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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Towards the Formation of Genuine European Parties? Examining and Comparing the Cases of DiEM25 and Volt Europa

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**ABSTRACT:** The 2019 European Parliament (EP) election saw the participation of two transnational parties: DiEM25 and Volt Europa. Both seek to democratise the European Union (EU) by engaging with European institutions and mobilising their supporters across member states, putting the EU's democratic deficit at the centre of their endeavour. They consider the European space as their primary field of appeal and mobilization, adopting a transnational conception of 'the people' as the source of democratic legitimacy. This paper explores the potential of genuine pan-European parties in increasing public contestation and inclusiveness at the European level and in democratising EU politics by treating DiEM25 and Volt as prototypical cases. Through a comparative analysis, we highlight the novelties of the two parties in relation to existing 'Europarties' and assess how these respond to deficiencies related to the democratic deficit. We conclude by reflecting upon what DiEM25 and Volt reveal about the potentials and challenges of 'transnationalising' EU politics.

**KEYWORDS:** Democratic Deficit, DiEM25, European Parties, European Union, Volt Europa

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## 1. Introduction

European parties have long been considered crucial components for Europe's democratic politics. Some perceived their emergence as an 'exceptional case of transnational representation' (Salm 2019, 2) signifying a move from a 'Europe *des patries*' (a Europe of nations) to a 'Europe *des partis*' (a Europe of parties) (Marquand 1978, 445; emphasis ours). Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union acknowledges their

importance in ‘forming European political awareness’ and ‘expressing the will of citizens of the Union’ (TEU, Article 10.4). Yet others see political parties at the European level as weak and insignificant due to their structural subordination to national party interests, which reduces them to ‘second order parties’ (Heidar 2003, 3). Both views are (to some extent) right. On the one hand, the emergence of genuine European parties can contribute to achieving a more democratic Europe; a ‘Europe *des peuples*’ (a Europe of the peoples) (Marquand 1978, 445). On the other hand, Europe’s political landscape is in practice still marked by the absence of truly European parties and a representative European-wide party system (Follesdal and Hix 2006; Hobolt 2014, 1531). Party competition – with democratic contestation for political leadership and meaningful debate over different policy agendas – does not effectively take place at the European level while European elections themselves remain ‘second order’ national elections (Follesdal and Hix 2006, 552-6; Reif and Schmitt 1980, 3). This is important as these are some of the key factors that fuel what is described as the ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union.

This article explores the potential role of genuine pan-European parties in dealing with this democratic deficit by ‘transnationalising’ EU politics. It does so by focusing on two case studies: (1) Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), launched by Yanis Varoufakis in 2016, and (2) Volt Europa, founded by Andrea Venzon in 2017. These are two transnational movement-parties, founded at the European level, that developed (and are still developing) national branches and networks. They declare that they seek to reform and democratise the EU by engaging with European institutions, putting its democratic deficit at the centre of their endeavour. In this sense, DiEM25 and Volt seem to enact a kind of politics that considers the common European space as its primary field of appeal and mobilization, adopting a transnational conception of the popular community as *the* source of democratic legitimacy. They start from Europe as their political space of reference, to then move on to national localities. This, on a different scale, could be considered similar to the way in which traditional national parties start from the national level of representation to spread to sub-national units; states, peripheries and municipalities, cities, towns and villages (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor 2007). That seems to be the greatest ambition of DiEM25 and Volt with both aspiring to be pioneering pan-European parties in that very sense, investing heavily on the idea of a European ‘people’ and a corresponding public sphere. In this context, and regardless of the success and impact of the two projects, one can argue that they constitute prototypical parties of that kind and are thus worth studying, especially as they could be pre-figuring a form of politics that is currently in the making or yet to emerge.<sup>1</sup>

Based on a qualitative analysis of their manifestos, campaign videos, flyers, selected speeches and interviews of their leaders, the article sheds light on their identity, ideological and programmatic principles as well as communication strategies and organization. The 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections provide the springboard for our analysis as they marked the electoral debut for both DiEM25 and Volt. Developments after that fall beyond the scope of this paper. Future research could examine their performance also in national elections and their endeavour to Europeanise national politics.<sup>2</sup> In this article we consciously limit ourselves in examining the specific novelties and peculiarities in the way that the two movement-parties prepared and campaigned during the 2019 EP elections in particular, that might differentiate them from traditional national parties and/or the so-called ‘Europarties’. Were their agendas formulated primarily at the European level to then be diffused to the national political arenas where they contested for seats? Did they run with a single

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<sup>1</sup> DiEM25 and Volt Europa are not the first attempts to establish pan-European parties of this kind. Newropeans, founded in 2005 by Frank Biancheri, was a pro-European, transnational formation that competed in the 2009 EP elections in Germany, France and the Netherlands gathering no more than 36,871 votes in total, not enough to win any seats (Van Ham and Smets 2010). Libertas.eu, a right-wing soft-Eurosceptic pan-European entity, born out of a lobby group initiated by Declan Ganley in Ireland to campaign against the Lisbon Treaty, can be considered as another relevant and short-lived experiment (Hartleb 2012, 57). Libertas contested in the 2009 elections in 12 member states with only one candidate being elected in France and the project faded soon after that (Gagatek 2010). While we do consider the aforementioned cases interesting, in this paper we focus on the most recent attempts to form pan-European parties which seem to be more successful and enduring, and thus more likely to have a lasting impact.

<sup>2</sup> DiEM’s affiliated party MeRA25 in Greece elected 9 MPs in the Greek Parliament in July, right after the European Parliament elections of May 2019, while Volt also secured 3 seats in the Dutch House of Representatives in 2021.

programme in all countries they competed in? How did they choose their candidates? And how was the national articulated with the trans-national/trans-European level in their discourse, campaign and public appeals?

To address these questions, the paper is structured as follows: The first section sets the broader framework for the two case studies by discussing the democratic deficit of the European Union and the role of pan-European parties in dealing with it. Identifying different levels of pan-Europeanism, namely an *inter*-national and a *trans*-national (see De Cleen 2017), we maintain that the existing ‘Europarties’<sup>3</sup> are trapped in the inter-national model and thus effectively fail to take the crucial leap from the national to the European, with the former remaining primary to the latter. The following two sections analyse the pan-European strategy of DiEM25 and Volt respectively. After outlining their main characteristics, we focus on the novelties of their campaigns and critically assess how these respond to deficiencies related to the democratic deficit. Our concluding remarks reflect on what DiEM25 and Volt Europa reveal about the potentials as well as the impasses of ‘transnationalising’ EU politics.

