and Vatter A (2012) Can't get no satisfaction with the Westminster model? Winners, losers and the effects of consensual and direct democratic institutions on satisfaction with democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(4), 435–468.
- Campbell A, Converse PE, Miller WE, et al. (1960) *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Dahl RA (1989) *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dalton RJ and Wattenberg MP (eds) (2000) *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton RJ, Farrell DM and McAllister I (2011) *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage: How Parties Organize Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- De Vries C and Hobolt SB (2012) When dimensions collide: The electoral success of issue entrepreneurs. *European Union Politics*, 13(2), 246–268.
- De Vries CE (2013) Ambivalent Europeans? Public Support for European Integration in East and West. *Government and Opposition*, Cambridge University Press, 48(03), 434–461.
- Enders CK and Tofighi D (2007) Centering predictor variables in cross-sectional multilevel models: a new look at an old issue. *Psychological methods*, 12(2), 121–38.
- Follesdal A and Hix S (2006) Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(3), 533–562.
- Helbling M, Hoeglinger D and Wüest B (2010) How political parties frame European integration. *European Journal of Political Research*, 49(4), 495–521.
- Hix S (1997) Executive Selection in the European Union: Does the Commission President Investiture Procedure Reduce the Democratic Deficit? *European Integration online Papers*, European Integration On-line Papers, 1(21).
- Hix S (1998) Choosing Europe: Real Democracy for the European Union. *EuroVisions: New Dimensions of European Integration, Demos Collection*, 13, 14–17.
- Hix S (1999) Dimensions and alignments in European Union politics: Cognitive constraints and partisan responses. *European Journal of Political Research*, 35(1), 69–106.
- Hix S (2008) *What's Wrong With the European Union and How to Fix It*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Hobolt SB (2014) A vote for the President? The role of Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Routledge, 21(10), 1528–1540.
- Hobolt SB and de Vries CE (2015) Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition. *Comparative Political Studies*, 0010414015575030–.
- Lodge M and Hamill R (1986) A partisan schema for political information processing. *The American Political Science Review*, 80(2), 505–520.

- Pitkin HF (1967) *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Powell GB (2000) *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rohrschneider R (2002) The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-Wide Government. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 463–475.
- Rohrschneider R (2005) Institutional Quality and Perceptions of Representation in Advanced Industrial Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(7), 850–874.
- Rohrschneider R and Loveless M (2010) Macro Salience: How Economic and Political Contexts Mediate Popular Evaluations of the Democracy Deficit in the European Union. *The Journal of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 72(04), 1029–1045.
- Rohrschneider R and Whitefield S (2006) Political Parties, Public Opinion and European Integration in Post-Communist Countries: The State of the Art. *European Union Politics*, 7(1), 141–160.
- Rohrschneider R and Whitefield S (2012) *The Strain of Representation: How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roth F, Felicitas-Lehmann D N and Otter T (2013) *Crisis and Trust in National and European Union Institutions--Panel Evidence for the EU, 1999-2012*. RSCAS Working Paper, Florence.
- Rovny J (2012) Who emphasizes and who blurs? Party strategies in multidimensional competition. *European Union Politics*, 13(2), 269–292.
- Samuels D and Zucco C (2013) The Power of Partisanship in Brazil: Evidence from Survey Experiments. *American Journal of Political Science*, 00(0), n/a–n/a.
- Sanchez-Cuenca I (2000) The Political Basis of Support for European Integration. *European Union Politics*, 1(2), 147–171.
- Schmitt H (ed.) (2010) *European Parliament Elections After Eastern Enlargement*. London: Routledge.

Schmitt H and Thomassen J (eds) (1999) *Political representation and legitimacy in the European Union*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schmitt H and Thomassen J (2009) The EU Party System after Eastern Enlargement. *Journal of European Integration*, 31(5), 569–587.

Thomassen J (ed.) (2009) *The Legitimacy of the European Union After Enlargement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomassen J and Schmitt H (1997) Policy Representation. *European Journal of Political Research*, 32, 165–184.

Van der Brug W and van der Eijk C (eds) (2007) *European Elections and Domestic Politics Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press.

Wagner A and Weßels B (2012) Parties and their Leaders. Does it matter how they match? The German General Elections 2009 in comparison. *Electoral Studies*, 31(1), 72–82.

