

PRIMARIES FOR SELECTING THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT

A DEMOCRATIC AND STRATEGIC REVOLUTION ?

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Synthèse

Developed by Party of European Socialists' activists, the idea of using primaries to nominate the progressive candidate to the Presidency of the European Commission is now relayed by the media and among the main leaders of the PES and national socialist parties.

The PES decided at the 2009 Prague Congress to choose a common candidate for the European Commission Presidency for the 2014 elections in order to avoid the repetition of the dark 2009 scenario where there had been no joint progressive alternative against the EPP candidate, the Commission's President Jose Manuel Barroso. The choice of such a single candidate is crucial to the European Union political future. The Lisbon Treaty offers opportunities for politicising and democratising the EU : the Commission President will now be elected and not merely approved of by the Parliament, on the basis of a Council proposal taking into account the results of the European elections. In brief, 2014 could be the advent of an actual political Europe. The Commission was until then the EU executive branch without any democratic accountability to its citizens. With the Treaty of Lisbon however, the Commission could become the EU government, stemming from the political majority at the European elections. The fight for further politicising the EU has now to be conducted inside the parties : the progressive parties must chose a leader for the European elections to be their candidate for the Commission Presidency and implement their program after it has been approved by the polls.

According to their supporters, European primaries would be the best option to overcome the current Social-Democrats' unsatisfying results across Europe and the severe democratic crisis of the European Union. They consider that primaries would give a new momentum to the Social-Democrats electoral strategies and would provide the European political system with a strong democratic legitimacy. These two objectives are both absolutely crucial to carrying out a progressive agenda.

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The organizational modalities of such primaries should maximize their impact on the Social-Democrats' scores while taking into account the different political situation across Europe. The following recommendations aim at combining both efficiency and pragmatism requirements.

The primaries could be open to all members of the Social-Democratic parliamentary group, notably to include the Italians who are not members of the PES.

The candidates could be able to present their own programs: the primaries must not only appoint a person but also choose a political line. But given the differences among European politics, the definition before the primaries of a joint PES program as a common framework for all the candidates seems necessary. The 2009 Manifesto experience shows that this process help to integrate the different progressive lines of the various member states.

A shortlist of candidates is necessary to limit their number to three, four or five. This selection can be done either by the PES Presidency or the PES Leaders meeting, with the risk of a choice based on the lowest common denominator, or by the Congress or by PES activists, options which are more difficult but would better involve the major actors of the campaign.

The primaries may be reserved for members of PES sister parties or be open to all European citizens. The first option would certainly be more functional and is likely to be more easily acceptable by the national parties. But the second one would obviously be most effective for involving the media and democratising the European political system. A mixed system is not to be discarded.

The U.S. primary system would allow to aggregate national results taking into account the weight of the various parties and the demographic weight of each member state. Voters would therefore designate delegates mandated to elect a specific candidate during a PES Congress.

The choice of the primaries calendar should aim at a European marathon with different stages for increasing the media coverage of the campaign while avoiding the risk of a loss of impetus. A course of three to five months ending two months before the European elections would be an interesting option in this perspective.



The campaign in favour of European primaries for nominating the PES candidate for the European Commission Presidency was launched on social networks by PES activists, headed by the Irish Desmond O'Toole and the Portuguese Jose Reis Santos. The interest raised by the initiative in the media and among politicians shows its relevance for the challenges progressives face today. This idea may indeed represent a major innovation to give the Social-Democrats a new momentum in Europe and to democratise the European political system.

How could this idea be elaborated? Could it be implemented for the 2014 European elections? This paper assesses the relevance of such European primaries and analyses its potential organisational modalities.

1 - GIVE NEW MOMENTUM TO SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE WHILE DEMOCRATISING THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The last European elections were a painful defeat for progressives. 2009 symbolises their inability to generate a momentum in the European elections despite a joint program, the Manifesto, and to rally behind a candidate for the Presidency of the Commission.

The PES activists campaign for European primaries to select a leading candidate for the European elections is a reaction to this alarming result.