## 2. Revisiting the EU’s democratic deficit: the role of pan-European parties

The EU defines the oft-bemoaned problem of its democratic deficit surprisingly well: ‘The real EU democratic deficit seems to be the absence of European politics’ (EUR-Lex). Grasping the specificity of this *absence* and offering ways to overcome it have been the Holy Grail for scholars of European integration. Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix have identified five standard claims around the EU’s democratic deficit: (i) the decline of national parliamentary control over executive agents; (ii) the weak powers of the EP which still does not have the right of legislative initiative; (iii) the lack of genuinely European issues and stakes in the European election campaigns, which most of the times end up focusing on domestic issues; (iv) the complexity of EU institutions that makes the EU look like a distant structure, indeed a ‘black box’ in the eyes of citizens; and (v) the lack of correspondence between citizen’s preferences and EU policies (Follesdal and Hix 2006, 534-7).

Crucially, and despite the significant developments since Follesdal and Hix’s article was published, the EU’s democratic deficit still manifests in the lack of democratic contestation over alternative policy options (Follesdal and Hix 2006, 545). A more functional representation at the European level would mean that policy initiative and executive power can be properly debated and contested. After all, it is hard to imagine any form of democratic politics without what Robert Dahl calls ‘public contestation’ (1971, 4) or what Chantal Mouffe describes as *agonistic* struggle between different projects; a struggle among adversaries who recognise each other as legitimate opponents yet disagree on the crucial question of what a better society is and how it could be achieved (2005, 20). Public contestation coupled with an agonistic ethos on the EU level would entail a European public sphere: a democratic arena, where various groups can make their contrasting standpoints visible by competing with one another (Eriksen 2005). Such a context involves an active role of European citizens who would be more aware of both what is at stake in the European Union and how the latter works. It is no coincidence that next to public contestation, Dahl identifies a second dimension of democracy as equally important, that of inclusiveness. This refers to the power and the proportion of citizens able ‘to participate on a more or less equal plane in controlling and contesting the conduct of the government: to participate, so to speak, in the system of public contestation’ (Dahl 1971, 4).

Important changes in recent years could render part of the critique on the democratic deficit of the EU obsolete. For instance, the introduction of the Spitzenkandidat system that invites Europarties and their groups in the EP to nominate a lead candidate for the post of President of the European Commission (Hobolt 2014). This was celebrated by leading EU political figures as a means to ‘Europeanise’ the European elections (Sasmatzoglou 2013, 70, 74). It could even be seen as a modest attempt to create a European public sphere by personalising the campaigns and anticipating an increase in the interest of EU citizens. ‘Europe’ in itself has

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<sup>3</sup> By ‘Europarties’ we refer to the extra-parliamentary federations of national political parties rather than to the European Parliament’s political groups. For the ways in which national parties relate to and interact with Europarties and Groups in the EP (see Bardi 1994; Voerman 2009, 204).

indeed become a political issue hotly debated across the continent (Hutter and Kriesi 2019), but not necessarily because of the Spitzenkandidat system. It was the ‘Euro crisis’ (after 2008) along with the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ (after 2015) that have facilitated the politicization of Europe. The Spitzenkandidat, has rather failed to produce the desired results (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018, 1479). Not only party competition still unfolds primarily at the national level, but right after the 2019 EP elections the heads of national governments re-affirmed their (inter-governmental) supremacy over the (supranational) EP by choosing the EU’s executive in a way that seemed to depend more on bargaining and negotiations between national-elites and less on EU-citizen input, as they bypassed Europarties and the popular mandate and appointed Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President (Dawson 2019). Von der Leyen, up to that point, had not been officially discussed as a candidate for the position and had not been exposed to public scrutiny and political debate during the election campaign. As a President and head of the EU executive, in other words, she lacked the legitimation of the popular vote, a popular mandate.

The ‘European Citizens’ Initiative’ (ECI) could be seen as another mechanism, a ‘transnational “babystep”’ (Kaufmann, 2012), designed to enhance inclusiveness and democratic participation at the EU level. However, given the requirement to collect one million signatures from at least one quarter of the Member States, and the fact that it is at the discretion of the Commission, which has the monopoly of legislative initiation, to accept (or ignore) an initiative, makes it almost impossible for the ECI to fulfil its democratic promise (Kaufmann 2012, 237-40; Ferri 2015, 343). In this sense, ECI seems to be ineffective as a participatory tool in practice and, for now, works more as a public consultation instrument or a public-agenda setting tool at its best, not creating the opportunities for EU citizens to intervene on crucial matters in a more meaningful and decisive way (Aichholzer and Rose 2020, 123). It is within this broader context that Peter Mair’s observation that the EU is constructed as a ‘protected sphere’ – protected from the demands of its own citizens – seems to still apply today (Mair 2013, 109). How then can European citizens become an integral part of Europe’s political life beyond the national level?

This brings us to another dimension of the EU’s democratic deficit: the *no-demos* thesis (Weiler 1995). If there is no European demos, the argument goes, there can be no European democracy. Some have imputed the absence of a European demos to the lack of homogeneity at the European level, assuming that democracy needs a homogeneous demos (see Majone 2005; Pérez 2013, 23-6; Bellamy and Castiglione 2013, 218-9). However, as Daniel Innerarity points out, this idea ‘is historically false and empirically untrue’ (2014, 4). A demos can be unified by respecting or even appreciating heterogeneity without being homogeneous in any way (Innerarity 2014, 3-4, 10-13). Others draw attention to the dimension of affect, emphasizing that it is actually the strong libidinal investment in national forms of identification that makes the construction of a transnational collective identity a challenging task (Stavrakakis 2007, 191-207).

Drawing upon the post-structuralist tradition, we argue that far from being natural, identities are always contingent and constructed (Laclau and Mouffe 2014 [1985], 107-8). This allows us to envisage possibilities on the transnational level. We anticipate that the identification with pan-European opposing camps, the development of party loyalties that are able to unite people across borders, as well as the participation in pan-European struggles that are not merely reflections of stakes at the national level, could consolidate collective identities at the European level, thus providing the building blocks for a European demos (McNamara and Musgrave 2020, 2-3). In this context, we see the emergence of pan-European parties as part of an overall movement that could contribute to the formation of a European demos. Article 10 TEU confirms the anticipated impact of European political parties on the development of a European identity when it stresses their role in ‘forming European political awareness’ (TEU, Article 10.4). However, the existing Europarties do not seem to fulfil that role.

