

Transnational lists

An Opportunity for the European Union in Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Addressing the Democratic Deficit

EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY: THE REQUIRED INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

TRANSNATIONAL LISTS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION IN STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND ADDRESSING THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

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Brussels, October 2023

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This Research Paper was elaborated on the basis of independent research. The opinions expressed here are those of the Contractor and do not represent the point of view of the Institute of European Democrats. With the financial support of the European Parliament

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the potential of transnational lists as a means to strengthen participatory democracy and address the democratic deficit within the European Union (EU). Transnational lists, a novel electoral mechanism, may enable EU citizens to vote for candidates from various member states, transcending national boundaries in the selection of representatives for the European Parliament.

However, implementing transnational lists presents a set of challenges. Striking the right balance between EU-level and national-level representation is a delicate task, as the lists should not undermine national democracy while enhancing EU-level democracy. Drawing from lessons learned from the Conference on the Future of Europe, several recommendations emerge. Gradual implementation, flexible electoral systems, public awareness campaigns, and a robust legal framework can facilitate the adoption of transnational lists. Strengthening participatory democracy within EU institutions involves enhanced public consultations, transparency initiatives, stakeholder dialogues, and civic education programs.

Social Media summary

This paper dives into the concept of transnational lists, their benefits, and the challenges they pose. Lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe shed light on citizen engagement and policy transparency. Policy recommendations suggest a phased approach to implementation and a focus on public involvement.

Keywords

#EU #Democracy #TransnationalLists #FutureOfEurope"

Short bio

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) faces an enduring challenge—a democratic deficit within its institutions that hinders effective citizen engagement and trust-building (Smith, 2018). This research proposal explores a potential solution, transnational lists, as an opportunity to reinvigorate participatory democracy in the EU context while addressing the democratic deficit (Hix, 2020). It delves into the concept of transnational lists, the challenges associated with their implementation, lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe, and ultimately, recommendations for strengthening EU democracy.

Transnational lists involve creating EU-wide electoral constituencies, allowing voters to choose candidates from various member states, transcending national boundaries (Treschel & Mair, 2019). These lists hold promise for the EU in multiple ways, including enhancing democratic representation, promoting a sense of European identity, and bolstering the legitimacy and accountability of EU institutions (Carey, 2019).

However, their implementation is not without complexities, necessitating a delicate balance between EU and national representation. This proposal aims to examine these intricacies, drawing from the Conference on the Future of Europe for insights on strengthening participatory democracy and reducing the democratic deficit. Through comprehensive analysis and well-considered recommendations, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the EU's democratic future.

TRANSNATIONAL LISTS

DEFINITION AND CONCEPT

Transnational lists, in the context of European Union (EU) elections, are a groundbreaking electoral mechanism that allows voters across EU member states to cast their ballots for candidates from various countries, transcending state boundaries in the selection of representatives for the European Parliament (Leduc & Pilet, 2019). This innovative approach seeks to establish a genuinely pan-European constituency, wherein citizens possess the unique opportunity to directly influence the composition of the EU's legislative body, regardless of their national origin.

The potential advantages associated with the introduction of transnational lists within the EU are manifold. Firstly, this electoral system holds the promise of significantly enhancing democratic representation within the EU's institutional framework. By empowering citizens to vote for candidates who align with their values and policy preferences, rather than being constrained by candidates from their own national constituencies, this system fosters a heightened sense of agency and engagement among voters, ultimately bolstering the overall democratic legitimacy of the EU (Hobolt, 2020).

Secondly, transnational lists have the capacity to cultivate a profound sense of European identity among EU citizens. By facilitating the election of candidates from various member states, this system encourages voters to contemplate shared European values and interests, transcending narrow national narratives. Such a shift in perspective can stimulate a more dynamic and inclusive pan-European political discourse, thus reinforcing the concept of a unified European community (Gatterman, 2019)

Lastly, transnational lists hold the potential to elevate the legitimacy and accountability of EU institutions to a new level. When elected representatives hold mandates that extend beyond their national constituencies, they are more likely to prioritize EU-level concerns and collaborate across borders, aligning their actions with broader European interests. This not only enhances the efficiency of EU decision-making but also addresses concerns related to the democratic deficit, as elected officials are perceived to possess a more encompassing mandate that transcends the confines of national politics.

In conclusion, transnational lists present a novel and compelling approach to addressing the democratic deficit within the EU by reimagining how citizens interact with the European project. Their potential benefits, including enhanced democratic representation, the promotion of European identity, and increased legitimacy, provide a promising avenue for strengthening participatory democracy within the European Union.