The initiative arises from the European Union is now essential to bringing a progressive project forward. Given the degree of Union' integration, a leftist agenda cannot really be implemented without an actual and strong European economic and financial regulation, progress towards fiscal and social harmonisation, the development of common policies in key sectors such as energy, environment, research and innovation.

Yet the European political system cannot allow the promotion of such a project. The three European institutions are currently dominated by the conservatives and, despite the extension of its powers, the Parliament's political influence is limited because its debate are still not politicized and relayed in the public opinion enough.

In this context, the Social-Democrats have no choice but to seek to invest and politicise the Parliament and the Commission. These two objectives have now to be pursued together because the Parliament elects the Commission President under the Lisbon Treaty.

For their supporters, organising primaries shortly before the European polls to select the candidate for the European Commission Presidency is the best strategy in regard of these two objectives.

1.1 – A KEY INNOVATION TO BREAK THE CONSERVATIVE HEGEMONY IN EUROPE

Today's social democrat's electoral record in Europe is alarming. The PES, which lost 38 deputies in the European parliament, only holds 162 seats out of 736, or 22% of the seats against 27% in 2004. It was in France that the PES has recorded the sharpest decline, losing 17 seats. As highlighted in the opinion polls, only two thirds of the socialist voters supported the PES, the rest preferring the Green vote or abstention. The PES has not been able to mobilise the Social-democrats to stop the conservative wave sweeping across Europe.

These last European elections reminded the Social Democrats of an obvious point: an electoral contest cannot be won without the ability to embody a political project. Without clear leadership, the

mobilisation of citizens in favor of a political movement is extremely difficult if not impossible. The 2009 Socialist defeat is not due to an insufficiently radical program or, conversely, too "old fashioned" social democrat options, but to their inability to generate momentum around this program and communicate on their proposals.

The lack of unanimous support for a common candidate against Barroso, who personified both the political conservatism and stagnation in Europe, has in fact discredited their message in 2009. Although Poul Nyrup Rasmussen was generally regarded by European Socialists as the natural candidate to carry their common agenda at the December 2008 PES Congress, no official statement has ratified this agreement. Some socialist governments have subsequently favored Barroso against their own side: the Portuguese, the Spanish, the British, and the German SPD led by Martin Schultz preferred to focus on technical arrangements related to the choice of the commissioners in the Barroso Commission. Faced with this division, citizens preferred the clearer approach assumed by the Greens, which was especially clear in France.

Willing to learn from this failure, the PES has initiated its reform in the Prague Congress in December 2009. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen did not beat around the bush: he put his candidacy on the line to ask the Socialist sister parties to radically change the PES functioning. His proactive policy has been successful: he was reelected with over 90% of the votes and his conditions were translated into concrete commitments for strengthening the PES. European socialist parties decided to choose "a PES candidate for the European Commission Presidency for the next European elections" and to consider "all means" for the next election, including a program and a common leader and an ever-stronger link between the European platform and the national and local parties.

To win the European elections in 2014, the PES will have to mobilise many more voters. As Poul Nyrup Rasmussen stressed, the main opponent to the Progressives is not the Conservative party but the "party of apathy": those who abstained despite their political leanings. It is for the Social Democrats that the abstention rates are the highest: their voters account for the majority of the growing contingent of abstainers, from 38% in 1979 up to 60% in 2009. Now this trend is likely to worsen: young people or rural citizens for instance are not interested in European elections or do not feel represented in the current political offer at European level. But shopkeepers and artisans, every left-sided social categories shows disinterest in the current European political contest.

Will the reform adopted by the PES be enough to tackle such a challenge? Can merely choosing a common candidate for the Commission Presidency allow progressives to win over the party of apathy? No, argue the supporters of European primaries. This political decision is a key step but is insufficient given the abyssal turnout figures.

An ad hoc committee was appointed during the Prague Congress, under the leadership of Alain Richard, to launch a reflection upon the method for appointing a common candidate. The FEPS has contributed to the debate with the Ania Skrzypek's very comprehensive analysis presenting all the possible options to select that candidate.

The divide between the different options is clear: the degree of openness of the process. Most of the proposed methods limit the nomination to a PES internal matter. Yet, these options would not have a

particular impact on the campaign and would be for the public opinion just way of catching up on the Conservatives.