## **2.1 Genuine European parties and ‘Europarties’**

Two points are especially worth making with regard to this argument. The first is that ‘Europarties’ such as the European People’s Party (EPP) or the Party of European Socialists (PES), are neither genuinely European nor proper parties; they remain ‘loose confederations’ (Schmitter 2000, 67) or ‘conglomerates’ (Lefkofridi and

Katsanidou 2014, 111) of national parties sharing a similar ideology and programmatic agenda. The structure of those confederations is based upon a flexible cooperation between different national parties. They are ‘umbrella organizations for national parties and not directly in touch with the electorate’ (Giannakou 2011, 6). In a similar vein, David Hanley notes that it is perhaps more appropriate to conceive of the existing ‘Europarties’ as ‘facilitators of relationships between national parties and their leaders rather than as possible direct representatives of European citizens at EU level’, attributing this to the absence of a European demos (2008, 22). As already mentioned, however, we suggest that it is (partly) through the identification with genuine transnational political forces that a European demos could emerge, so this is not necessarily a one-way process/relationship.

While scholars use the term ‘Europarties’ to refer to both the extra-parliamentary organizations and the European parliamentary groups (e.g. Bartolini 2005, 326) in this paper, for analytical clarity, we use the term to refer primarily to the former. These organizations do not always coincide with the political groups in the EP. The latter may consist of coalitions of Europarties, national parties or even independent politicians. Luciano Bardi (1994) is right to draw attention to the interactions between national parties, the EP groups and the extra-parliamentary (con)federations. Bardi, in fact, develops a broader perspective and sees Europarties as multi-level organizations consisting of the aforementioned ‘three components’ (1994, 359). In this sense, he seems to apply Richard Katz and Peter Mair’s analytical schema of the three faces of (national) party organizations at the European level: ‘the *party in public office*’, embodied by the EP group, the ‘*party in central office*’, which is the extra-parliamentary organization, and ‘the *party on the ground*’, represented by the affiliated national parties (Katz and Mair 1994, 594, italics in the original). This approach is certainly effective for studying the degree of integration and various interactions among the three components/structures (Calossi and Cicchi 2019, 3). However, we prefer to keep these analytically distinct as they have not been formally and institutionally unified in a way that would render them directly comparable to traditional parties and, more importantly, to the cases studied here. Adopting Bardi’s model would unnecessarily complicate the analysis that we purport to develop, without, suggesting, of course, that this would not be something worth pursuing in the future.

That said, the history of the so-called Europarties is inextricably intertwined with that of the EP groups and marked by national parties’ efforts to expand their influence at the European level (Ladrech 2000, 132). The creation of the European parliamentary groups dates back in 1953 and the then Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (Salm 2019). Those first members of the Assembly were appointed by their national parliaments. They were predominantly national representatives. The decision to introduce direct elections led to the formation of party (con)federations and generated expectations for the emergence of party politics on the European level (Ladrech 2006, 492-3). After nine EP elections, the question whether MEPs are national or European parliamentarians is still timely. More precisely, even though Hix, Noury and Roland are right to stress that nationality plays a limited role when it comes to their voting behaviour, which is formed mostly along party-ideological lines (2007, 3-4), MEPs are doomed to operate as ‘primarily national politicians’ as long as their political aspirations and their re-election itself depend on their national parties (Scully et al. 2012, 672). The latter are the ones who select the candidates in European elections, and in the final instance, national parties are the ones that campaign and fight elections, both national and European ones (Hix et al. 2007, 134).

Since there is still more at stake in politics at the nation-state level, national parties reasonably prioritise national electoral contests. Looking at recent research evidence, it is clear that even during EP elections, public debate focuses mostly on domestic issues confirming the endurance of the ‘second order’ elections thesis (Ehin and Talving 2021) – although, as Daniela Braun highlights, ‘with some slight trends towards greater emphasis on EU issues in more recent EP elections’ (2021, 453). More precisely, it has been argued that distinguishing between polity/constitutive issues and policy-related ones allows one to see that EU policy issues are more salient in official party documents than often recognized (Braun et al. 2016).<sup>4</sup> However, these rarely occupy

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<sup>4</sup> Constitutive issues ‘centre on fundamental features of the EU polity, i.e. membership, competencies and decision-making rules’ while policy-related ones ‘refer to policy questions in fields where EU institutions are involved in daily policy-making’ (Braun et al. 2016, 2).

centre stage in the actual campaigns and do not attract significant media coverage (Braun et al. 2016, 587). As a result, the lack of a proper competition over alternative European policies remains a persisting feature of EP elections. Following Zoe Lefkofridi, one could note that it is the current structure of the EU that prevents political contestation from being expressed ‘in transnational policy terms within the system’ directing it at ‘the polity and the political personnel’, a favourable arena for nationalists and Eurosceptics (2020, 47).

In this context, Europarties are left with a rather negligible role to play in European elections. Although they tend to produce election manifestos, those have more of a symbolic function and are rarely used in a meaningful way by the affiliated national political actors (Hobolt 2014, 1531). Another sign of their marginalized character is that even when mechanisms that could potentially strengthen their position and visibility in the European arena are introduced, such as the Spitzenkandidat, Europarties benefit too little from them. The limited success of the Spitzenkandidat indicates that the *strategic considerations* of national parties, the key players in the EP elections, are still rooted in national political systems and realities (Braun and Popa 2018). There is, in other words, an uneven relationship between existing parties/groups in the EP and the national parties, with the latter remaining the undisputed dominant force. As Robert Ladrech puts it, national parties are ‘the “gatekeepers” on transnational party activity’ (2015, 496). As long as this relationship remains intact, Gaffney’s observation that political parties are ‘essentially a national and local phenomenon’ will remain valid (1996, 2). To put it bluntly, in order to be meaningfully European, Europarties would be expected to escape from this inter-national model, to stop being effectively dependent on their national affiliates, and to establish their autonomy (or even primacy) at the trans-European level.