The introduction of transnational lists in EU elections not only reshapes the way citizens engage with European politics but also fosters a stronger sense of solidarity and cooperation among member states. By enabling voters to choose candidates from different countries, the EU encourages a broader understanding of diverse cultures, languages, and historical backgrounds. This exposure to a rich tapestry of European experiences can serve as a catalyst for mutual understanding and appreciation, breaking down cultural barriers that might hinder collaboration. As citizens become more accustomed to the idea of electing representatives based on shared European values, the concept of a unified Europe becomes more tangible and meaningful in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, transnational lists have the potential to invigorate the political landscape of the European Parliament by infusing it with a wider array of perspectives. Candidates from different member states bring unique policy insights and approaches, enriching the debates and decision-making processes within the EU institutions. This diversity of thought not only enhances the quality of legislation but also reflects the complex, multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by the European Union. Consequently, the EU becomes better equipped to address pressing issues, leveraging the collective wisdom and expertise of representatives from various national backgrounds.

In essence, the introduction of transnational lists embodies the EU's commitment to unity in diversity. By encouraging cross-border voting, fostering a shared European identity, and promoting inclusive political discourse, this innovative electoral mechanism paves the way for a more integrated, democratic, and vibrant European Union. As the EU continues to evolve, transnational lists stand as a testament to the bloc's dedication to democratic principles and its vision of a harmonious, united Europe.

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. Balancing EU and National Representation

Balancing EU-level and national-level representation within the framework of transnational lists presents a multifaceted challenge. While the aim of transnational lists is to strengthen EU-level democracy, they must not undermine the principles of national democracy that are integral to the functioning of member states (Hix & Hagemann, 2017).

Achieving the right balance between these two levels of representation is complicated by the diversity of national political landscapes, each with its unique party systems, ideologies, and electoral traditions. Striking this delicate equilibrium necessitates careful consideration of the potential impact on national sovereignty and political diversity. Furthermore, the varying degrees of citizens' identification with the EU across member states introduce an additional layer of complexity. Some member states may be more enthusiastic about transnational lists, while others might perceive them as a threat to their national political identity (Vries, 2021).

The challenge of balancing EU and national representation within transnational lists requires a nuanced approach that respects the intricacies of both levels of governance. One possible solution lies in creating a flexible system that allows member states to tailor their participation in transnational lists according to their unique political contexts. This could involve implementing a system where countries have the option to allocate a certain number of seats in the European Parliament to transnational candidates while retaining the majority of seats for national representatives. Such a hybrid model would preserve the essence of national democracy while promoting a more integrated European identity.

Moreover, fostering a sense of inclusivity and collaboration between national and transnational representatives is crucial. Establishing channels for constant communication and cooperation between EU-level and national-level politicians can mitigate potential conflicts and ensure a harmonious working relationship. This collaboration could involve joint sessions, policy forums, or collaborative initiatives, fostering mutual understanding and trust among representatives from different levels of governance.

Additionally, investing in public awareness campaigns and education initiatives can play a pivotal role in garnering support for transnational lists across member states. By disseminating accurate information about the benefits of transnational representation and addressing common misconceptions, citizens can make informed decisions about supporting this innovative electoral mechanism. Engaging citizens in dialogues about the future of the European project can also help bridge the gap between varying levels of enthusiasm for transnational lists, promoting a more cohesive vision of European democracy.

In navigating the complexities of balancing EU and national representation, careful deliberation, adaptability, and proactive efforts to include citizens in the conversation are indispensable. By striking the right balance between these two levels of representation, the EU can not only strengthen its democratic foundation but also foster a more harmonious and collaborative relationship between member states and the European Union.

2.2. Concerns about Nationalization of EU Elections

Concerns about the nationalization of EU elections revolve around the potential for transnational lists to inadvertently transform EU elections into contests dominated by national issues and parties. This could lead to a situation where EU elections mirror national elections, undermining the unique character of EU-level democracy. The implications of such nationalization are significant. Smaller member states, in particular, may feel marginalized as the focus shifts towards the political powerhouses within the EU. This could erode the principle of equal representation among member states, which is fundamental to the EU's structure. Additionally, nationalization may hinder the emergence of truly pan-European debates and discussions, diminishing the appeal of transnational lists as a tool for fostering a shared European identity (Meguid, 2005).

Furthermore, the nationalization of EU elections could exacerbate existing divisions between member states, creating a fragmented political landscape within the European Parliament. If transnational lists become predominantly influenced by national issues and parties, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices among member states, hindering the development of a cohesive European identity. This fragmentation could impede the EU's ability to address common challenges collectively, as divergent national interests may overshadow the broader goals of integration and cooperation. Additionally, a strong focus on national issues might deter talented individuals from participating in EU politics, as they might prefer to

engage at the national level where their expertise and ideas are more directly relevant. To prevent these detrimental consequences, careful consideration and strategic measures are necessary to ensure that transnational lists genuinely promote a united European identity, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration among all member states. Balancing national interests with the overarching ideals of European integration remains a paramount challenge in the implementation of transnational lists within the EU electoral system.

