TRANSNATIONAL LISTS

An opportunity for the future?

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Abstract

In the tumultuous political climate following Brexit, a new energy has been given to the idea of establishing transnational lists for the European elections. With the ever-increasing need for democratic legitimacy on the EU stage, the system of transnational lists is viewed by many as a salvation to the problem with democratic deficit within the European Union. The idea of transnational lists was voted in the European Parliament during the plenary session in Strasbourg on February 2018 but rejected after a debate on a clearly divided issue. By analysing the debate from 2018, this study aims to investigate what are the conditions, found in the debate, that could make transnational lists in the European Parliament possible.

When analysing the debate from 2018, five significant conditions for transnational lists were identified. These conditions were democracy, question of federal states, the aspect of spitzenkandidaten, solidarity and the size of Member States. Interestingly, the conditions were observed to be both obstacles and possibilities for transnational lists. Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between the above-named conditions and the failure of the proposition for transnational lists, alternatively, to a future breakthrough.

Key words: the European Union, the European Parliament, European elections, transnational lists, Jürgen Habermas, idea-analytical approach, framing method
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1. Introduction

Following Brexit, the expected withdrawal of the United Kingdom’s members of the European Union parliament (MEP) in the near future, has given a new energy to the idea of establishing transnational lists for the European elections. In 2017 Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, stated his support for transnational lists for the next European elections. Macron affirmed that citizens would “vote for the same MEPs throughout Europe” and wished to “finish building this democratic area”. He also mentioned that from the 2024 elections “half of the European Parliament could be elected on these transnational lists.” (Verger 2018, 2) During the plenary session in Strasbourg on February 2018, the idea of transnational list was rejected in the European Parliament after a debate on a clearly divided issue and in addition, the outcome was still unsure until the end of the vote. European representatives determined their choice voting against the establishment of a transnational list for the elections in 2019. (Barbière, 2018)

Researchers today agree to a great extent that the European Union’s (EU) special institutional structure has been and still is associated with a number of democratic shortcomings (Tallberg 2016, 178). The background to these problems associated with democratic deficit can be argued to be the special nature of the EU, a new form of political system that draws on both traditional, international organizations and national democracies. (Tallberg 2016, 178) According to Habermas (2015), a German political philosopher, sociologist and science theorist, the democratic deficit within the EU has been known for decades and it is considered that the lack of politics within the European Parliament (EP) causes nearly a zero significance for the democratic will of European citizens (Habermas 2015, 547-548). Simon Hix (2005) argues that the nature of elections to the EP and the absence of party competition at the European level are the ground for democratic deficit. Elections to the EP are held on national level and fought by domestic political parties, partially about national issues. This leads to non-politics at the EU level and the EP elections can be found as “beauty contest” for national parties. (Rittberger 2005, 30) Also, there is no open competition for the course of the policy agenda and for the executive office. This makes the EU currently less a form of democratic government and more like a form of rational despotism. (Hix 2008, 54) Elections deem to perform the function to represent people’s interests and therefore legitimize the operation of power, as well as holding governments accountable. Unfortunately, elections to the European parliament broadly fall short to perform these functions. (Franklin & Hobolt 2015, 400)
It is needed here to clarify exactly what is meant with transnational lists. Christine Verger (2018) writes: “citizens would be called on to cast two votes: one for the national party’s list, and another for a list composed of candidates which are not from national political parties, designated by European political groups, the same in each country and not necessarily of the nationality of the country in which citizens are voting. This would thereby create a European constituency.” (Verger 2018, 3) European parliament is designed to be a transnational political representation of the Unions citizens as whole and therefore it is supposed to represent all the citizens interest (Habermas 2015, 547-548). After all, if the European Parliament is designed to represent transnational interests in the first place, why are the elections only national and not transnational?

Transnational list has been on the table in the European Parliament before but has not managed to achieve to be nothing more than a proposition. Previous research has established that in the decades 1979–2002 the main obstacle to electoral reform was inside the Council, with certain Member States opposing to any proposals for electoral reform. In the case of Duff report, a proposal for transnational lists in 2011, the main barrier was inside the Parliament itself. Proposal was blocked at an earlier stage, when Parliament itself questioned their ability to push for a stronger representation across the borders and for a more federal Union. (Donatelli 2015, 47) This seems to be the case also in the proposal 2018, when the idea of transnational list was rejected in the European Parliament after a debate on a divided issue. Most studies in the field of transnational lists have only focused on Duff report or pan-European constituency itself (Donatelli 2015, Bol et. al. 2016) but much less is known about the debate in 2018. Transnational lists are a major area of interest within the field of European integration because of the up heated debate following Brexit. Therefore, this paper is at the heart of our understanding what are the conditions that are in importance when aiming for establishment for such a system.

1.2 Aim of the paper and research questions

The aim of this paper is to investigate what are the conditions that could make transnational lists in the European Parliament elections possible. To solve the whole problem with democratic deficit in the EU would be far too ambitious task to research, and indeed something EU itself and many researchers have tried to solve for decades. That is why this paper will only focus on the conditions for transnational lists in the European Parliament elections.
The paper will answer the following research questions:

- What are the conditions to transnational lists that can be identified in the debate about the composition of the European Parliament (debate on procedure 2017/2054(INL))? 
- How can Habermas three democratic principles from his democratic theory be applied to these conditions?
- Is it possible through analyses identify if transnational lists could have potential and if so, how?

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: chapter two will explicate the history behind proposals for transnational lists from back in the 1990s to the debate in 2018. The paper will then go on to chapter three which will present the previous research and the theory of Jürgen Habermas followed with chapter four with method and data that are used in this paper. Chapter five is all about the analysis of the debate and lastly there will follow chapter six with summarizing conclusions.
2. The up heated debate between federalists and the others

One reason to the democratic deficit within the EU is considered to be that the turnout in the EU elections is usually lower than in national elections. Citizens interest towards the EU has reduced although information about the EU is at present easily accessible. At the same time, European Parliament elections are still described as second rank elections because they are practically national elections. As exemplified by, they are not primarily driven by a European debate about Europe’s common issues, but deal with domestic political issues and party sympathies. The absence of European politics depends mainly on the party and political system and hardly not on voters. Hence, transnational party associations are attempting to develop joint programs for European elections, parties remain national, as well as the subjects’ politicians emphasize in the campaigns. The citizens are left with a few options for the future Europe. Moreover, the fact that the European elections cannot result in a change of governments draws down the interest among the voters. (Tallberg 2016,184)

In this section I will clear out the history behind proposes for transnational lists from back in the 1990s to the debate in 2018. I will narrowly explicate what was suggested back then, what happened between and how the debate looks like now, 20 years after.

2.1 Overall prospects about the report in 1998 and the journey to 2018

Transnational lists have been on the table in the European Parliament a few times before. Question of transnational lists in elections for the European Parliament came already up in a report on a proposition 1998. In this report it was proposed that ten per cent of the total number of seats in the EP would be considered to be filled by list-based proportional representation relating to the whole territory of European Union Member States. This suggestion for transnational lists was supposed to be valid from the EP elections to be held in 2009. (Committee on institutional affairs 1998, 8) It was claimed in the report that EP elections will not have effect on the legitimacy of the Union if citizens do not vote or if they only vote for reasons which are national and related only to each Member State (Committee on institutional affairs 1998, 18). Report presented that transnational lists would contribute to the establishment of appropriate European political parties and emergence certain European political awareness. Therefore, European elections would be less concerned with national political issues and
instead give the elections more European dimension. It was also mentioned that there has been both supporters and opponents for the regional proportional system and such a change to the representation system could balance the position between supporters and opponents.