This brings us to our second point which concerns terminology. The relevant literature tends to label Europarties as ‘transnational’ (Hanley 2008; Hix et al., 2007, Gaffney 1996). However, if, as we argue, the established European parties are rather alliances of national parties focusing mostly on a flexible collaboration between them, it would be more accurate to call them *inter-national* rather than transnational (see also De Cleen 2017, 355). The inter-national model results in political parties that are largely reflections of national politics without being able, and maybe even willing, to transcend this context. A genuine transnational model would entail a creative articulation of the ‘between’ and the ‘beyond’ moment. In other words, a transnational party would create a stronger sense of common identity among its members. It would require its members to work together, across and beyond borders, in order to create a common agenda that takes the European level as its primary field of activity and legitimation. While this operation in the inter-national level moves from the national to the European, the operation in the transnational one would be the opposite. Put differently, whereas in the inter-national model national parties are the prime movers in terms of campaign organization, selection of candidates, formulation of electoral programmes for the EP elections, in the transnational model the centre of activity would lie mostly with the pan-European entity. It seems that both DiEM25 and Volt, the two European initiatives that we examine in this paper, purport to do precisely that: *instead of reflecting national politics on the European level by creating a network of national particularities, they start from the European level to then create roots and branches at the national and the local; thus reflecting European politics onto the national level.*

By that we do not imply that existing Europarties have remained static in their inter-national mode of operation. Some dynamic of moving towards a more transnational direction has indeed been observed.<sup>5</sup> The growing institutional recognition, their access to public funds and the more recent decision to allow direct individual membership among other developments can be seen as signs of such a move (see Alemanno 2018; Hertner 2018). The Spitzenkandidat process, as already mentioned, also demonstrates this tendency, exemplifying at the same time the severe constraints put by the current mode of politicizing at the EU level, which is still defined, in the last instance, by national political party elites. The proposal of the EP’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) about the rules for the 2019 EP elections involving the introduction of transnational lists is another example. This was perceived as a chance to inject ‘a federal element into the electoral system’ which would lead to ‘genuine political parties’ on the European level as well as to genuine European elections (Duff, 2018). It is not a surprise that both DiEM25 and Volt wanted to run in the 2019 EP

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<sup>5</sup> Assessing such long-term gradual shifts in EU party politics and across the whole spectrum of Europarties falls outside the scope of the paper.



election with transnational lists. However, this proposal was rejected in the end by the EP. This did not prevent the founder of DiEM25, Varoufakis, to run in Germany, and the initiator of Volt, Venzon, to run in the UK.

In our analysis we further examine such novelties in the way that the two parties/alliances competed in the 2019 EP elections. As we have seen, existing Europarties are far from being genuinely European, acting more as umbrella organisations or networks for already existing national parties. Genuine European parties could increase public contestation and inclusiveness at the EU level. They could also contribute to the development of a European demos, thus significantly enhancing democracy in the EU. DiEM25 and Volt are, arguably, two unique actors at the EU level that aspire to operate as such parties today and thus form almost prototypical agents in that respect. Having set the context of politicizing at the EU level and the challenges that this presents for relevant actors, we now turn to examining the two cases more closely to see whether their discourse and practice opens up new possibilities for the democratic revitalisation of the EU or if they end up reproducing problems and limitations already evident in the way established Europarties operate.

### **3. DiEM25 and Volt Europa: Emergence, key principles and organizational structure**

DiEM25 and Volt Europa emerged as pro-European responses to a multifaceted European crisis in an era that has been marked by the rise of exclusionary, xenophobic and Eurosceptic far-right parties (on the latter, see Mudde 2019). They both started with a similar diagnosis of the problem, articulating responses that revolved around the demand for the democratization of the EU and the advancement of a transnational, pan-European approach to EU politics.

DiEM25 was inaugurated on 9 February 2016 at Volksbühne, 'The Theatre of the People', in Berlin by the former Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, who had already achieved near celebrity status following his role in the heated negotiations between the first SYRIZA government and its European partners between January and July 2015. The Croatian author and political activist Srećko Horvat together with the Italian founder of the European Alternatives, Lorenzo Marsili were among the co-initiators. The movement can be seen as the by-product of SYRIZA's defeat in negotiations with Greece's EU partners in 2015 about ending austerity (see Katsambekis 2019). This, according to DiEM25, uncovered the anti-democratic structure of the EU and highlighted the need to act primarily on the pan-European level in order to ensure a democratic Europe and envisage an alternative to austerity (DiEM25 2017a).

The key problem that the EU faces, as maintained by DiEM25, is the lack of democracy in the decision-making process (Varoufakis 2016). Adopting a stance of 'constructive disobedience' (DiEM25 2017a, 6-7), DiEM25 advocates the democratization of European institutions with its immediate aim being 'full transparency in decision-making'. This entails the live-streaming and publication of minutes of important meetings of EU institutions and informal bodies such as the Eurogroup, access to all important documents related to crucial negotiations, as well as the monitoring of lobbying activities (DiEM25 2016, 5). Additionally, DiEM25 has introduced a European New Deal, a 'Plan A' for Europe, that is a policy agenda intending first to stabilise Europe's five-dimensional crisis (debt, banking sector, inadequate investment, migration, rising poverty) within the existing institutional framework and then to fight for 'real democracy [...] at the transnational European level' (DiEM25 2017a, 6, 9-10). The development of a new Constitutional Assembly 'consisting of representatives elected on a transnational ticket' (DiEM25 2016, 6) coupled with a strong citizens' involvement, that would be responsible for the creation of a democratic constitution, is the long-term goal of this New Deal. This constituent drive sets DiEM25 apart from other actors in Europe, highlighting its radical-democratic aspirations for a re-founding process of the EU. In defence of its transnationalism, DiEM25 has argued that the reason why the multifaceted European crisis remains unresolved is because it is 'left in the hands of national governments powerless to act upon them' (DiEM25 2016, 5).

Volt Europa was launched on Facebook on 29 March 2017 by the rather unknown 27 years old Italian Andrea Venzon, an ex-McKinsey Consultant, supported by the German Damian Boeselager and the French

Colombe Cahen-Salvador.<sup>6</sup> Volt was the outcome of another traumatic experience, that of the 2016 Brexit referendum. It was created the day the United Kingdom invoked article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) to formally begin the withdrawal negotiation process. This ‘shocking’ event for anyone advocating for more European integration, argued the founding members of Volt, acted as a wake-up call to defend and re-energise the European project by working for a Federal Union (Volt 2017a, 24).

