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News | 05.02.2018

Transnational lists for the European elections

Questions & answers

What are transnational lists and what is their purpose?

Transnational lists would create a common constituency, made up of the entire European Union. This would sit alongside the existing constituencies of Member States.

A common constituency would push European political families to build truly European projects and take into account the needs and situations of all citizens, not just the voters in their country.

For example, a Finnish candidate on a conservative list would need to have answers to the problems experienced by Greek voters, just as a French candidate on a Green list would need to be able to meet the needs of German, Spanish and other citizens.

In this way, European issues, which are at the heart of MEPs' mandate, can finally take their deserved place in European election campaigns. We hope this could help build a genuine European democracy in the service of the collective European interest.

How are MEPs elected today?

Although the EU Treaties stipulate that "the Parliament is composed of representatives of the citizens of the Union" (i.e. that MEPs represent all EU citizens, not just those of their Member State), European elections are held at national level.

Each State is allocated a number of seats and organises European elections on its territory, while respecting a certain number of common rules. As such, the European elections today are essentially 28 national elections to the European Parliament.

How are the seats distributed among states?

The following principles on the distribution of seats among states apply (Article 14 TEU):

- The European Parliament is composed of a maximum of 751 members (this is a ceiling, there can be fewer)
- No Member State may have more than 96 seats (Germany reaches this ceiling)
- No Member State may have less than 6 seats (at present, Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus, Estonia and Malta)
- Representation of EU citizens must be based on the principle of “degressive proportionality”

What is degressive proportionality?

This principle of degressive proportionality establishes that an MEP elected in a more populous Member State represents more citizens than one elected in a less populous Member State. It was established in order to have some form of proportionality (more populous states have more MEPs) but still allow smaller states to have an acceptable number of MEPs.

What is wrong with the current system?

While MEPs represent all EU citizens, they campaign at national level, often on national issues and are ultimately politically accountable to national voters.

This means there is no proper space for European political debate, where those who will have to write and vote on European laws will debate their projects in front of all Europeans.

Further, it is not uncommon to see members of the same European political parties putting forward contradictory programmes at national level, even though they will ultimately sit together in the same political groups when elected to the European Parliament.

Why do we have this historic opportunity for change?

There are two key reasons why transnational lists are on the political agenda.

Firstly, because we are reforming the distribution of seats in the European Parliament. The current distribution of seats between Member States fails to respect the principle of degressive proportionality laid out in the Treaties. Several states have a higher MEP/citizen ratio than more populous states. These states (France, Spain, the Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, Denmark and Ireland) should therefore be allocated additional seats.

On electoral matters, the European Parliament has the sole right of legislative initiative. In June 2013, the European Council called on Parliament to make a proposal for a change in the distribution of seats to ensure that the 2019 elections comply with the Treaties. Looking at the distribution opens a window to consider transnational lists.

Secondly, the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, which is due to take effect in March

2019, frees up 73 seats. This makes it possible to rebalance the number of seats per State while leaving the possibility of creating transnational lists, without any state losing seats.

How would these lists work in practice?

On election day, each citizen would have two votes: one vote for the party they prefer at national level, and one vote for a European list.

The Greens/EFA Group would like these lists to meet a number of conditions before they could be submitted. We believe that they should be balanced according to both gender and geographical criteria. For example, candidates on the same list should represent at least one quarter of the Member States of the Union (which is the threshold for setting up a European political group or party) and in blocks of five candidates, two candidates could not have the same nationality.

What are the next steps to make these transnational lists a reality?

On 7 February, the European Parliament will on its position on the subject. This position will then be passed to the European Council, who are due to hold a debate at an informal Council on 23 February. The Council has to agree its position unanimously before sending it back to the European Parliament for final agreement.

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