European parliament’s Legal Service gave their opinion on this suggestion for transnational lists. They pointed out that the Articles 189 and 190 of the EC Treaty would need to be modified but that transnational lists would have legal grounds regarding to principles of the Treaty. The Members of the European Parliament represent all the people in the Union and Maastricht Treaty verified this aspect by introducing the right to vote and stand in elections regarding if they resident in a Member State other than their own. This also makes cross boarder representation possible in the EU for all the people of the Community. (Committee on institutional affairs 1998, 21) The change of election procedure ideates important part in the prospects for the future Union. Moreover, the EP should be capable to future developments and marked by intensity of flexibility and therefore open for the presentation of European lists by European political parties. (Committee on institutional affairs 1998, 79)

In spite of attempts, the report from back in the 1990s became to be only a suggestion for the future. In 2011 the Duff report suggested at the European Parliament that twenty-five members could be elected on transnational lists when creating a pan-European constituency. It was suggested that each citizen could cast one vote for the transnational list in addition to the national vote. Hence, the adoption by the competent commission, it was returned and not voted in plenary session, because it failed to get improbable majority. Furthermore, by the request of the European Parliament, a couple of academic papers were published in 2010 about a pan-European constituency and in 2014, by different researchers of the Robert Schuman Centre if the European University Institute in Florence. (Verger 2018, 2)

2.2 Debate of transnational lists 2018

The idea of transnational list was rejected in the European Parliament after a debate about the composition of the European Parliament. European representatives made their choice during a plenary session in Strasbourg on February 2018, by voting against the establishment of a transnational list for the elections in 2019. Hence, the idea of transnational lists fell short, change of the composition in light of Brexit was voted trough. Rapporteurs Danuta Hübner and Pedro Silva Pereira mentioned in the initial proposal to keep 46 of the 79 seats vacated by the UK for transnational list. (Barbière, 2018) As mentioned earlier, the issue was divided in the
Next, I will summarize the arguments for and against transnational lists from the debate in the European Parliament to initiate the analysis itself.

MEPs who supported the idea of transnational lists highlighted that transnational lists would strengthen the democracy in the European Union. They argued that the fact that people would have two votes would be the factor that would create a European demos and mutual solidarity. The vote for a national candidate would still be the link throughout the citizen and her or his MEP and the other vote for transnational candidates would strengthen the relation between the citizen and the European Union as whole. Further, the transnational lists would complement the *spitzenkandidaten* process and make it actually democratic. MEPs reasoned that it is important to create a feeling of belonging to the EU and grow a solidarity across the boundaries among citizens. Further, transnational lists would be a link to encourage the process forwards a single European constituency. Strengthening the self-governing regions influence and to defend their interests was also mentioned by the supporters of transnational lists. The European Union needs to be more about the Europe and therefore transnational lists would be a solution for that. Finally, it was mentioned in the debate that it is unclear if transnational lists would help this matter, but European dimension is something that needs to be shown in peoples’ everyday lives. (European Parliament, debate on procedure 2017/2054(INL))

MEPs that opposed the idea of transnational lists argued mostly on the basis that there is no European demos and rather will transnational lists create it. Either is there not enough cohesion in the European Union that transnational lists could be the next step for the Union. Transnational lists are seen as a top-down, elite-driven project which would split the Parliament to two camps, national elected MEPs on the one hand and transnational list elected MEPs on the other. It is also mentioned that MEPs elected trough transnational lists would be answerable to none which would only give them power without an electorate, accountability and responsibility. Therefore, transnational lists would be undemocratic and not help to solve the democratic deficit-issue within the EU. It would also take the presence of democracy more away from citizens as well as alienate voters. A fear for a system that does not exist anywhere else concerned also MEPs that opposed the idea of transnational lists. Furthermore, it was mentioned in the debate that transnational lists would ruin the equilibrium between states and majorities which already has been established. (European Parliament, debate on procedure 2017/2054(INL))
3. Previous research and the role of pan-European lists in democratic theory

3.1 Previous research

Previous research on this topic is limited and has mostly focused on understanding the dynamics underlying Duffs proposal. These kinds of studies are as well focused on hypothetical outcomes of transnational lists and how it could be possible. Lorenzo Donatelli (2015) has analysed the process of Duffs proposal of 2009-2012 to understand the dynamics in the process and therefore, to understand why it failed. Duffs proposed for instance that twenty-five members could be elected on transnational lists when creating a pan-European constituency. (Donatelli 2015, 5) Donatelli (2015) studied the dynamics by using Princen’s model for agenda setting, which categorizes agenda setting on three steps, where each step highlights a significance stage in the process (Donatelli 2015, 17).

The conclusions Donatelli (2015) lands on is that it was the group of federalist-minded MEPs that was decisive in raising the issue. Hence, the absence of a true “cross-Member States” made it fall short. In the field of electoral reform there was instruments of non-agenda setting that explains the freezing of Duff proposal when analysing the path from the committee to the plenary. He finds out four macro-barriers which can explain why the proposal was not taken up in the “decision agenda”. The procedural barrier played more insignificant role than was expected. On the contrary, the issue was more political. One of the most significant barriers was the opposition by MEPs from smaller and medium-sized Member States that feared that the proposition would only benefit bigger Member States. The conclusion Donatelli (2015) draws from this barrier is that the nature of parliamentary representation at the Union level can compares to current consociational democracies where minorities are often over-represented to unite them in the process of decision-making. Distortions blocking the coexistence of separate electoral systems played a minor. However, the representative function for many MEPs is still accomplished with attachment to the citizens of their own countries. Therefore, there is no agreement for a Europeanization of national campaigns. The fourth barrier was critical for the outcome namely the disagreement in determining the net benefit from the possible introduction of the single district, different interests in national delegations and dispute over the proposal were all factors that contributed significantly in the failure of the proposal. There is a gap betwixt the policy-orientation in the plenary and committee, but the results show also the essence of the latent dynamics in electoral reform in the European Parliament. Finally, different
fragmentation determines the voting behaviour of MEPs in constitutional issues and break apart the groups alongside national lines which leads Donatelli (2015) to state that in Duff report the main opposition was inside the Parliament itself that blocked the proposal at an earlier stage. (Donatelli 2015, 44-47)

Bol et al. (2016) has also researched the area that concerns the possible introduction of a transnational list in the European Parliament elections. He conducted a digital experiment, together with several other researchers, in which thousands of Europeans voted for a transnational list that the researchers had designed. The experiment was conducted three weeks before the European Parliament elections in 2014 and a website was created in several languages, where one could learn more about the European elections in general, but also participate in the aforementioned digital experiment. On the ground of cooperation with research colleagues in all EU Member States, responses covered the whole Union. However, some Member States had very low response rates. (Bol et al. 2016, 528-529)

Bol et al. (2016) found out that vote choice in transnational lists would be significantly affected by the national candidates’ existence. Citizens in the Europe would more likely give votes to candidates from their own country under open lists and as well tend to vote for a list that included co-nationals. In spite of the results, Bol et al. (2016) stated that it is reasonable to assume that if there actually was a pan-European election, pan-European parties would have participated in pan-European campaigns which would have affected peoples knowledge about parties and therefore, it is possible that citizens would have been less attached to the candidates of their own countries. In the long term, a pan-European election could possibly reduce the effect of national candidates on the lists and increase the politicisation of the EU. From the results Bol et al. (2016) derive two concrete recommendations for EU decision-makers. They recommend that if transnational lists are created there should be a maximum number of candidates from each Member State on the list. The lists should as well be a system of closed-lists instead of open-lists. These both recommendations would decrease the eventual benefit for bigger Member States. (Bol et al. 2016, 539-540)