Similar to DiEM25, Volt strives for a ‘more democratic, more transparent and stronger Europe’ (Volt 2019a), a Europe ‘led by and built by and for its citizens’ (Volt 2019b). For the founder of Volt the greatest weakness of the EU lies in its inability to act with a single voice upon common challenges: ‘we’re just the sum of multiple states, each with their own national interests’, he notes, adding that ‘the voting procedures and the issues debated in the European Parliament are still national’ (Venzon 2018a). The ‘old way’ of doing politics along with nationalism and corruption are identified as the main threats to the future of the European Union (Volt 2019c). Turning the EU into a federal ‘Social Union’ and enhancing citizens’ participation are considered top priorities for the party (Volt 2019a). Its vision also encompasses what they call a ‘smart state’ with the digitalization and the improvement of public services, an ‘economic renaissance’ and a strong emphasis on equality and the protection of human rights (Volt 2019a). As DiEM25, Volt also calls for a European Constitution which would be drafted by an elected European Convention with at least half of its seats being reserved for citizens and which would lead to the foundation of a new Europe (Volt 2019b, 3-4; Volt 2019c, 186-7).

Both parties, despite differences in the type of solutions they suggest and the programmatic agendas they adopt, seem to advocate a critically pro-EU stance, supporting further integration while advocating for a series of (more or less) radical reforms that would lead to a more meaningful and democratic union as they envisage it. In this regard, DiEM25 and Volt can be perceived as cases of progressive Euroalternativism, as it is ‘policies, not the polity [that are] at stake’ for them (Fanoulis and Guerra 2020, 220). Their focus, indeed, is on European policy issues rather than the EU polity itself. This means that far from opposing the project of European integration as such, they criticise particular aspects of the EU, while at the same time attempting to offer an alternative from within. They both agree that this alternative involves a Europeanization of EU politics. Their pan-Europeanism and commitment to enhancing politics at the transnational level, however, does not neglect the national nor the local. On the contrary, their endeavour concentrates on finding ways to connect those three levels. This is evident in their organizational structure.

DiEM25’s Coordinating Collective (CC), that consists of twelve members elected every year by an online all-members vote, is a transnational instrument responsible for all the strategic and organizational activities of the party (DiEM25 2017b). Under the CC, there is an Advisory Panel (AP) composed of leading well-known personalities from across the world such as Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, Julian Assange, Naomi Klein and Ken Loach, who can suggest actions and campaigns to the CC (ibid.). This body has a more permanent character. Every member is free to recommend potential Advisors, while the Validating Council (VC) is responsible for their approval. The VC is a team of one hundred members selected by sortition from a pool of self-nominated candidates every six months and assists with decisions that needs to be taken quickly, usually by validating with a Yes or No proposals put to them by the CC. Gender-balance rules apply to all elected roles (ibid.). One would be right to notice the co-existence of an elitist structure (CC), formed by essentially unelected members by merit of their status and visibility, along with a democratic/grassroots one (VC), based on the classic democratic principle of sortition, with the former being essentially hierarchically superior to the latter, which might seem rather contradictory to the party’s criticism of the EU’s elitist structure.

On the local level, we find DiEM25’s Spontaneous Collectives (DSCs), self-organized local groups that can develop policy proposals and submit them to the CC, initiate events and campaigns aiming at spreading DiEM’s Manifesto. On the national level, DiEM forms National Collectives (NCs) involving eight to ten people elected in the same way with the CC, being responsible for the coordination at the national level and

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<sup>6</sup> Soon after the EP elections of 2019, Venzon stepped down from Volt and in collaboration with Cahen-Salvador started working on a global movement ‘Now!’, officially launched in January 2020. ‘Now!’ was then renamed to ‘Atlas’ which aspires to become a global party working for a free, fair, and federal planet. In any case, Venzon remained the most prominent leader of Volt during the period of study, hence our focus on him in parallel with Varoufakis.



the organization of national campaigns dependent upon the approval of the CC (ibid). Members can thus organise with DSCs, NCs, or even run for a position in the CC, but the key point here is that all important decisions are taken transnationally, by an online all-members vote.

Turning to Volt Europa, we find at the top the Board of Directors composed of nine members: two co-presidents [one male and one female], one treasurer and six non-executive members (Volt n.d.a.) who administer and coordinate the movement's activities transnationally. The members of the Board are elected annually through the General Assembly (GA) (Volt n.d.a). The GA consists of all effective members (Volt n.d.a.) that can meet physically or electronically once or twice per year. This is the highest decision-making, and transnational in nature, body of Volt, which sets the movement's priorities and goals through an all-members (or those present in case of physical meetings) vote. An Electoral Committee (EC) is responsible for organizing and supervising all the voting procedures while there is also a Conflict Resolution Body (CRB), a group of five members elected by the GA for two years with the aim to settle any disagreement between Members or even between the different bodies of the movement (Volt n.d.a).

Aspiring to be visible at every level, Volt establishes national and local teams that focus on the 'the daily operations of the movement' as well as on the organisation of events (Volt, 2017b). A Regional Council, consisting of two representatives from each national team, has the task of implementing the GA's decisions and providing coherence among the various national branches (Volt 2017b; Volt 2017a, 18). It is important to note that all crucial decisions about policies, strategies and directions are taken at the transnational level and national chapters are responsible for adapting and prioritizing, as well as translating and creating new policy proposals based on Volt's values (2018). As Cahen-Salvador further explains 'countries can reach a goal in different ways, but they cannot directly contradict one another' (Cahen-Salvador 2018).

Overall, both Volt's and DiEM's organizational structures, as shown above, are first and foremost transnational, with national and local organs that adapt and communicate to the national level what is shaped and decided at the European one. Aiming to examine whether the way in which DiEM and Volt campaigned for the 2019 EP elections has been marked by that transnational logic and to trace any other novelties and similarities with traditional parties and existing Europarties, as well as continuities and discontinuities, in the following section we take a closer look at the 2019 EP campaigns of the two initiatives.

## 4. DiEM25 and Volt Europa during the 2019 EP Election

National parties affiliated to Europarties and corresponding EP Groups, as we have seen, contest European elections primarily along national lines, campaigning, essentially, on separate national manifestos with candidates that are selected to appeal (and be accountable) to national electorates. DiEM25 and Volt Europa claim to be *the only ones*<sup>7</sup> today who run genuinely transnational political campaigns. In this section, we examine what this entails in practice.

### 4.1 DiEM25's European Spring

On 10 March 2018, DiEM25 members met in Napoli with various left municipal, regional and national political forces including the Alternativet (Alternative) from Denmark, Benoît Hamon's Génération.s from France, the Portuguese LIVRE (Free) and the Polish Razem (Together). The purpose of the meeting was the creation of a single transnational list that would be able to take the movement's *New Deal for Europe* to the ballot box for the 2019 EP elections. In particular, they declared that:

This list will set the frame to build [...] the first successful transnational political party in EU history with the direct purpose of pushing also other political forces to follow us on that path, creating their own, finally real, transnational parties (DiEM25 2018, 4-5).