Table 1: Candidate recognition rates (i.e. percent of the sample correctly identifying the candidates)

	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt
Austria	43.90%	39.77%	15.80%
Belgium	31.09%	25.55	69.46
Bulgaria	13.45%	17.63%	4.63%
Croatia	11.97%	10.58%	4.08%
Cyprus	17.17%	12.08%	5.66%
Czech Republic	4.5%	5.69%	3.40%
Denmark	17.42%	11.34%	3.23%
Estonia	4.32%	5.24%	2.12%
Finland	25.18%	17.24%	11.50%
Flanders	34.40%	26.72%	77.28%
France	12.48%	16.67%	2.42%
Germany	63.65%	66.93%	8.01%
Great Britain	8.4%	2.03%	1.2%
Greece	21.84%	18.25%	1.76%
Hungary	9.15%	9.69%	6.16%
Ireland	13.41%	5.00 %	13.15%
Italy	13.20%	20.26%	8.71%
Latvia	14.69%	4.17%	2.75%
Lithuania	5.47%	7.48%	4.11%
Luxembourg	80.48%	45.91%	23.05%
Malta	34.37%	49.82%	4.23%
Netherlands	23.44%	16.00 %	24.16%
Northern Ireland	10.36%	9.17%	4.73%
Poland	5.56%	6.79%	5.15%
Portugal	12.58%	9.20%	4.94%
Romania	5.42%	11.64%	3.34%
Slovakia	6.58%	6.48%	5.11%
Slovenia	17.67%	15.84%	8.92%
Spain	10.94%	10.32%	3.35%
Sweden	21.15%	11.54%	5.16%
UK	8.87%	3.73%	2.04%
Wallonia	25.58%	23.97%	58.82%
EU mean	18.91%	16.87%	8.78%

Table 2: Explaining the subjective evaluation of EU's democratic performance

	Empty Model	Model 2: effect of GDP (H1b)	Model 3 Effect of recognition moderated by attitudes towards the EU (H2)
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Intercept	0.489 <sup>***</sup> (0.016)	0.156 <sup>***</sup> (0.011)	0.156 <sup>***</sup> (0.011)
Recognition		0.001 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.006)
Support EU integration		0.154 <sup>***</sup> (0.013)	0.153 <sup>***</sup> (0.013)
Demo performance (country)		0.545 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)	0.546 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)
EU knowledge		-0.015 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.016 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Interest in politics		0.00003 (0.003)	0.0001 (0.003)
Education secondary		0.012 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.012 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)
Education tertiary		-0.073 <sup>***</sup> (0.007)	-0.073 <sup>***</sup> (0.007)
Age		0.018 <sup>***</sup> (0.002)	0.018 <sup>***</sup> (0.002)
Female		0.030 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.030 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Religiosity		-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
Union		0.092 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.092 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Economic situation		0.025 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.026 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Subjective class		0.055 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	0.054 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)
Unemployed		-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
QoG		0.003 (0.053)	0.002 (0.052)
GDP		-0.137* (0.065)	-0.136* (0.065)
Recognition X Support EU			0.070 <sup>***</sup> (0.014)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>			
Intercept	0.0077	0.0020	0.0020
Recognition		0.0045	0.0005
Support EU integration		0.0043	0.0043
Residuals	.0541	0.0298	0.0297
N (individuals)	23380	23380	23380
N (country)	28	28	28
LL	889	7966	7978
AIC	-1774	-15884	-1590.

standard errors in parenthesis; Notes: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.00

Table 3: Explaining the subjective evaluation of EU's democratic performance, by partisanship