Lefkofridi and Katsanidou (2018) has examined if European Party Groups in the European Parliament offer various policy alternatives and how cohesive these are. They have studied party positions from 2009 and 2014 elections. According to Lefkofridi and Katsanidou (2018) the European Union shows characters of disintegration and its future do not look bright. Politics in the EU are perceived as irrelevant by citizens and political parties are not offering them
enough alternatives for policy routes. As political parties are the key actors in representative democracies, it is actually damaging for the reputation of political parties. In Representative democracies, parties are expected to speak for the citizens and mobilize their interests into public policies. Lefkofrid and Katsanidou (2018) assert that national parties need to be able to mobilize across the borders, which is the only way policy alternatives can be formulated to represent Unions interests as whole. (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou 2018, 1462-1463)

Finally, Mette Jolly (2005) has studied the “no demos” thesis related to the European Union. She finds out that the democratic deficit within the European Union is said to be caused to some extent by polity’s lack of demos which makes the European Union unsuited for majoritarian decision-making. Nevertheless, the problem is often confused with the lack of public enthusiasm when it comes to European integration. She states that the “no demos” thesis focuses on the aspect that there is no transnational relationship between the individuals which makes it related mostly to the legitimacy of the process of decision-making. Furthermore, the issue relates mainly to the European integration itself. (Jolly 2005, 12)

3.2 The democratic theory by Jürgen Habermas and his connection to the European Parliament

The conditions for a democratic political order are based on the theory of Jurgen Habermas (2009). He asserts that “the democratic principle” needs to be consistent in any legal order. What he means is that:

“Only those statutes may claim legitimacy that can meet with the assent of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted.”

(Wiener & Diez 2009, 210)

However, the process must respect three principles to be legitimate. It has to respect civil, legal and social rights. According to Habermas (2009) it is the process of democratic self-legislation that constitutes these rights and are implied by. These principles are the ground for private and public autonomy which are important for citizens to asses on an equal basis with one another. (Wiener & Diez 2009, 210)
The next section will summarize how Habermas applies his principles of democracy to the idea of transnational lists and pan-European district in different themes. These chapters will also contribute to the operationalization of Habermas three principles.

### 3.2.1 Legally constituted civic solidarity and the EU

According to Habermas (2015) the EU needs changes to tackle the issue with democratic deficit. The EU needs goals to push forward European constitutional movements. Under the conditions of status quo, the fact is according to Habermas (2015), that the political elites have refrained for half a century from turning the European issues to be topics of the national public spheres. Consequently, the outcome of trenchant, persistent and encompassing public disagreements over the present times, alternatives for action would be absolutely open. That is why he supports the idea of “Europeanising” the European elections. According to Habermas (2015), defeatist election predictions are inexpensive as long as shirtsleeves campaigns and public discourses are not being conducted. Then again, Unions institutional framework is geared to the cohesion and security of exceptionally fragmented political community and therefore designed to avoid such a campaigns. It is designed to make consensual decisions avoiding possible conflicts, not to generalise European-wide interests and solve conflicts. This conflict-avoidance in the European Union exists partially because of the Parliaments side-line and political elites separating of political decisions from the national public sphere. Habermas (2015) states that European citizens lack an arena in which they can share their social interests across national borders and establish political conflicts of these interests. Therefore, it is important to foster and channel social and political conflicts to moderate between contrasting conceptions of the “common good”. (Habermas 2015, 552-553)

There are divided opinions if the changes in institutional design are relevant. According to Habermas (2015) those kinds of changes would be necessary. He agrees that there is a lack of mutual trust among citizens of different nations to show between, as a precondition to adopt willingly a common perspective when political decisions are made on shared federal issues. Therefore, the protest against EUs widening into a supranational democracy is grounded in terms of “no demos”. Nevertheless, the lack of mutual trust contributes this “no demos” thesis only if it is misunderstood in a substantialist sense. Habermas (2015) establishes his argument to a historical remark that a national consciousness was fostered and created by the military,
schools and national historiography in European states that appeared from national unification action. The older dynastic, religious ties and forms of life laid over by national consciousness. According to Habermas (2015) this older solidarity that has developed over time should not be confused with legally constituted civic solidarity. He means that nationalism is grounded in these two different forms of solidarity. (Habermas 2015, 552-553) Habermas (2009) agrees that the current market focus of the EU have eroded collective identities and therefore the sense of solidarity between the Member States. On the EU level, the solution lies in establishing a new form of civic solidarity based on constitutional patriotism that would focus on his three principal sets of democratic rights. (Wiener & Diez 2009, 211)

3.2.2 Solidarity and the legal issues

Habermas (2015) would say that without any political mobilisation there would be no nations. These political communities evolved not spontaneously, instead they were they legally constructed. National consciousness is the result of a mobilized form of political integration. A comparatively high level of political inclusion has been accomplished in modern democracies. Habermas (2015) point out that it is a fact that needs to be understood to explain the lack of mutual trust in The EU between the national populations. He finds out two motives to clear out the distrust of a European super state and the motives for attachment to one’s own national state. According to Habermas (2015) these two motives would be clearly separated from each other. The lack of trust for the EU reflects pressures of self-conscious citizens of their nations-states normative achievements. Nation states have secured citizens free and relatively equal living conditions that citizens trust. They are seen as a guarantor of these achievements that citizens do not want to risk by an unfamiliar supranational polity. (Habermas 2015, 552)

For the reasons above, Habermas (2015) thinks that the lack of “European people” is not necessary obstacle to joint political decision making in Europe. For translingual citizenships from a different language communities, Europe needs an European public sphere. According to Habermas (2015) the already existing infrastructures are as far sufficient for Europe-wide communication. However national arenas have to be opened up to each other and the national media must learn to report all the issues that concern all citizens of the Union, discussions in other countries as well. (Habermas 2015, 553) The civic solidarity that has been limited only to national states must develop to a cosmopolitan solidarity and expand to enlarge to all the citizens of the Union (Bellamy and Attycci 2009, 210). As stated by Habermas (2015), this is
the way the form of a nationally limited civic solidarity among the citizens can develop into trust that attain across national boundaries. These above-mentioned normative achievements of national states are worth preserving to understand and solve the “no demos” thesis. (Habermas 2015, 553)

Many experts have widely discussed the legal issues of the required changes of the already existing constitutional treaties. From the perspective of democratic theory, Habermas (2015) points out the above discussed interests of European citizens. Citizens have an interest in creating a supranational polity that can act effectively in a democratically legitimate way to find solutions to the problems The EU is currently facing. They also support transnationalisation of democracy in the conditions that national states remain as guarantors of the level of freedom and justice that already has been achieved. Therefore, the higher political level must not overcome the lower one. According to Habermas (2015), the authority of the supranational polity should not be resolved by means of hierarchisation as it is in federal states. Instead, there should be a heterarchical relationship betwixt the Member States and the supranational. (Habermas 2015, 554)
4. Method and data

4.1 Selection of case and empirical material

Following Brexit, the expected withdrawal of the UK’s MEPs in the near future has given a new energy to the idea of establishing transnational lists for the European elections. The creation of transnational lists divide opinions among the current MEPs and within the EU Member states. In spite of that, the from time to time-heated debate is only just beginning. This case in the aspect of transnational lists in the EU parliament elections has been chosen in the light of the European Parliament being a unique institution because of its transnational character (Kreppel 2002, 3). The ongoing situation with Brexit and the unknown future for the European Union gives a great opportunity to research something which has a limited list of previous studies. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring conditions for transnational lists.