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that they claim this without any reference to previous attempts or even to one another.

We observe that DiEM25's goal is not merely to advance its own agenda but also to be aspirational in wider terms, aiming to trigger a transformative process for party competition at the EU level, as it hopes to inspire other forces to develop similar formations, even if those forces end up being in opposition to DiEM.

A second meeting took place in Lisbon a month later, where there was a unanimous agreement on the name of DiEM25's electoral alliance for the election: 'European Spring'. This was a direct reference to what was described as the 'Athens Spring', an 'experiment in democracy in Greece that was crushed by the banks' (referring to the first months of the SYRIZA-led government in 2015, when Varoufakis was minister of finance) as well as to the Prague Spring of 1968 (Varoufakis 2018).

The European Spring alliance included the Spanish Actúa (Act) and the Izquierda en Positivo (Left in Positive), the Greek MeRA25 (European Realistic Disobedience Front 2025), DiEM25's first national electoral wing that was launched in March 2018, and the German electoral wing, Demokratie in Europa (Democracy in Europe) founded in June 2018. DiEM preferred calling them 'electoral wings' because they wanted to signal that they are 'not just another political party' but rather additional instruments added to DiEM25's core structure as a Europe-based political force (Varoufakis 2017a). They are national electoral mechanisms but at the same time integral components of DiEM as a transnational structure and movement. This development brought DiEM into the area of what has been described as hybrid movement-parties that combine the participatory, grassroots, character of social movements with institutional electoral politics (Della Porta et al., 2017; Bonfert, 2020, 7). As such, DiEM25 has the option to run in local, national and European elections, if its members approve it (Varoufakis 2017a). Indeed, after an internal debate, DiEM's members approved the movement's participation to the 2019 elections in November 2018 (DiEM25 Communications 2018).

The strategy of DiEM25 in the 2019 European elections followed a transnational logic, but also merged novel elements of organization ('electoral wings') with the umbrella logic that we have seen in existing Europarties. Similar to Europarties, DiEM25 forged alliances with existing parties across Europe on the condition that they agreed on adopting and promoting the policy agenda of DiEM25's *New Deal for Europe* that had been established centrally. Wherever such alliances could not be established, DiEM25 decided to form its own national 'electoral wings'. Those two levels of interacting with and campaigning at the national level met in the European Spring project, which can be understood as a transnational European alliance. What united the different actors under the same umbrella was a concrete common policy programme that had been developed and legitimized by DiEM's members centrally, at the European level. In other words, the transnational or trans-European *takes priority over and feeds into the national* in this case. This is what differentiates their approach from the way that traditional national parties collaborate and contribute to campaigns within the traditional Europarties structure. In the latter, it is the national that takes priority over and feeds into the European, while national parties are not committed to and bound by a concrete common programme.

## 4.2 Volt's Amsterdam Declaration

The ambition to compete in the 2019 EP elections accompanied Volt from its foundation (Venzon 2018a). Claiming to be the first pan-European movement as well, Volt's members met in Paris in May 2018 with the aim to exchange ideas on the movement's policy agenda and set the terms of their EP elections campaign (Volt 2018a; 2018b). The decision taken there was to create a single electoral platform, a single and simple document that 'people would understand' (Drounau 2018). Few months later, this led to the *Amsterdam Declaration*, Volt's programme for the 2019 EP elections which was approved by the GA in October 2018. As Damian Boeselager highlighted, this was 'a framework programme, on which various programmes can be based upon, from EU to local elections' (Boeselager 2019), revealing Volt's ambition to engage with electoral processes at all levels of government in order to promote their agenda.

In terms of strategy, Volt differs from DiEM's European Spring alliance. Instead of forging coalitions between existing national parties and their own 'electoral wings', Volt chose to form its national branches from scratch in order to contest in the EP election. In this sense, from its very inception, Volt was realized as a pan-European movement with 'branches' of national chapters, the first of which founded in Germany, in March 2018 (Volt, 2018c), soon to be followed by nine more in the Netherlands, Belgium, Bulgaria, Luxembourg,

Sweden, Spain, UK, France and Austria. These are national parties that enable Volt to stand for elections with one programme. Apart from that, the aim of Volt's national chapters is to promote the movement's vision and policy agenda by prioritizing issues that are specific to each national context (Volt 2017a, 1). As with DiEM's 'electoral wings', Volt's national chapters are also organic components of the broader transnational structure of the movement, organized centrally at the European level, and then moving downwards, to the national one. The key difference with DiEM here is that Volt solely relies on its central trans-European structure to spread its roots and create its network into national localities instead of creating an umbrella in which it could accommodate already existing national political groups. In this sense, Volt is more innovative, while DiEM is mixing its innovative elements with aspects of the umbrella structure seen in existing Europarties. This is also clearly seen in the fact that national chapters all maintain the same name (Volt) with the addition of the corresponding country's name (e.g. Volt Germany, Volt Belgium, and so on) as well as the same logo and colours. This creates an even clearer common point of reference in terms of key symbols at the transnational/European level, when compared to DiEM, whose national branches maintain their names and own particularities and thus distinct visual identities when they address national audiences, which are unified by their common reference to the 'European Spring'<sup>8</sup> and their common programme.

In this way, Volt Europa's strategy for the 2019 EP elections was clearly marked by a transnational logic; from an organisation/structure perspective, even deeper than that of DiEM. Instead of building alliances with existing parties/groups and creating electoral wings as a secondary option, Volt chose to rely on its own national chapters – not just programmatically, in terms of advocating for a common policy programme, but also symbolically, in terms of maintaining the same name, symbols and visual identity in all national localities, making it even clearer that these national branches act as extensions/organ of the central pan-European structure; that it was actually one and the same party campaigning and contesting elections across Europe. On another note, perhaps this was done to avoid the necessary compromises or impasses when negotiating to form coalitions, but it also signified Volt's commitment to breaking new ground in the ways that parties are organised at the European level.

The establishment of affiliated national political parties, in one form or another, was unavoidable as, legally, 'electoral arrangements are governed by national provisions', meaning that to run in the EP elections, one needs to be registered as a party in a member state (Fact Sheets on the European Union 2020, 3). Nevertheless, both Volt and DiEM's European Spring campaigned with a single programme, the *Amsterdam Declaration* and the *New Deal for Europe* respectively. This means that programmatically and ideologically, the central transnational structure, at the European level took priority over and defined those at the national (branches, chapter, affiliated parties, etc.). And despite their differences, this is a critical element that also sharply distinguishes them from the way that traditional parties campaigned for the 2019 EP elections and the ones before that.