	Model 4: Schulz recognition and partisanship, SD	Model 5: Schulz recognition and partisanship, SD	Model 6: Juncker recognition and partisanship, EPP	Model 7: Juncker recognition and partisanship, EPP	Model 8: Verhofstad recognition and partisanship, ALDE	Model 9: Verhofstad recognition and partisanship, ALDE
<i>Fixed effects</i>						
Intercept	0.085 <sup>***</sup> (0.012)	0.088 <sup>***</sup> (0.013)	0.079 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.082 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.079 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.082 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)
Recognition (party candidate)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.028 <sup>**</sup> (0.010)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.028 <sup>**</sup> (0.010)
Party ID	-0.004 (0.011)	0.001 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)
Support EU integration	0.156 <sup>***</sup> (0.013)	0.148 <sup>***</sup> (0.013)	0.164 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.159 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.164 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)	0.159 <sup>***</sup> (0.015)
Demo performance (country)	0.555 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	0.555 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	0.563 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	0.563 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	0.563 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)	0.563 <sup>***</sup> (0.006)
EU knowledge	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	-0.017 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Interest in politics	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)
Education secondary	0.012 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.012 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.009 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	0.009 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	0.009 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)	0.009 <sup>*</sup> (0.004)
Education tertiary	-0.072 <sup>***</sup> (0.007)	-0.073 <sup>***</sup> (0.007)	-0.070 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	-0.070 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	-0.070 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	-0.070 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)
Age	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.002)	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.002)	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)	0.019 <sup>***</sup> (0.003)
Female	0.027 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.027 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.034 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)	0.034 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)	0.034 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)	0.034 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)
Religiosity	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Union	0.091 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.091 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.089 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.089 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.089 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.089 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Economic situation	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)	0.023 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Subjective class	0.055 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	0.055 <sup>***</sup> (0.008)	0.052 <sup>***</sup> (0.009)	0.052 <sup>***</sup> (0.009)	0.052 <sup>***</sup> (0.009)	0.052 <sup>***</sup> (0.009)
Unemployed	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)
QoG	-0.127 <sup>**</sup> (0.049)	-0.124 <sup>*</sup> (0.049)	-0.052 (0.065)	-0.050 (0.064)	-0.052 (0.065)	-0.050 (0.064)
GDP	0.004 (0.039)	0.002 (0.039)	-0.026 (0.053)	-0.028 (0.052)	-0.026 (0.053)	-0.028 (0.052)
Candidate visits (weighted by N of MEP)	0.182 <sup>***</sup> (0.036)	0.181 <sup>***</sup> (0.036)	-0.043 (0.037)	-0.049 (0.038)	-0.043 (0.037)	-0.049 (0.038)
Recognition X Party ID		-0.020 <sup>*</sup> (0.008)		-0.005 (0.011)		-0.005 (0.011)
Recognition X Support EU		0.035 <sup>***</sup> (0.011)		0.050 <sup>**</sup> (0.016)		0.050 <sup>**</sup> (0.016)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>						
Intercept	0.0015	0.0016	0.0013	0.0013	0.0017	0.0017
Support EU integration	0.0040	0.0041	0.0034	0.0034	0.0047	0.0049
Recognition	0.0002	0.0002	0.0001	0.0001	0.0003	0.0003
Party ID	0.0033	0.0032	0.0029	0.0029	0.0002	0.0002
Residuals	0.0328	0.0294	0.0289	0.0289	0.0295	0.0295
N (individuals)	21249	21249	20362	20362	18612	18612
N (country)	28	28	27	27	24	24
LL	7215	7223	7099	7104	6306	6311
AIC	-14370	-14382	-14137	-14154	-12552	-12558

standard errors in parenthesis; Notes: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.00