Case that has been chosen for this study is European Parliament and therefore this paper focuses on the debate in the Parliament about composition of European parliament (2017/2054(INL)) in February 2018. Two significant criteria used in qualitative research is reliability and validity. They are used to show the quality in a research. Reliability consist of four different criteria namely credibility, transferability, dependability and an option to prove and confirm. Credibility is used to ensure that the study has been conducted through the prevailing rules and that it reaches out to the people who are affected by it. Furthermore, transferability means that the research is produced with clear descriptions for others to understand and take part of it. Dependability means that the researcher adopts an investigating approach that contributes to creating a complete and accessible statement of all the phases of the research process. Finally, an option to prove and confirm means that the researcher must strive to objectivity when drawing conclusions. It is impossible as researcher to be completely objective but personal opinions should not affect conclusions. (Bryman 2018, 467-469)

To have validity in a research, answers that are received should be answers that is asked. This aspect can be strengthened by describing the research process and by paying attention to all the factors that are significant to the theme research is engaged to. Finally, it is important that the research takes place within the frameworks of science and can be associated with relevant previous research. (Tjora 2012, 162)
The research was conducted through valid rules and will be accessible to all the people that are affected by it. Clear descriptions have been produced for others to easily understand and take part of this paper. Complete and accessible statements of the research process are declared in the paper by using an investigating approach when analysing and researching the debate. In order to confirm this papers reliability, objectivity has been aimed when drawing conclusions. The answers that are asked in this paper will be answered in diverse parts of this paper and summarized in the conclusions to ensure validity in this research. This research has also been associated with relevant previous research which has been presented in the chapter of previous research.

4.2 Case study with idea-analytical approach together with framing method

Idea-analytical approaches are practical in different types of research studies and in various disciplines and therefore works well for studying political debates. Studies of the ideological and conceptual content of text can as well be combined with other methods to complement the aim of the study. (Bergström & Svärd 2018, 138) In idea-analytical approaches the hermeneutical insight is that people create meanings and the language is used as a way to communicate and collaborate with other people. These ideas that people create, can be studied indirectly throughout the expressions in people’s practices such as writing, speech or other communicative practice. When analysing a text, the task is to produce a statement of the underlying ideas that affect or might have affected the expression. Credible hypotheses can be created from the statements on how the ideas are constituted and therefore how they must interact to create a pattern that can be observed in the matter. To understand or explain ideas, a trial movement back and forth between the material and analyst’s own conceptions of the subject is the key to a successful analysis. This way, underlying structures behind the ideas can be interpreted. This kind of research strategy is called retrodictive. (Bergström & Svärd 2018, 139-140)

To complement the aim of the study I am going to use a method that is called frame analysis. It is often used as a method to study in what extend ideas influence politics with potential to capture problems within a different type of political documents. The model is used in order to study the significance of ideas and actors in policy making as a dynamic, interactive process. It is a social constructivists theoretical assumption that the outside world becomes understandable
only when we make it understandable, which has a special bearing on the social world and in politics. There is no objective fact that is relevant without a social context. Ideas are therefore a significant weight for politics because politics is about pushing through different ideas and constructing them. Ideas affect actor’s political agency by functioning obstructing or enabling. (Erikson 2011,10)

In a dynamic frame analysis, ideas about politics are analysed in term of frames. In a context of a political debate framing can be seen as a system of ideas for a specific question and these frames can contain several ideas about the phenomenon studied. The analysis becomes dynamic when different framings are analysed and compared with each other. In this paper I will use frames for different specific themes which can contain different ideas about the phenomena, problem and a suggested solution. Problem and the suggested solution are a significant aspect in politics which affects each other and therefore, needs to be analysed together. The questions we need to ask are what is the problem and why? What is the cause of the problem and what needs to be done to find a solution to the problem? (Erikson 2011, 38)

Prior to analysing the debate in the European Parliament (on procedure 2017/2054(INL)) from 2018, the arguments were coded according to specific themes after reading the debate carefully several times. As mentioned, in idea-analytical approaches the hermeneutical insight is that people create meanings and the language is used as a way to communicate and collaborate with other people. Based on this method, certain categories were found in the debate. These categories were also found in previous research which provides the relevance of the aspects. These categories will be called as “conditions” for transnational lists. These conditions were democracy, question of federal states, spitzenkandidaten, solidarity and the size Member States, which then could be analysed with Habermas principles about democracy. In the ground of these conditions the most relevant quotes were chosen. After the relevant quotes were chosen the data was analysed. The relevance of the quotes was determined by taking into consideration that the speeches chosen, summarized all the key arguments about a certain condition. This was the primary criteria for the chosen quotes. For every condition, one quote was chosen for, and one towards the transnational lists. Except the condition “size of Member States” where it was not possible to choose a certain quote because this aspect was only mentioned shortly in diverse speeches. However, the negative opinions towards transnational lists in the aspect of the size of Member States were taken into consideration. These arguments that were chosen, have shined spotlight to the arguments that has surrounded the whole debate.
The idea-analytical approach with frame analysis was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of different ideas in a debate of transnational lists. The benefit of this idea-analytical approach is that it works well in studying political debates and underlying ideas in argumentation which are in importance to achieve the results that are aimed in this paper. A major advantage in studies of the ideological and conceptual content of text is that it can as well be combined with other methods to complement the aim of the study and that is the reason why it has been combined with frame analysis in this paper. However, idea types or dimensions were not adopted to the idea analytical approach because frame analysis was considered to allow a better insight to the conditions found in the debate.

4.3 Limitations for the research

Because of the time limit with this paper, I have chosen only one quote for transnational lists and one towards transnational list for every condition. These quotes have then been analysed with the chosen theory. I am aware that it can limit the aspect to be able to generalize conclusions to the European Parliament as whole, but I am convinced that it is sufficient to fulfil the aim of this paper. I will not focus on the different party groups, instead I will focus on the conditions according to transnational lists that the MEPs bring up. Neither will I focus on the language or certain words, but on the idea itself.
5. Analysing the debate 2018

In this section I will analyse the arguments by using the approach of ideas together with framing method. I will start by quoting a speech or a part of a speech. Then I will analyse the arguments by framing the problem and solution to it. After that I will apply Habermas approach to it. What would Habermas theory say about the problems and solutions? After I have analysed the quote for and towards transnational lists and applied Habermas approach, I will draw my own conclusions about the conditions for transnational lists.

5.1 Aspects of democracy in the debate

I will start by quoting György Schöpflin from EPP Group who summarises the aspects towards transnational lists according to democracy and why the transnational lists would not make the democracy better in EU.