For Desmond O'Toole, the Irish representative for PES activists, progressives must go further to renew their strategies. They have to fight not only for winning polls but for their own survival.

By involving all European socialists or even all citizens, the primaries imply the organization of an actual public debate on progressive options for European politics. This cannot be merely about rallying behind a common candidate, but about carrying an huge political innovation, which would be key for democratising the EU and would correspond to the progressives vocation. The primaries undeniably have a strong symbolic power which could restore the progressive group's image as party of change.

The Progressive campaign could make an big qualitative leap thanks to the primaries. By staging a competition among several candidates, they would show the importance of the European elections. By bringing forward different left-side lines, they would set an actual European political debate on progressive policies. The challenge would be likely to attract political figures with a European or even an International stature. The competition between such figures would not fail to stir the curiosity of the public opinion and to enhance the mobilization of activists. The primaries thus have considerable leverage on the media coverage of the campaign. Their organization, their purpose - the Commission Presidency - as well as their political and media potential should encourage national Social-Democrat parties and their activists to get more involved in the campaign, to develop their reflection on European issues, to take part to the elaboration of the program and to build stronger relations between sister parties and with the PES. There is probably no other method for nominating a candidate able to create such an emulation and to give such incentives for cohesion.

What are the risks to the Social Democrats? Failure, of course. But a failure of the primaries because of a lack of participation would most likely be the sign of an underlying electoral failure. Such a defeat would be a further sting, but the current difficulties encountered by the Social Democrats suggest that the cost of refraining from a genuine change in their parties' position and organisation would be higher than the cost of a failure of the primaries. This could furthermore be explained by the novelty of the idea or by a disinterest in European politics. The breaking up of PES internal consensus is another risk. The PES political situation is still fragile and its current structure, influenced by a "French conception", has only emerged in the last decade. Hence the primaries question might seem to put the internal unity of European socialists at risk. Supporters of this initiative, however, consider that the European socialist parties' cohesion that would bring the primaries remain higher this risk of division.

1.2 - AN EFFICIENT TOOL FOR THE POLITISATION AND DEMOCRATISATION OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Beyond electoral cycles, the Social Democrats face a fundamental challenge for their ambitions: the lack of politisation of the EU institutional system. EU politics nowadays still fail in highlighting clear policy options and political divide.

For most citizens, the European political system remains blur and hardly representative. While the European Commission is responsible for proposing legislations and implementing decisions, this institution still lacks democratic legitimacy, even though the Parliament has already censured some Commissioners. The political program of the Union stems from the broad guidelines issued by the European Council without Parliamentary oversight. Moreover, although the Parliament sees its role strengthened, its divide develop more along thematic rather than political lines. It is therefore not surprising that in such a system, European citizens are struggling to see the stakes of voting in European elections.

This absence of a political system governed by actual democratic changes in the majority in power, both at the Parliament and the Commission, naturally fosters abstaining, and especially today among progressive voters. The conservative majority in the Council has led for several decades the progressives to consent to the deepening of the European market in exchange for institutional advances but without giving them the possibility to carry their own agenda. The implementation of project for an Europe showing more solidarity, especially through social and fiscal harmonization, is always delayed. Here also stands a key reason for the electoral decline of the Social Democrats in the European elections: their ambitions and promises being mostly belied by the light of EU policies.

The necessity to politicize the EU therefore meets the electoral objective.

A strictly intergovernmental approach will not hatch this politicisation : the conventional moment has not led to any actual constitution and no institutional progress can be expected in the medium term through a treaties revision. The democratisation of a regime and the affirmation of the role of the Parliament may, however, come from the construction by the Parliament of a favorable balance of power though a strategic use of its prerogatives. The British parliament has thus asserted its authority using its budgetary powers. The French Third Republic was also rooted through a procedural harassment of the royalist government, which triumphed with the crisis of May 16, 1877 and the renouncement by the President of the Republic to held the power of forming the Government. The European Parliament now has the leverage to engage in such a process: it already holds the power to censure the Commission, to elect its President, to exert strong budgetary control and to use an increasing decision and interpellation power. Moreover, by giving a personal legitimacy to the candidate of the majority party invested as President of the Commission, the primaries fortify him to confront the Council.