### 4.3 Comparing the two campaigns

On 23 March 2019 Volt officially launched its campaign in Rome, calling people across Europe to 'Join the change'. Volt competed in eight countries as a single party (see table 1 in appendix). DiEM25's European Spring competed as a transnational alliance in seven countries (see table 2 in appendix). The latter's common agenda was presented on 25 March 2019 in Brussels, at an event themed 'A Citizen Takeover of the EU Institutions'. Staying true to their transnationalism, both Volt and European Spring put forth candidates who ran in countries different from their nationality. Varoufakis, among others, ran in Germany with DiEM's electoral wing, *Demokratie in Europa*, 'to prove', in his words 'that we are determined to end nationalism and to begin a process of transnational democratic politics' (Varoufakis 2019a). Venzon ran in the UK, as an independent candidate in the constituency of London, stating that 'the only way out of this divided Europe is to start building united politics' (Venzon 2019a).

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<sup>8</sup> The 'European Spring' logo was visible in all campaign materials and ballot papers of parties under its umbrella, but this was secondary to their own names/visual identities.

With regard to the selection of their candidates, in Volt, the national chapters had the upper hand in identifying and picking individuals to run in the election (Venzon 2019b). More precisely, national and local teams were responsible for organizing meetings ‘to discuss and develop good proposals [...] to identify candidates, and to run for elections’ (Volt’s website, ‘people’ section). DiEM25 acted differently. On one level, there was an internal call for candidates (who had to meet legal formal requirements) followed by an online voting process where all DiEM25 members could participate (DiEM25 Italia 2018). On another level, the national electoral wings, the Greek MeRA25 and the German Demokratie in Europa, could recommend their own candidates that also had to be approved by an online all-members vote. In cases where DiEM ran in coalition with other parties under the European Spring umbrella there was a specific number of candidates that each party could nominate (DiEM25 2018, 6). For instance, in France where there was an alliance with Génération.s, DiEM was allowed to nominate 20 candidates out of a sum of 80. This adds an interesting twist to the two parties’ mode of operation: Volt’s candidates are selected and authorised at the national level, while a substantial part of DiEM’s candidates still draw their legitimacy and authorisation for the central party-structure at the European level.

Both Volt and DiEM put at the centre of their campaigns the democratic deficit of the European Union, emphasizing issues around transparency, accountability and equality in their manifestos. There are, admittedly, differences between the two movement-parties, and Venzon himself noted that Volt is less ‘radical on certain issues’ (2018c), with DiEM25 being located clearly on the left of Volt. However, the two initiatives have much in common (Pascal 2018), which can be attributed (partly) to their shared European transnationalism. They both claim to be progressives and through their policy agenda they advocate a series of similar demands which can be summarized as follows:

- the strengthening of the EP with the right to initiate legislation (European Spring 2019, 3; Volt 2019c, 1).
- the empowerment of European citizens through a blending of direct and representative democratic mechanisms with citizens’ assemblies and digital platforms (European Spring 2019, 3-4; Volt 2019c, 2).
- the expansion and democratization of the EU budget (European Spring 2019, 18; Volt 2019c, 1-2).
- measures to increase transparency and the protection of whistle-blowers (European Spring 2019, 7, 28; Volt 2019c, 3).
- the fight against corruption and the monitoring of lobbying (Volt 2019c, 3; European Spring 2019, 6).
- ensuring multinational corporations pay their taxes (Volt 2019c, 1, European Spring 2019, 28).
- moving towards green and sustainable societies (European Spring 2019, 14-7; Volt 2019c, 7).

As we have seen the constituent drive is another decisive feature that DiEM25 and Volt share and played an important role in their campaigns. For DiEM25, in which this constituent drive is more radical, this is not just a demand for further advancing and democratising European integration. The bottom-up drafting of a European Constitution is considered to be pivotal specifically in forging a pan-European common identity, ‘it will be the beginning of a new age: the age of “We, the People of Europe”,’ as noted in official documents (DiEM25 2018, 4).

Moreover, DiEM and Volt agree that a transnational approach to EU politics, a *pan-Europeanism*, is the only way to tackle problems and challenges at the regional, national and local levels, which links to a distinct worldview about politics in times of unprecedented global integration, of interconnectedness and thus interdependence (Schütze 2018). For DiEM25, meaningful change at all these levels (regional, national, local) can only come about through a dialectical connection between the national and the transnational as there are key challenges and problems (e.g. climate change) that are essentially borderless. As Varoufakis puts it: ‘We cannot sort out climate change in our own country. Same applies to public debt, banking crisis, low investment and poverty’ (Varoufakis 2017b). Volt also highlights the overlap between the national and the European level in the vast majority of policy areas including ‘climate change, economic inequality, migration, international

conflict, terrorism, and the impact of the technological revolution on our jobs' (Venzon 2018b), which makes deeper political-party Europeanization an urgent need (Volt 2018b): 'a real EU democracy needs [...] real EU political parties' (Volt 2019c).

The above commonalities might exemplify how European transnationalism can act as a common ground for certain policy initiatives and demands for different movements and parties that choose to operate and mobilise at this level.

There are, however, two elements that differentiate DiEM25 from Volt Europa. First, Volt openly aims at a federal political union, with a European Government led by a European Prime Minister elected by the Parliament, a President directly elected by the people and a European Finance Minister, as well as a European army (2019c, 1, 3). DiEM25 warns against this kind of maximalism 'which is used as an excuse for in the end doing nothing' (Varoufakis, 2019b). This is why European Spring's programme focuses more on what can be done within the existing institutions (ibid.) and it does not develop a detailed plan for the envisaged structure of the EU, implying that this will be decided by the Constitutional Assembly which will draft a new democratic constitution.

Second, DiEM and Volt differ from each other in the way they perceive *the* political and democracy itself, which was reflected in the way they campaigned as well. Volt, on the one hand, adopts a consensual, associative view of the political as the arena of liberty and acting in concert (see Mouffe 2018, 87). In this context Volt presents itself as a post-ideological movement. One of Volt's main slogans is that 'We are neither left nor right, we find solutions', while Venzon has emphasized that 'Volt is about pragmatic and rational politics, led by experts who provide concrete solutions' (2018c). To put it in standard comparative politics jargon, Volt seems to fit in the paradigm of 'valence politics', stressing competence over ideology (Green 2007). DiEM, on the other hand, follows a dissociative conception according to which antagonism and conflict form part of the essence of politics and democracy (see Mouffe 2018, 87). Its discourse is characterised by an anti-establishment rhetoric pitting 'us/the European people' versus 'them/the establishment'. For DiEM it is on the basis of this antagonism that a European people can emerge. In the words of an ex-member of the Coordinating Collective: 'through the struggle against European institutions, we can forge the European people' (Pietrandrea 2018). DiEM could thus be understood as an expression of the populist left on the EU transnational level (Panayotu 2017; De Cleen et al 2019), while Volt's rhetoric is more reminiscent of 'Third Way' Social Democracy and an anti-populist liberalism of the centre.