[…] First, the transnational list (TNL) is based on an idea that out there somewhere there is a European demos just waiting to be represented, and that the TNL will do just this. This is an error. There is no European demos and to claim the contrary is an illusion. Have European citizens ever been asked if they want to be represented by a transnational list? Again, the answer is no. So, in real terms, what we are looking at is a top-down, elite-driven project, presumably starting from the belief that, if the transnational list comes into being, so will the European demos. Why on earth should it? It is a fatal assumption that the TNL will generate a supranational European consciousness. If anything, those putatively elected on the TNL will be remote from the electorate, and that will not do the reputation of this Parliament any good. It’s magical thinking that the transnational list will somehow produce the European demos. If the transnational list does happen, then this Parliament will have 27 free-floating MEPs answerable to none. They will have power without an electorate, they will have power without accountability and power without responsibility. So where are the checks and balances? I shouldn’t have to say that power without responsibility is the high road to arbitrariness. That, if you ask me, is about as undemocratic as it gets. (György Schöpflin, EPP Group)
The problem Schöpfling lift up is that there is no European demos and either will transnational lists create it. He claims that the idea of transnational lists is a top-down, elite-driven project. It would bring bad reputation to the Parliament because MEPs elected through the transnational lists would be remote from the electorate and they would also not be answerable to none. This would lead to question about checks and balances and if it would exist in such a system. Argumentation for this is that MEPs from transnational lists would have power without an electorate, accountability and responsibility, which makes the whole situation undemocratic. His solution to this problem is to not adopt transnational lists to EP elections. Schöpfling frames the whole problem to the lack of demos and claims that transnational lists would make the situation even more undemocratic. Thus, the hard argument, he comes up with no solutions how to create demos instead.

According to Habermas the protest against transnationalisation is grounded in terms of “no demos” and indeed the problem lies in the misunderstandings in the thesis of “no demos”. He means that instead of letting the lack of trust be an obstacle, the solution according to him would be, through transnationalisation, to create and develop the trust among the Member States. Habermas would probably disagree to the argument that the idea of transnational lists is a top-down, elite-driven project. Transnational lists would not change the structures in hierarchy that already exists in the EU. As long as the higher level of politics do not overcome the lower level, it would be legitim under Habermas democratic theory.

Next, I will quote Guy Verhofstadt from ALDE Group. In his argument he summarizes the positive arguments in the debate of transnational lists in the aspect of democracy.

*Mr President, first of all I want to thank the rapporteurs for their work, for their wisdom and for their patience in this long discussion. You may remember the former president of the European People’s Party who was my predecessor as Prime Minister of Belgium and who was, I can say quite easily, a very dedicated European, Wilfried Martens. Wilfried Martens was a true believer in and defender of transnational lists and he understood what was at stake: he understood that without a strong link between the citizens and Europe, eurosceptics and populists would in the end always win the game. And he understood that transnational lists will not alienate the citizen: quite the contrary. Why? Because, in the proposal that you have before you, people will have two votes. One vote is for a national candidate, for a national list, to keep the link between the citizen and his or her MEP; and a second vote is for transnational candidates, to strengthen the*
link between the citizen and the European Union. In my view, this is the only way to create what I call a European demos – which cannot arrive by accident, or spontaneously of itself – and I think it is also needed to make the Spitzenkandidaten process really democratic [...] (Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE Group)

Verhofstadt argues that the strong link between citizens and Europe is the only way to fight against eurosceptics and populists. He states that the reason why transnational lists would not alienate the citizen is the fact that people would have two votes. He points out that the vote for a national candidate would still be the link throughout the citizen and her or his MEP. The other vote for transnational candidates would be to strengthen the relation between the citizen and European Union. This would strengthen both sides, the relation to the Union as whole but still carry the link for national relations which would create a European demos. According to Verhofstad the problem deems to be eurosceptics and populists and therefore it is important to strengthen the democracy in EU. The solution he proposes is to adopt transnational lists to the EP elections. Framing the problem from this argument is that the cooperation between transnational and national is the fact that creates what he calls European demos and right now the democracy seems to be loose in the European Union.

According to Habermas, citizens of nation states have a nationally limited civic solidarity which is grounded on the nation states achievements as guarantors. According to him, it is important to separate the “naturalised characteristics of ethnonational origin” that lend to support right-wing populism. (Habermas 2015, 553) Habermas would agree in all likelihood to Verhofstadt’s argument that the strong link between citizens and Europe is a way to fight against eurosceptics and populists, together strengthening the European demos. He means that it is possible to create a trust among the citizens across boundaries similarly as the national civic solidarity was developed. There would be no nations without any political mobilisation and there will be no European demos without political mobilisation within the EU. That is why Habermas would agree with Verhofstadt that EU needs an actual European public sphere. The existing infrastructures among nation states are already sufficient for Europe-wide communication and therefore one could suppose that transnational lists would be a start for creating an arena where citizens can share their social interests across national borders and establish political conflicts of these interests.

The thesis of “no demos” is multilateral and according to Jolly (2018), the problem is often confused with the lack of public enthusiasm. She states that the “no demos” thesis focuses on
the aspect that there is no transnational relationship between the individuals which makes it related mostly to the legitimacy of the process of decision-making. It seems that Schöpling means that European demos is similar with supranational European consciousness and in that aspect, he could mean that there is no public enthusiasm nor transnational relationship between the individuals and that is why transnational lists should not be established. On the other hand, Verhofstadt means that it is expressly transnational lists that would create this European demos. It could be possible that when establishing transnational lists, the European demos would be generated like the national civic solidarity has done. Nevertheless, the key problem with Habermas explanation is that it does not take into consideration that indeed the problem of no demos and lack of solidarity across the boarders has made the idea of transnational lists fall short before, like Donatelli (2015) shows in his study.

About the question of accountability, the fact is that the EU already suffers from lack of accountability in decisions-making. Because of the nature of the parliament elections which are fought on domestic issues in national parties, leaving European parties no more that parliamentary groupings, it becomes as far hard to identify the parts that has been responsible for certain decisions (Wiener and Diez 2009, 217). This seems to be another issue in the European Parliament that needs to be solved to have a solid ground for new establishments. The results in this chapter indicate that to make transnational lists possible it would be necessary to either build this European demos other way or guarantee MEPs inside the Parliament that it is not necessary to already have it because transnational lists would create it. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the aspects of federal states.

5.2 Aspects of federal states in the debate

Next, I will quote Paulo Rangel from EPP. In his argument according to transnational lists in the aspects of federal states, he states why it is not appropriate for the EU.

*Mr President, we fully support the composition and allocation of seats designed by the co-rapporteurs, but we are very worried about the transnational list political recommendations in this report. We have managed to build a sound and trustworthy democracy here in the European Union, where there is an equilibrium and balance between majorities and states. If we accept the constitutional Frankenstein monster that is the transnational list, we accept something that does not exist in any*
Rangel argues strongly that such a system with transnational lists does not exist in any federal state and that is why it should not exist either in the EU. He states that there is an equilibrium between states and majorities which would be ruined with transnational lists. He introduces transnational lists as “Frankenstein monster”. Problem according to Rangel seems to be a system that doesn’t exist anywhere else and the fear that a change to the old system would ruin the already existing democracy and balance between Member States. The solution to this problem stated by him is to keep the old system with sound and trustworthy democracy without transnational lists. Rangel is framing the problem to a federal constitution which would be like a “Frankenstein monster” and compares EU to a federal state.

It is quite a clear that Habermas supports the idea of supranational federation, but he points out that the supranational polity must not overcome the lower level. It is understandable that there is a fear for the new system to ruin the old achievements in the view of the politically uncontrolled issues, which are resulted from the mismatch between a society, that is developing to increasingly at the systemic level, and states that continues to exist fragmented (Habermas 2017, 173). That is why Habermas highlights the obligation for heterarchical relationship between the Member States and EU. He also emphasizes that already existing normative achievements of the Member States must be preserved. This democratic self-assertion for normative achievements speaks consequently, under the given conditions, for the aim to understand a supranational democracy. What Habermas means is that democracies impounded within nation-states could not preserve the substance of democracy in Europe even though they would not be affected by participation in the systemic dynamics of a society that is global. (Habermas 2015, 553)

Guy Verhofstadt from ALDE Group argues for transnational lists when it comes to the issue about federal states.