Figure 1: Marginal effect of recognition depending on support for EU integration

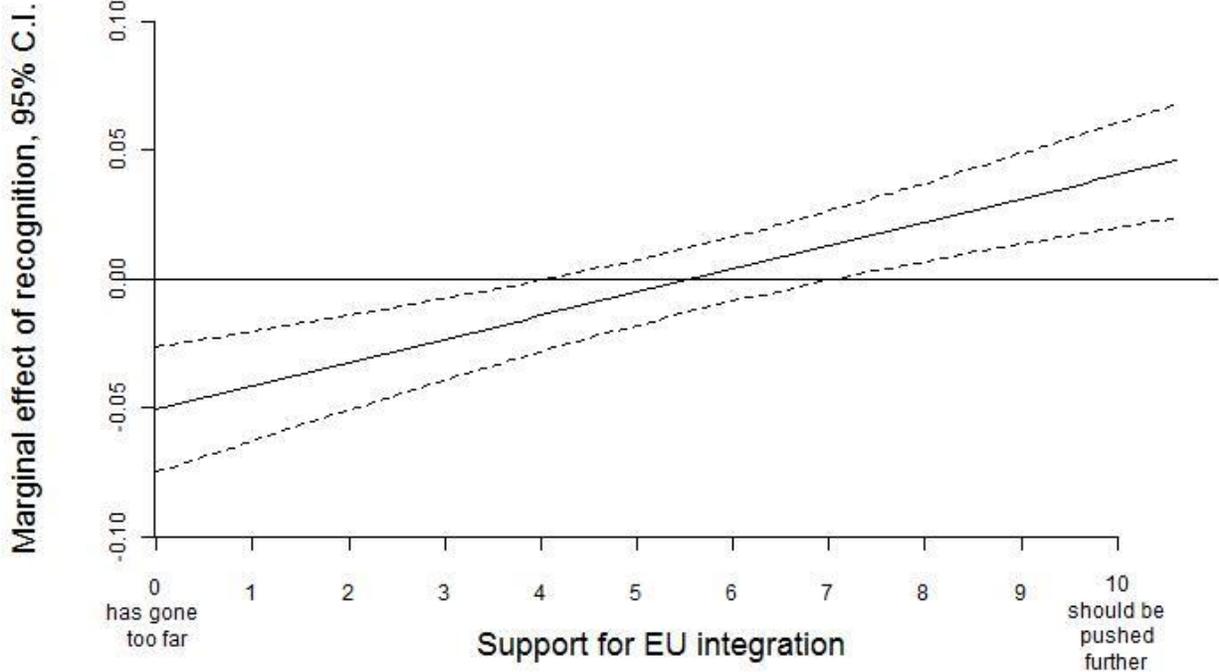


Figure 2.1: Marginal effect of recognition Schulz depending on SD partisanship

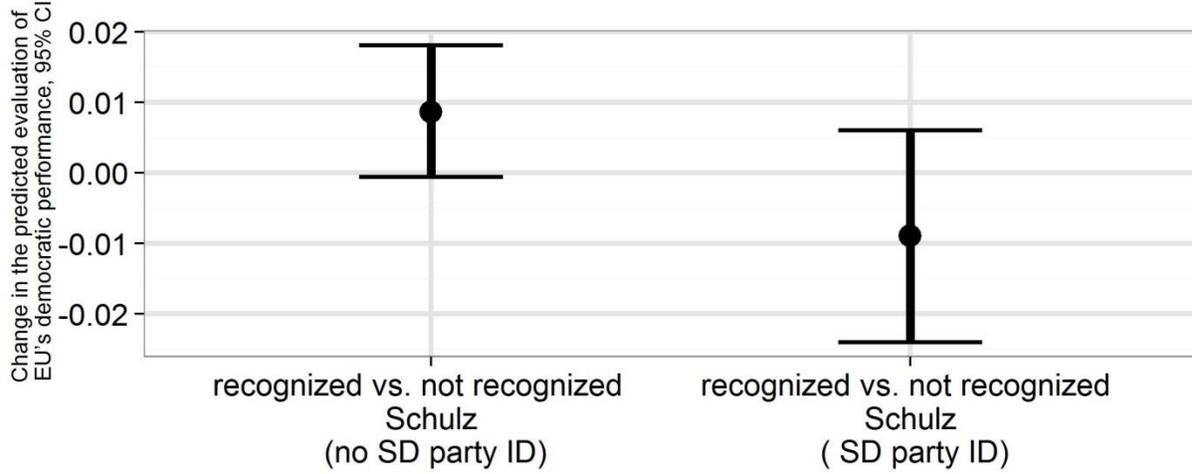


Figure 2.2: Marginal effect of recognition Juncker depending on EPP partisanship

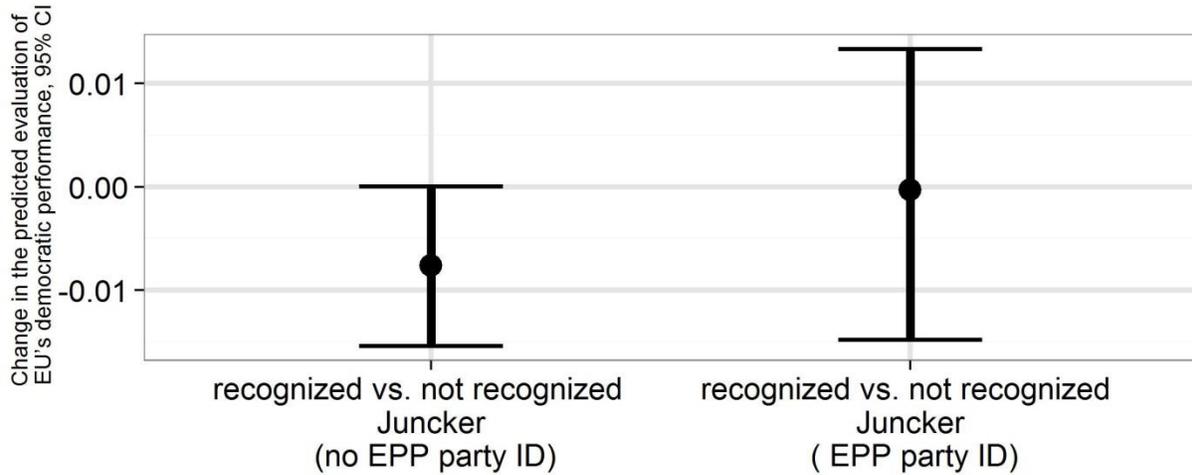
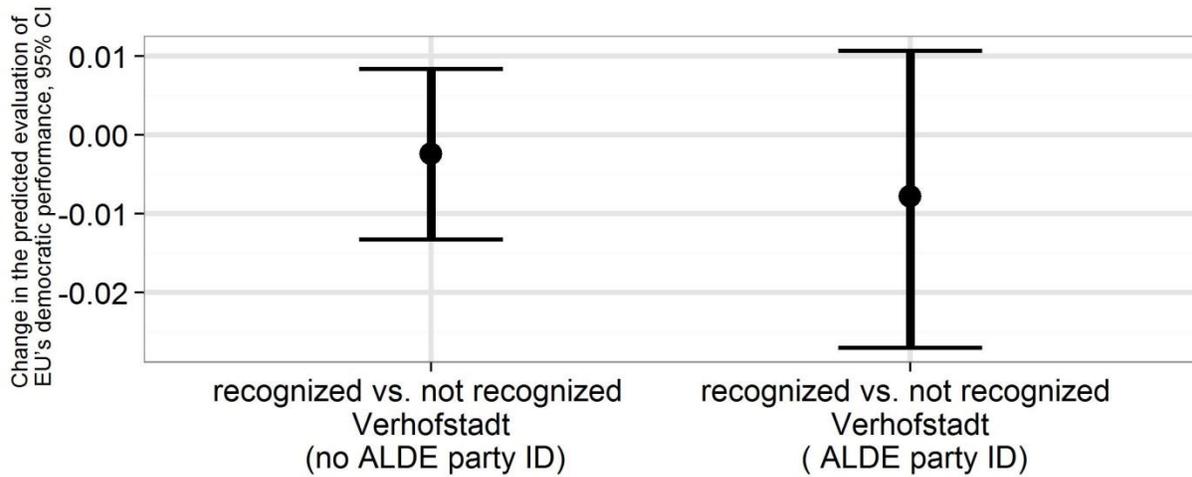


Figure 2.4: Marginal effect of recognition Verhofstad depending on ALDE partisanship



## APPENDIX 1. Variable description.

### *Dependent variable:*

**Democratic performance of the EU:** additive index computed as the mean of three variables: R trusts in the institutions of the EU (original question wording Qp6.2), whether R perceives that the European parliament takes into consideration the concerns of citizens (original question wording Qp6.4), and whether R perceives that one's voice counts in the EU (original question wording D72.1) . Rescaled to take values between 0 (lowest evaluation) and 1 (highest evaluation).

*Explanatory variables, individual component (level 1), original question available at the following link:* [eeshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/EB0817UKXTRA.pdf](http://eeshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/EB0817UKXTRA.pdf)

**Recognition:** computed as the summation of three variables **Junker recognition**, **Schulz recognition** and **Verhofstad recognition**, rescaled to take values between 0 (did not recognize any of the candidates) and 1 (recognized all three of the candidates).