## 5. Conclusion

The final day of the 2019 EP elections confirmed that neither Volt nor DiEM's European Spring met the requirement of 25 MEPs in order to form their own political groups in the EP as they aspired. In fact, they were both far from reaching that goal. The DiEM25-led European Spring gathered 1,402,387 votes – three times more votes than Volt (see tables 1 and 2 in appendix), but it did not manage to win any seats. Volt gained one seat in Germany. After an online voting process including all Volt's members, the party's elected representative, Damian Boeselager, joined the Greens–European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) group in the EP.

Looking at these results, one might claim that by placing Europe at the centre of their campaigns and aiming to treat EP elections as 'first order' pan-European contests, DiEM and Volt seem to be 'exceptions that prove the rule': those who focus on domestic issues attract more votes. This is in line with Lefkofridi's argument that transnational actors are disenfranchised by the existing rules of the EP game (Lefkofridi, 2020, 42). The notion of political representation itself remains largely anchored at the national level and this is a structural obstacle that transnational parties will inevitably encounter. A critical and more practical challenge that Volt and DiEM's European Spring had to face was campaign financing with both relying mostly on crowdfunding and members' donations. This limited their capacity to organise a more effective campaign and communicate their programmes to European citizens. Still, a counter-argument here could be that their performance and endurance (both remain active today), in fact, sets a crucial precedent for organising and campaigning at the transnational European level. Whatever viewpoint one chooses to take, what is certain is that those parties exemplify a series of important organizational, strategic, programmatic and ideological/discursive novelties



that are relevant to anyone interested in the development and future of European politics in the post-Brexit, post-pandemic era. An era in which tensions between the national, the inter-national and the trans-national are becoming more relevant than ever.

Our analysis has shown that both parties followed a predominantly transnational logic in their campaigns, attempting to provide answers to issues they perceived as European and thus common across EU countries. They both ran with a single electoral manifesto in the member states they competed for seats; a manifesto that was created transnationally, and compared with the existing Europarties, they also had the final say in the selection of candidates. Nevertheless, DiEM's strategy in the EP elections through the European Spring which comprised both novel 'electoral wings' and alliances with existing national parties, was more complex than Volt's decision to run on its own, relying solely on its own 'national chapters'. This might have made DiEM's transnational approach and the novelty of competing with the same programme less visible in the eyes of the electorate. The organizational structure of both parties though clearly demonstrates a logic that starts from the European/transnational level to then move to the national and the local level. This predominantly transnational logic also seems to produce important policy convergences, despite the significant differences among the two parties, which could feed into the already existing divide and tensions between the inter-governmental and supranational logics that drive EU integration. These are important novelties that could – in the long run – motivate other forces or even the existing Europarties to move towards a more genuine pan-European approach to EU politics and thus contribute towards the further Europeanisation of political campaigning for EP elections.

Such a development may play a critical role in 'the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different [...] political projects can be confronted' (Mouffe 2005, 3) at the EU level. It could enhance public contestation through political competition over alternative policies, provide more opportunities to citizens to participate in this democratic contestation and improve the quality of their representation on the EU level. Such political competition and the mobilisation of voters in the context of genuinely pan-European organizations/platforms could also facilitate the formation of transnational collective identities that could further contribute to the emergence of a European demos. Both DiEM and Volt, as we have shown, are transnational forces that promote participation in transnational political campaigns, political strategizing, recruitment processes, protests and events, with both emphasizing their intention to construct transnational collective identities among their members and beyond (the labels 'DiEMers' and 'Volters' that the two movement-parties casually use to refer to their supporters across EU countries are also very telling in this respect). The drafting of a European Constitution with the direct and deliberative involvement of European citizens that both parties advocate is another political initiative that would bring together diverse communities in the process of forging a European demos. It is in this sense that DiEM and Volt aspire to tackle the EU's democratic deficit, highlighting the originality and democratic potential of genuinely pan-European parties.

However, transnationalising EU politics is a challenging task that faces certain limitations concerning first and foremost the fact that formations like DiEM and Volt necessarily operate within a Europe of nations. They have to deal with the strong resistance of established national parties unwilling to lose their status as key/primary actors, both nationally, and in the way they interact inter-nationally and within the EU. As such, national parties 'may well be the most powerful obstacle to the development of genuine Europarties' (Bardi 1994, 360). The existing institutional settings, that still largely reflect democratic representation as primarily enacted and legitimised at the national level, also severely impede the prospects of their success. Finally, for as long as there is no sense of a deeper common identity at the European level across citizens and societies, these parties will risk making appeals to an 'absent demos', which is a reminder that we are merely dealing with one aspect of a multifaceted and highly complex process here. This does not take away anything from the importance of DiEM and Volt as potentially prototypical actors in a process of transnationalising EU politics that might have just started. A process that may indeed at some point lead to the passage from a 'Europe of nations' to a 'Europe of peoples.'



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## Appendix

**Table 1 - Volt's performance in the 2019 EP election (data collated by authors from national ministries and EP website).**

Countries	2019 European Parliament election <b>Volt</b>		
	Number of votes	Vote share %	Seats gained
Belgium	20,385	0.48	0
Bulgaria	3,500	0.18	0
Germany	249,098	0.67	1
Luxembourg	26,483	2.10	0
Netherlands	106,004	1.93	0
Spain	32,432	0.14	0
Sweden	146	0.003	0
UK (London Constituency)	731	0.00	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>438,779</b>		

**Table 2 - DiEM25-led European Spring's performance in the 2019 EP election (data collated by authors from national ministries and EP website).**

Countries	2019 European Parliament election <b>DiEM25's European Spring</b>		
	Number of votes	Vote share %	Seats gained
Denmark	92,964	3.37	0
France	741,772	3.27	0
Germany	130,229	0.30	0
Greece	169,635	2.99	0
Poland	168,745	1.24	0
Portugal	60,575	1.83	0
Spain	38,467	0.11	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,402,387</b>		