[...] People say federal states don’t have it: wrong! Federal states want it. My country, Belgium, is a federal state and many want a federal constituency. It is separatists who make war against it. A second example is the United States of America: a federal state. It’s because there is no single constituency that it is Mr Trump who is
President and not Hilary Clinton, who received three million votes more than Donald Trump […] (Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE Group)

Verhofstadt point out that he comes from Belgium that is a federal state that do not have this system but would like to have it. He asses that many would like to have a federal constituency and points out that people who do not want it are separatists who do not even want Belgium to be a federal country. Verhofstadt also reminds about elections in USA where Hilary Clinton lost to Donald Trump although she received three million votes more. The problem seems to be according to Verhofstadt, the lack of a system that would contribute to all the citizens in EU and be fair according to representativeness. Solutions to this is to adopt transnational lists. The problem is framed to be the lack of federal constituency and therefore equal representativeness. When Verhofstadt highlights the problem with USAs election system, he also lifts up that there is a need for a system that would secure a fair election to the Union as whole. This makes the problem as well not unique, instead he means that also federal states have a problem in their systems with representativeness.

In federal states there is a principle of the democratic legitimization of joint political action across the boundaries from international law that established out of nation states. When the size of these states is divided largely it gives rise to complication with principles of democratic equality and state equality when they come together and form a federation. Therefore, Habermas states that in a federally structured supranational polity these competing principles must find a different institutional resolution than in a federal state. (Habermas 2017, 172) Consequently, Habermas supports the idea of a federation but assets that the resolution must be different in a supranational polity to be equal and meet the democratic principles.

The fear of the EU turning into a federal state exist among the MEPs in the Parliament. There is also MEPs that support the idea of a federal state like Verhofstadt. Furthermore, Habermas is also a well-known advocate for a federal constitution within the EU. The fact is that, the European Union is so far one of the most outstanding political achievements of the present age and unique as its character. Therefore, there is no parliament that could be compared to the European Union’s parliament nor is there an election system such as the EU’s. If considered of the view of the proposition about transnational lists citizens having two votes, one for a national candidate and one for a transnational, would this mean that EU would automatically transform into a federal state? It can be doubted but the fact is that transnational lists alone would not make EU to a federal state. Consequently, transnational lists would be a step towards EU as a
super state and that is why it would be significant to have a clear dividing line between supranational organization and a federal state. However, Donatelli (2015) study shows that the disagreement in determining the net benefit from the possible introduction of the single district was a significant factor that contributed in the failure of the Duff proposal for transnational lists. Therefore, it could be possible that these same reasons are the causing factors why transnational lists did not succeed this time either when analysing the aspect of a federal state.

As the Parliament's function is to represent citizens in the Union as whole it is important to make sure that citizens will be heard, was it then through transnational lists or through national lists. One thing that is sure, is that the EU needs more European politics within the Parliament. The EU already has the Council, who represent Member States and therefore, it is important that European Parliament fulfils its function as an unbound party to national states representing citizens across boundaries.

The results in this chapter indicate that the question of a federation is a significant factor which affect the opinions about transnational lists. As Donatelli (2015) proves in his study, different fragmentation determines the voting behaviour of MEPs in constitutional issues and break apart the groups alongside national lines which can also be seen in the debate. Consequently, opinions between Member States in this issue are too divided to find a fine line for a settlement. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the aspects of spitzenkandidaten.

5.3 Aspects of the spitzenkandidaten in the debate

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant with spitzenkandidaten. According to a definition provided by Laura Tilindyte from European Parliamentary research service, ”Spitzenkandidaten process is a procedure whereby European political parties, ahead of European elections, appoint lead candidates for the role of Commission President, with the presidency of the Commission then going to the candidate of the political party capable of marshalling sufficient parliamentary support” (European Parliamentary research service, 2019). The discussion about transnational lists and spitzenkandidaten was divided. Paul Tang from S&D highlights why EU should not adopt transnational lists at the moment.

Mr President, in the interests of public support for the European Union, it is essential that the EU becomes more democratic and more political, and breaks away from the old combination of legalistic bureaucracy and backroom deals. To be fair, the report under discussion has this in mind, but it is limited in its opportunities: it only
addresses the British seats. Should one really start a discussion on European democracy with the implementation of degressive proportionality or with the reserving of a handful of seats? I would say no. Should one start a discussion on the consequences of Brexit, keeping in mind that the UK is a net contributor, with a claim for more seats in the European Parliament? I have to say no again. Despite all good intentions, this report does not help us in the discussion on European democracy or on Brexit. For the Dutch delegation of Socialists and Democrats, the Spitzenkandidaten process is far more important […] (Paul Tang, S&D).

Tang frames the problem to be backroom deals within the EU and the old combination of legalistic bureaucracy. He argues that transnational lists are not the factor that would lead to public support for the Union, which he says it is essential to raise the democracy level in the EU. He agrees that the report tries to address this problem, but it maintains to be limited in its opportunities when it only addresses the seats of United Kingdom. The solution he proposes is to rather focus on the Spitzenkandidaten process. However, he does not expand his argument to the reasons why it would be far more important.

According to Habermas, political elites are the cause for the European Union’s old combination of legalistic bureaucracy. He would state that the political elites have refrained for half a century from turning the European issues to be topics of the national public spheres and that is the reason for lack of interest of public support for the European Union. Habermas would disagree to Tangs argument about transnational lists not affecting European democracy and instead point out that transnational lists would make elections to the Parliament about European issues and consequently lead to public support for the Union, which would finally lead to increased democracy. He would probably agree that spitzenkandidaten process is important, but rather than only focus spitzenkandidaten, he would see transnational lists as a complement to this process to increase democracy within the EU.

Guy Verhofstadts speech refers also the argument about Spitzenkandidaten. His view about that is following:

[...] In my view, this is the only way to create what I call a European demos – which cannot arrive by accident, or spontaneously of itself – and I think it is also needed to make the Spitzenkandidaten process really democratic. Today the Spitzenkandidaten process is still undemocratic and non-transparent, a backroom deal within political parties or between political parties. What Spitzenkandidaten alone will
Verhofstadt notes that transnational lists would make the Spitzenkandidaten process throughout democratic. He assumes that Spitzenkandidaten process is now a backroom deal within or between the political parties which makes it non-transparent and therefore undemocratic. The problem is that EU has a system which is supposed to make it more democratic but fails to do that and thus, makes it undemocratic instead. The solution would be transnational lists that would complement the Spitzenkandidaten process. Verhofstadt frames the problem to spitzenkandidaten process and its undemocratic character. He finds that EU has already a process that fails to deliver its function. According to him, transnational lists would make the process really democratic and it would be citizens who first then could make an impact in the choice for president of the commission (Dagens arena 2014).