2.3. Complexity of Implementation

The practical and legal challenges associated with the implementation of transnational lists further complicate their adoption. One of the primary hurdles is the need for harmonized electoral systems and legal frameworks across member states, which Reif K. and Schmitt H. already previewed in 1980 in their Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of the results of the European elections. Ensuring a consistent set of rules for candidate eligibility, campaign finance, and voting procedures across a diverse EU landscape demands extensive coordination and negotiation.

Another layer of complexity arises from the potential logistical difficulties tied to transnational campaigns and voting logistics. Coordinating campaigns that span multiple member states, reaching diverse audiences with distinct languages and cultures, presents formidable challenges. Additionally, organizing voting and counting processes for transnational lists across the EU's various electoral systems introduces logistical intricacies that require careful planning and oversight (Ferrer, 2021).

In conclusion, the challenges of implementing transnational lists in the EU are multifaceted and require a nuanced approach. Balancing EU and national representation, mitigating concerns about the nationalization of EU elections, and addressing the practical and legal complexities of implementation are critical considerations in the pursuit of a more participatory and democratic European Union.

LESSONS FROM THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Conference on the Future of Europe, launched in 2021, represents a significant initiative within the European Union to engage citizens in shaping the future of the EU. This conference is designed to be an inclusive, multi-faceted platform for dialogue, involving citizens, civil society organizations, and political actors. Its overarching goal is to enable Europeans to have a say in the EU's priorities, policies, and future direction (European Parliament, 2021)

The Conference on the Future of Europe encompasses a wide range of activities, including citizens' panels, debates, consultations, and events held both online and offline. It aims to address various thematic areas, such as climate change, health, the economy, and democracy itself. The process is intended to be open, transparent, and reflective of the diverse perspectives and voices across the EU (European Commission, 2021).

Certainly, the Conference on the Future of Europe concluded its proceedings in 2022, marking a significant milestone in the EU's efforts to enhance democratic engagement. One of the notable outcomes of the conference was the comprehensive final report, a culmination of the extensive deliberations and discussions that took place over the course of the initiative. The report synthesized the diverse viewpoints expressed by citizens, experts, and stakeholders, providing valuable insights into the concerns, aspirations, and priorities of Europeans regarding the future of the EU. The final report highlighted several key conclusions that are pivotal for the future of the European Union:

Strengthening Democratic Processes: The conference reinforced the need for continuous efforts to strengthen democratic processes within the EU. Recommendations included enhancing transparency in decision-making, increasing citizen participation in EU affairs, and promoting inclusive policies that address the needs of diverse communities across member states.

Addressing Socio-Economic Challenges: Participants emphasized the importance of addressing pressing socio-economic challenges, such as

unemployment, inequality, and social disparities. Strategies to promote economic resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable growth were discussed, with an emphasis on ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of a prosperous Europe.

Tackling Climate Change: Climate change emerged as a top concern, reflecting the growing global awareness of environmental issues. Citizens called for ambitious climate policies, renewable energy investments, and measures to mitigate the impact of climate change. The conference underscored the necessity of adopting sustainable practices to safeguard the environment for future generations.

Promoting Digital Transformation: The digital transformation of society and the economy was a central theme. Discussions revolved around digital literacy, cybersecurity, and ensuring fair access to digital technologies. Participants emphasized the importance of harnessing the potential of technology while safeguarding individuals' rights and privacy.

EU's Role in the World: The conference highlighted the EU's role on the global stage. Participants expressed the need for a united, values-based EU foreign policy that promotes peace, democracy, and human rights worldwide. Strengthening international partnerships and addressing global challenges collaboratively were key priorities identified in the discussions.

In summary, the Conference on the Future of Europe served, among others, as a testament to the EU's commitment to inclusive democracy and citizen engagement, regarding the topics related with this paper. The insights gleaned from this initiative have provided valuable guidance for policymakers and EU institutions, shaping the direction of the European project. By fostering open dialogue, promoting transparency, and addressing the concerns of its citizens, the EU has taken significant strides toward building a more responsive and accountable European Union.

On this sense, the conference has provided several key lessons that are particularly relevant to enhancing participatory democracy and addressing the democratic deficit in the EU:

Citizen Engagement is Vital: The conference underscored the importance of involving citizens directly in decision-making processes. It demonstrated that when citizens have the opportunity to voice their concerns and contribute to shaping policies, they are more likely to feel invested in the EU project (Chenneval & Schimmelfennig, 2021).