**Junker recognition:** original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the European People's Party/(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Junker's nomination and 0 otherwise. 'Don't Know' answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008; Hansen, 2009a.)

**Schulz recognition:** original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the Socialist & Democrats/(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Junker's nomination and 0 otherwise. 'Don't Know' answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008; Hansen, 2009a.)

**Verhofstad recognition:** original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the Liberals and Allies Group/(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Junker's nomination and 0 otherwise. 'Don't Know' answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008; Hansen, 2009a.)

Note: in countries where two or more parties were expected to join an EP group, the biggest party was mentioned. In countries where there was no party supporting one of the four EP groups, only the name of the EP group was provided.

**Partisanship:** original question QP21, recode 1 for those who consider themselves close to a party supporting a specific candidate( parties belonging to the SD party group in the case of Schulz, parties belonging to the EPP party group in the case on Junker and parties belonging to the ALDE party group in the case of Verhofstad) and 0 otherwise.

**Support EU integration:** original question wording QPP18 order was reversed and rescaled in the analysis, the final variables takes values for 0 reflecting that the respondent considers that “European unification has already gone too far” to 1 reflecting that the respondent considers ‘European unification should be pushed further.

**Demo performance (country):** index computed as the mean of three variables: R trusts in the institutions of country (original question wording Qpp9.1), whether R perceives that the national parliament takes into consideration the concerns of citizens (original question wording Qpp9.2), and whether R perceives that one’s voice counts in the country (original question wording D72.2) . Rescaled to take values between 0 (lowest evaluation) and 1 (highest evaluation).

**EU Knowledge:** measure of political knowledge that ranges from 0 to 5, reflecting the correct True/False answers given by each respondent to. “Don’t Know” answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008; Hansen, 2009a).

QPP23.1. Switzerland is a member of the EU. True/False

QPP23.2 Each Member State elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament.  
True/False

**Interest in politics:** original wording QP6.9 Answers order was reversed and rescaled in the analysis, the final variables takes values for 0 reflecting ‘No, not at all’ to 1 reflecting ‘yes totally’.

**EU membership:** original question wording QP7, recoded to take 1 ‘EU membership is a good thing’ and 0 otherwise.

**Married:** original question D7c, recoded to 1 married and 0 otherwise.

**Secondary education:** original question VD11, recoded 1 for those who ended their education between the age of 16 and 19 and 0 otherwise.

**Tertiary education:** original question VD8, recoded 1 for those who ended their education after the age of 20 and 0 otherwise.

**Age:** original question VD11.

**Female:** original question D10, recoded to 1 'female' and 0 'men'.

**Unemployed:** original question C14, recoded to 1 'unemployed' and 0 'otherwise'.

**Rural:** original question D25, recoded to 1 'rural residence' and 0 'otherwise'.

**Religious:** original question D75, recoded to take values between 0 'never attends religious services' to 1 'attends religious services more than once a week'.

**Union member:** original question D76, recoded 1 if respondent and/or somebody else in the household is union member and 0 otherwise

*Explanatory variables, macro component (level 2)*

**QoG:** an additive index, compute as the mean the six Worldwide Governance Indicators (cites): voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption, measured in 2013 (source: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>) the six indicators are highly correlated and constitute a reliable scale ( $\alpha=0.95$ ); rescaled to takes values between 0 (minimum) and 1 (maximum).

**GDP:** natural logarithm of GDP per capita as reported by EUROSTAT for 2013 (source: ); rescaled to takes values between 0 (minimum) and 1 (maximum).

**Candidate visits:** number of campaigning days a given candidate spent in a given country in the two month before the EP elections divide by the number of MEPs (as a control for population size) of the country.