Habermas speaks for a united Europe and for transnationalisation of the democracy. According to him European elections do not deserve its name because it is not European wide. Joint candidates and transnational lists could make difference in manifestos and therefore it would give citizens visible alternative choices. Consequently, a mutual European party system has to be established out of the loose party families. About the spitzenkandidaten, Habermas stated 2014 that if Europe’s heads of the government ignore the vote in the election of the President of the Commission it would be an attack on democracy (Minkmar 2014). He would probably agree with Verhofstad’s argument that transnational lists are needed to make the whole spitzenkandidaten process democratic. He sees also an interplay in Brussels between institutions that has no legitimation pressure as European Court of Justice and Commission. Their decisions are not enough legitimised because national elections alone cannot validate representatives of varying governments to take part in decisions over other nations as whole. (Habermas 2015, 547)

The spitzenkandidaten process was applied for the first time in connection with the European Parliament elections in 2014, when five European parties appointed their top candidates. The function of the process is to promote accountability for decision-making and increase the interests among citizens towards the EU. (Utrikesministeriet 2018) It is hard to say if the
process has succeeded in its intended function because it has been applied for the European elections only once. However, Habermas theory does not fully explain why transnational lists would be positive for the spitzenkandidaten process, but it states strongly that the political competition must increase within the European Union to increase the democracy, which transnational lists would contribute to. With or without transnational lists the transparency within the Union has to be better and the media needs to be able to inform citizens across the borders. It could be possible that transnational lists could increase citizens interest for the spitzenkandidaten process and for the Union as whole. There is some evidence that transnational lists may affect positively politicisation of the EU. Bol et al. Finds out in their experiment that, in the long term, a pan-European election can possibly increase the politicisation of the EU. On the other hand, it could also strengthen the critique spitzenkandidaten process has faced, namely that it takes too much power from national governments and gives it to the Party groups.

5.4 Aspects of solidarity in the debate

There were few arguments in the debate about solidarity in the EU and cohesion which also divided opinions. Doru-Claudian Frunzulică from S&D argues following:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{Don't you think that, through these elections, we ought to send the important message that we need more cohesion inside the European Union? Then we could make the switch to transnational lists. We can see currently that the eurozone represents a hard core of the European Union, while there are still countries that are not members of the eurozone, not members of Schengen, and so on and so forth. Don't you think that we ought to wait a bit for more cohesion, and then move on to the next step?}\[...]
\]

(Doru-Claudian Frunzulică, S&D)

Frunzulică argues that there is not enough cohesion in the European Union and that is the reason why transnational lists cannot be the next step for the Union. Frunzulică states that not all the countries are members of the Eurozone or members of Schengen and that is why that would need to happen before the EU can be ready for transnational lists. The problem deems to be the lack of cohesion in the EU. The solutions he is proposing is not to adapt transnational lists before, for example, all the countries are members of the eurzone. He frames the problem to be lack of cohesion and especially that all the Member States are not members in all the projects
there has been before. Frunzulică do no argue directly that transnational lists are a bad thing. Instead, he points out that it is not the right time.

Habermas would agree to the issues with the Eurozone. The establishment of the mutual economic zone and single currency was connected with the assurance of increased prosperity for all. The idea of a social Europe has observably failed in the course of neoliberal economic globalisation. As stated by Habermas, the reasons to these failures resides in Europe itself. However, mastering the continuing crisis will not be achievable without transferring further sovereignty rights to European level. Anyhow, European Parliament needs to be strengthened. (Habermas 2015, 549) Furthermore, Habermas thinks that the lack of “European people” or the lack of cohesion is not necessary obstacle to joint political decision making in Europe. Nation states have secured citizens free and relatively equal living conditions that citizens trust. They are seen as a guarantor of these achievements that citizens do not want to risk by an unfamiliar supranational polity. For these reasons Habermas states that the conditions have to stay like this. Nation states can still retain as guarantors for their citizens even if they cooperate more across the boundaries, but the important part is to establish an arena where this collaboration can happen.

Josep-Maria Terricabras from Verts/ALE assess that transnational lists would be a factor to strengthen the solidarity between Member States.

Mr President, transnational lists are an important step in the process towards a single European constituency. Having the opportunity to vote for a list with candidates from different Member States helps to create in the imagination of citizens a sense of European general interest and a feeling of belonging. Transnational lists can open the window to the creation of solidarity and a redistribution of wealth and can reinforce the idea of a European public sphere. All in all, we are debating something that can strengthen democracy […] (Josep-Maria Terricabras, Verts/ALE)

According to Terricabras transnational lists would encourage the process forwards a single European constituency. It would generate a sense of European general interests in the eyes of citizens. It would also create a feeling of belonging and grow solidarity among citizens and therefore, strengthen democracy. The problem deems to be the non-existence of a single European constituency and the lack of feeling of belonging. The solution is to adopt transnational lists to create a feeling of belonging and solidarity between Member States. When
framing the problem one can point out that the need for transnational lists is the lack of European feeling and feeling of belonging to a European community as whole.

According to Habermas the European Union’s institutional framework is geared to the cohesion and security of exceptionally fragmented political community. It is designed to avoid conflicts in European-wide interest. These interests are important and unfortunately, as far, The European Union lack of an arena to solve them or even create them. There exist contrasting conceptions of the common good and therefore, according to Habermas, EU has a need for a European public sphere where social and political conflicts can moderate.

In the debate of transnational lists there are on the one hand, opinions within the European Parliament that the lack of cohesion is an obstacle to create transnational lists and on the other hand, that transnational lists would contribute to cohesion within the European Union. Hypotheses can be made if transnational lists would strengthen the Union and bring citizens closer together, but as we can see from Donatelli’s (2015) conclusions, the representative function for many MEPs is still accomplished with attachment to the citizens of their own countries. Therefore, there is no agreement for a Europeanization of national campaigns. Thus, candidates from transnational lists would not represent any country specifically which could soften the MEPs attachment to their own country. In conclusion, the lack of cohesion seems to be a problem in the process of creation of transnational lists but could be non-problematic in practice. As Donatelli (2015) states, different fragmentation within MEPs determines the voting behaviour in constitutional issues and break apart the groups alongside national lines, which makes the lack of cohesion to an obstacle when trying to create transnational lists. Whereas it would not necessary be a problem in commission, because then all the MEPs would not be attached in such an extent to their national countries, because then part of them would actually represent all the citizens equally.

The results in this chapter indicate to the same results as with the issue of the thesis “no demos”. Either is it seen as an obstacle or as a possibility. It could be stated as a conclusion that the European Union needs more solidarity to function as it should. If the aspect that lack of solidarity is an obstacle to the transnational lists, it should be created other way that transnational lists could even have a chance at all. Or then there would need to be understanding that transnational lists would create this much needed solidarity between all the Member States. The next chapter moves on to discuss the aspects of size of Member States.
5.5 Aspects of the size of the Member States and equality in the debate

There were as well different opinions about transnational lists and if they would only benefit big member states. Josep-Maria Terricabras states as following:

(...) We have an opportunity to reinvigorate the European project and to rethink it, especially from a bottom-up perspective – for instance, by allowing Member States to assign seats to regions having legislative powers. This is today the case in the Åland Islands and tomorrow it could be the case in others. It is a matter of political will (...) (Josep-Maria Terricabras,Verts/ALE).

Terricabras sees transnational lists as bottom-up perspective which would benefit and help regions that have legislative powers. He points out that for instance, the Åland Island and other regions with autonomy would benefit from transnational lists and would make it easier for these self-governing regions to defend their interests. The problem seems to be that the self-governing regions do not have enough influence in the EU or that they do not have their voices heard. The solution to this would be to adapt transnational lists. When framing the problem one could assume that there is a lack of democracy within the EU according to self-governing regions as the Åland Island.