Transparency Builds Trust: Transparency emerged as a fundamental principle. Providing accessible information about EU policies, decision-making, and the outcomes of deliberations fosters trust in EU institutions (Eriksen & Fossum, 2022).

Meaningful Dialogue Matters: The conference highlighted the value of fostering meaningful dialogue between citizens, policymakers, and stakeholders. Engaging in open and constructive discussions on critical issues can bridge divides and contribute to more informed decision-making (Hix, 2020).

Balancing National and European Interests: The conference deliberations revealed the ongoing tension between national interests and the broader European agenda. Finding ways to strike a balance between these interests is essential to address concerns about nationalization (Biezen & Ringe, 2019).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Implementing Transnational Lists

To effectively implement transnational lists and overcome the associated challenges, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Gradual Rollout: Begin with a gradual rollout of transnational lists, testing their impact and feasibility in a limited number of EU elections. This phased approach allows for learning from practical experiences and adjustments as necessary

Flexible Electoral Systems: Allow member states some flexibility in adapting their electoral systems to accommodate transnational lists, taking into account their unique political contexts. This flexibility should be within the bounds of agreed-upon EU standards.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns to inform citizens about transnational lists, their benefits, and how they work. These campaigns should be conducted well in advance of elections.

Robust Legal Framework: Develop a robust legal framework that outlines the rules and procedures governing transnational lists, ensuring consistency and clarity across member states.

Strengthening Participatory Democracy

To strengthen participatory democracy in EU institutions, the following recommendations are suggested:

Enhanced Public Consultations: Prioritize citizen engagement by regularly conducting public consultations on significant EU policies and decisions. Ensure that the results of these consultations are taken into account during decision-making processes.

Transparency Initiatives: Continue efforts to enhance transparency by providing accessible information about EU policies, decision-making procedures, and outcomes. Create user-friendly platforms and channels for citizens to access this information.

Stakeholder Dialogues: Foster ongoing dialogues between policymakers, citizens, and relevant stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and experts. These dialogues should be structured to encourage meaningful discussions on key EU issues.

Education and Civic Engagement: Invest in civic education programs that promote civic engagement and democratic values from an early age. Encourage EU citizens to actively participate in the democratic process.

These policy recommendations aim to address the challenges of implementing transnational lists while concurrently strengthening participatory democracy within EU institutions, fostering a more engaged and informed European citizenry.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, we've delved into the multifaceted topic of transnational lists and their potential role in strengthening participatory democracy while addressing the democratic deficit in the European Union (EU). This exploration has led us to consider the concept and benefits of transnational lists, the challenges associated with their implementation, lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe, and policy recommendations for the way forward.

Transnational lists offer a promising avenue for enhancing EU democracy by enabling citizens to vote for candidates based on shared values and policies, transcending national boundaries. They can promote a sense of European identity, foster pan-European political discourse, and bolster the legitimacy of EU institutions. However, their implementation is not without complexities. Balancing EU and national representation, addressing concerns about the nationalization of EU elections, and navigating the practical and legal challenges are critical considerations.

The Conference on the Future of Europe has provided valuable insights into citizen engagement, transparency, and meaningful dialogue, which are essential components of participatory democracy. Lessons learned from the conference emphasize the importance of actively involving citizens, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and fostering constructive dialogues to bridge divides and build trust.

In light of these discussions, policy recommendations have been proposed to guide the effective implementation of transnational lists and to strengthen participatory democracy in EU institutions. These recommendations encompass a phased approach to transnational lists, flexibility in electoral systems, public awareness campaigns, and a robust legal framework. They also highlight the significance of public consultations, transparency initiatives, stakeholder dialogues, and civic education.

In conclusion, the path toward a more participatory and democratic European Union involves striking a delicate balance between EU and national representation, while actively engaging citizens and promoting transparency and dialogue. Transnational lists represent an opportunity to achieve this balance, and the lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe provide valuable guidance. As the EU continues

to evolve, these discussions and recommendations contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the future of European democracy.

Out of this academic analysis, the European Parliament adopted a position on transnational list, on May 2022. The majority of the chamber ruled on favour of changing the European Electoral law, so this becomes a reality. This proposal was thought to give the European citizens two votes, a hybrid model, on which they could chose the MEPs representing their member states, and transnational candidates on a second ballot. This hybrid system could be a beginning of a more unified and federal electoral process, which, should end on a treaty reform. It is difficult to ensure this process will take place, and which electoral process will finally take place on the European Elections, nevertheless, we can ensure, transnational list is a topic of the European agenda.

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