**APPENDIX 2.** Robustness check, measuring recognition using a dichotomous variable, i.e. recognized any of the candidates vs. did not recognized any of the candidates

	Empty Model	Model 2: effect of GDP (H1b)	Model 3 Effect of recognition moderated by attitudes towards the EU (H2)
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Intercept	0.489 *** (0.016)	0.156 *** (0.011)	0.156 *** (0.011)
Recognition		-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Support EU integration		0.154 *** (0.013)	0.144 *** (0.013)
Demo performance (country)		0.546 *** (0.005)	0.546 *** (0.005)
EU knowledge		-0.015 *** (0.004)	-0.015 *** (0.004)
Interest in politics		0.0001 (0.003)	0.0001 (0.003)
Education secondary		0.012 *** (0.003)	0.012 *** (0.003)
Education tertiary		-0.073 *** (0.007)	-0.073 *** (0.007)
Age		0.018 *** (0.002)	0.018 *** (0.002)
Female		0.030 *** (0.004)	0.030 *** (0.004)
Religiosity		-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
Union		0.093 *** (0.004)	0.093 *** (0.004)
Economic situation		0.025 *** (0.004)	0.026 *** (0.004)
Subjective class		0.054 *** (0.008)	0.054 *** (0.008)
Unemployed		-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
QoG		-0.135* (0.064)	-0.140* (0.064)
GDP		-0.002 (0.052)	-0.0001 (0.051)
Recognition X Support EU			0.035 *** (0.009)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>			
Intercept	0.0077	0.0021	0.0021
Recognition		0.0001	0.0001
Support EU integration		0.0042	0.0043
Residuals	.0541	0.0298	0.0298
N (individuals)	23380	23380	23380
N (country)	28	28	28
LL	889	7965	7973
AIC	-1774	-15882	-15895

**Appendix 3: Explaining the effect of partisanship on recognition**

	Model A1: Schulz recognition	Model A2: Junker recognition	Model 6: Verhofstadt recognition
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Intercept	-3.798** (1.404)	-6.296*** (0.968)	-5.001** (1.608)
Party ID	0.274** (0.085)	0.162* (0.076)	0.340** (0.115)
Support EU integration	0.311*** (0.071)	0.275*** (0.068)	0.477*** (0.091)
Demo performance (country)	0.381*** (0.114)	0.373*** (0.110)	0.308* (0.148)
EU knowledge	0.856*** (0.082)	0.866*** (0.079)	0.408*** (0.102)
Political discussion	0.264*** (0.064)	0.229*** (0.064)	0.199* (0.082)
Political efficacy	-0.002 (0.110)	-0.026 (0.109)	-0.149 (0.151)
News consumption	0.251 (0.149)	0.310* (0.146)	0.240 (0.184)
Exposure to campaign	0.170** (0.052)	0.074 (0.050)	-0.072 (0.065)
Campaign involvement	1.044*** (0.119)	0.947*** (0.114)	0.946*** (0.151)
Contact by politician	0.017 (0.060)	0.043 (0.056)	0.163* (0.075)
Education secondary	0.267*** (0.059)	0.249*** (0.057)	0.245** (0.077)
Education tertiary	0.456*** (0.061)	0.530*** (0.059)	0.360*** (0.078)
Age	1.023*** (0.129)	1.166*** (0.123)	0.246 (0.163)
Female	-0.495*** (0.042)	-0.493*** (0.040)	-0.374*** (0.054)
Religiosity	-0.118 (0.074)	-0.096 (0.071)	-0.201* (0.092)
Union	-0.013 (0.054)	0.056 (0.050)	-0.057 (0.066)
Interest in politics	1.183*** (0.083)	1.206*** (0.080)	0.812*** (0.108)
Economic situation	0.250** (0.076)	0.267*** (0.073)	0.137 (0.097)
Subjective class	0.418* (0.138)	0.287* (0.131)	0.282 (0.176)
Unemployed	-0.126 (0.087)	-0.022 (0.081)	-0.066 (0.106)
QoG	-0.009 (0.005)	0.032*** (0.010)	-0.044** (0.015)
GDP	1.114*** (0.288)	0.554* (0.252)	0.504 (0.410)
Party support	-0.141 (0.081)	0.055 (0.061)	0.006 (0.104)
Visited country	1.450** (0.531)	1.707*** (0.387)	1.722** (0.594)
Population size (log)	-3.798** (1.404)	-6.296*** (0.968)	-5.001** (1.608)
Candidate nationality	0.274** (0.085)	0.162* (0.076)	0.340** (0.115)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>			
Intercept	0.711	0.413	0.952
Party ID	0.108	0.070	0.128
N (individuals)	20992	20992	20992
N (country)	28	28	28
LL	7917	8504	7917
AIC	15889	17065	10836

standard errors in parenthesis; Notes: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.00