According to Habermas the distribution of the seats in The European Parliament represents a critical violation of the citizens equal representation in the EU given the existing differences in size of the populations like Malta, on the one hand, and Germany, on the other (Habermas 217, 171). As stated by Habermas, transnational lists would bring The European Union closer to citizens and give them a European public sphere where to share interests across the borders whether they come from a big or small state. The European model of society is based on the interconnection of democracy and welfare state. Habermas states an empirically documented results of industrial countries where inequality is increasing steadily. The connection between welfare state and democracy will break down if the social inequality cannot be turned around. This trend towards a split society is attached to the alarming tendency of rising political abstention, paralysis and alienation of voters from mainly underprivileged classes. According to Habermas this inequality is connected to disintegrating equal representation of the voting citizens and their entire spectrum of interests. (Dagens arena 2014)
The debate was surrounded by arguments that transnational lists would benefit only the big Member States but as well arguments that it could be an instrument for small Member States to have their voice heard. In the previous attempt to establish transnational lists Donatelli (2015) comes to a conclusion that one of the most significant barriers why it failed was the opposition by MEPs from smaller and medium-sized Member States that feared that the proposition would only benefit bigger Member States. As Habermas itself admit, citizens are strongly attached to their own national states and do not want anything to ruin the achievements National States have permitted for them. Consequently, the lack of trust for the EU reflects pressures of self-conscious citizens of their nations-states normative achievements. Therefore, citizens strong connection to their national state is possible to remain even if transnational lists exist. Bol et al. (2016) holds the view that citizens would most likely choose their vote depending on if their own national candidates exist on the transnational lists. One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether transnational lists would fulfil its function if citizens would regardless vote for their own national candidates? Nevertheless, it could be assumed that if the politics would generally be more across the borders, the transnational lists could fulfil its function. However, it depends on citizens awareness toward the Union as whole and not only their own national state. Consequently, it seems possible that these transnational lists could help to increase the politics in the Europe as whole if they are created in equal terms for all the Member states regardless size. One possible implication of this is like Bol et al. (2016) suggest that transnational lists should be created in the way that there would be a maximum number of candidates from each Member State on the list. The list should as well be a system of closed-lists instead of open-lists. Both of these aspects would strengthen the equal representation of all the Member States. Taken together, one condition for make the transnational lists happen can assume to be that the European Parliament must be guaranteed that there will be equal representation to all the countries despite the size. Only then citizens could trust that their own national States remain as a guarantor for their rights.
6. Conclusion

The nature of elections to the European Parliament and the absence of party competition at the European level are strongly associated with the democratic deficit issue in the European Union. European Parliament elections are still described as second rank elections, held on national level and fought by domestic political parties, partially about national issues. European parties are trying to develop joint programs for European elections, but parties in election remain national, as well as the subjects’ politicians emphasize in the campaigns. Furthermore, the absence of European politics depends mainly on the party and political system and hardly not on voters. The citizens are left with a few options for the future Europe. Elections deem to perform the function to represent people’s interests and therefore legitimize the operation of power as well as holding governments accountable. Unfortunately, elections to the European parliament broadly fall short to perform these functions. Following Brexit, the expected withdrawal of the UK’s MEPs in the near future has given a new energy to the idea of establishing transnational lists for the European elections. In February 2018 the idea of transnational list was voted but rejected in the European Parliament after a debate on a clearly divided issue

When analysing the debate from 2018, five significant conditions for transnational lists were identified. These conditions were democracy, question of federal states, aspect of spitzenkandidaten, solidarity and the size of Member States. Interestingly, the conditions were observed to be both obstacles and possibilities for transnational lists. Either was it observed that because of the certain condition, it is not possible to establish a system with transnational lists or, that indeed because of the lack of a certain condition, it would be necessary to establish a system with transnational lists to create it.

The results with the aspect of democracy, indicates that to make transnational lists possible it would be necessary to either build European demos first or guarantee MEPs inside the Parliament that it is not necessary to already have it because transnational lists would create it. However, Habermas would say that the problem lies in misunderstandings in the thesis of “no demos” and in addition, is something that could be possible to create as national civic-solidarity has been created back in the days. Furthermore, the results for the aspect of federation, indicates that this question is a significant factor, which breaks apart the groups inside the Parliament alongside national lines. Indeed of that, Habermas highlights the obligation for heterarchical
relationship between the Member States and EU to make it transnational lists democratically legit. Interestingly, the aspect with *spitzenkandidaten* was used as an argument in both positive and negative ways. Spitzenkandidaten was partially introduced to mitigate the problem with elections which others sees just as an undemocratic attempt for elites to rule the system, and that way argues that transnational lists would be necessary to make the process actually democratic. Others sees it as more important that should not be confused with new changes. Together the results provide important insights into the aspect of citizens interest for European elections. It could be possible that transnational lists could increase citizens interest for the spitzenkandidaten process and at the same time for the Union as whole. There is also some evidence that transnational lists may affect positively politicisation of the EU. This accords as well with earlier observations by Bol et. al. (2016) which showed that in the long term, a pan-European election can possibly increase the politicisation of the EU. On the other hand, it could also strengthen the critique spitzenkandidaten process has faced, namely that it takes too much power from national governments and gives it instead to the party groups. By contrast, Habermas states that the political elites have refrained for half a century from turning the European issues to be topics of the national public spheres and that is the reason for lack of interest of public support for the European Union. Consequently, transnational lists would solve this problem by creating a European public sphere.

Furthermore, the results in the aspect of solidarity indicates to the same results as with the issue of the thesis “no demos”. It could be stated as a conclusion that the European Union needs more solidarity to function as it should, because of the shared view among the MEPs about the lack of solidarity. Habermas states that European Union is designed to avoid conflicts in European-wide interest and that is the reason that The European Union lack of an arena to solve them or even create these mutual interests. There exist contrasting conceptions of the common good and therefore, according to Habermas, EU has a need for a European public sphere where social and political conflicts can moderate. The results for the aspect of the size of Member States shows that citizens have a strong attachment to their own national state. This leads to one question that needs to be asked, whether transnational lists would fulfil its function if citizens would regardless vote for their own national candidates. Nevertheless, it could be assumed that if the politics would generally be more across the borders, the transnational lists could fulfil its function. One condition to make transnational lists possible can assume to be that the European Parliament would have to be guaranteed that there would be equal representation to all the countries despite the size. Alternatively, according to Habermas, the distribution of the seats in
The European Parliament represents a critical violation of the citizens equal representation in the EU given the existing differences in size of the populations and that is why it is a significant condition for transnational list to secure this aspect.

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between the above-named conditions and the failure of the proposition for transnational lists, alternatively, to a future breakthrough. This finding is similar to previous studies which has suggested reasons to the failure of the previous attempts to establish transnational lists as well as for the outcomes if transnational lists would be established namely, that transnational lists could have potential to increase the European interest. A possible explanation for the failure might be that there is not enough cohesion within the European Parliament of the conditions in the aspect of which are seen as obstacles and which as possibilities. It is therefore possible, that if all of these conditions are taken into consideration and mutual values are made within the European Parliament, transnational lists could have a bright future. These results are significant in understanding why the idea of transnational lists failed and what would need to be taken into consideration for possible future attempts. These findings have as well important implications for developing future cooperation to solve the problem in the big picture. As we can see, the European Union was not ready to make a change this big because of the lack of mutual understanding of these conditions. Therefore, it could be necessary to prepare such a change with further integration in the aspect of European election. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that the European Union could be ready for transnationalisation of the European election’s through other way. Maybe by making the elections more about European parties and therefore, perhaps that MEPs would run campaigns through European parties about European issues. This could already create more European politics and make the elections more about Europe. Though, further studies, which take these aspects into account, will need to be undertaken.
References