The election of the President of the Commission, and not just its approval by Parliament, is therefore an essential step towards the politicisation and democratisation of the Union. But it remains an insufficient one as supporters of the primaries argue.

In theory, the appointment of a leading candidate should make the Commission more representative and contribute to the politicisation of the elections. But stopping there would imply ignoring that a vital element of a modern democracy is the **perception of political issues. This key point was clearly demonstrated by the researchers Reif and Schmidt.** The procedures to appoint political representatives have a decisive influence on the results. Yet the stakes for the European elections remain hardly perceived today by the citizens. This fact should not be overlooked. It seems therefore essential to establish a nomination process that makes obvious the policy issues that it raises.

To think that the mere existence of candidates for each party for the Commission Presidency could lead to the politicisation of the European debate would also imply ignoring the actual tradeoffs in the Parliament. The quest for balance and consensus still precludes indeed political divides. The major parties share out the positions according to a mechanism that is clear only to MPs. The impact of a designation of candidates by parties may therefore be limited to the elections since the establishment of an opposition system with such rules is unlikely.

A real politicisation of the European debate and of the Parliament therefore implies a greater involvement of party activists or even citizens, so that their concerns could be better addressed and that greater political responsibility rest with elected officials, should they become President of the Commission or leader of the opposition.

Another advantage of the primaries: their long-term positive impact on the progressives' position over the EU politics. Such a process would raise the national parties' interest for the European politics, which is now still lacking, and would strengthen the links between national parties and the PES, both in substance and organisation. Beyond the election issue, the primaries would thus contribute to structure and strengthen the European parties' position, functioning and impact.

The task is difficult indeed: the aim is to move from a political system wherein the European elections are not an issue of power to one where they would determine the European institutions' political orientations. The interest of citizens in institutional issues has largely dried up by sheer weariness. Similarly, a progressive agenda has lost its credibility within the existing framework. Progressives must therefore both propose a project likely to involve citizens and a mechanism for its implementation that will convince them.

This is the yardstick with which we must evaluate the advantages and disadvantages as well as the general feasibility of the various possible models for these primaries.

2 – THE PRIMARIES ORGANISATION

Three criteria should be taken into account to chose the way of organizing the primaries:

- The effectiveness of the system adopted to select a strong candidate and setting their campaign at the heart of the public debate and the media system in Europe ;
- The degree of adherence of the national parties to the primaries, as the PES has little leeway on this issue outside the willingness of sister parties;
- The cost of the primaries, which must not undermine the financing of the European polls or even other national elections. Such situation would hamper the party members enthusiasm for sure. To ensure equal conditions to the candidates, the PES and the national parties would have to provide them a budget. The possibility of EU funding for primaries should be sought with other political parties which would engage in this way.

2.1 - PREPARATION OF THE PRIMARIES

Organizing primaries for a party, a group or a parliamentary majority?

Should the primaries be internal to the PES or open to other political forces? Can they contribute to building a parliamentary majority?

Primaries reserved only for the PES sister parties would not fully reflect the choices presented to the citizens in the European elections. Indeed, some parties, clearly involved in the SD group in the European Parliament, refused to join the PES. This is the case of the Italian social democrat party or of smaller parties stemming from national political histories without any ideological differences with the European Socialists. Excluding candidates from these primaries could be a mistake. The organization of the primaries could therefore gather all parties belonging to the SD parliamentary group.

The Socialists can also consider opening the primary to three political families: the “left-of-the-left”, the greens and the center. The first group develops too tumultuous relations with the European socialists at the national level to envisage a political agreement at the European level. Electoral cartels are conceivable with the center, itself divided between Christian Democrats and liberals. But this group is precisely defined by its ability to remain equidistant from the left- and right-wing, in various configurations which would be difficult to foresee at the European level. Considering their degree of European integration as well as their experience of coalitions with the socialists and social democrats, the Greens are clearly the most credible partner for such a project.

The diversity of national cultures and systems, however, must be taken into account. In many countries, elections only aim at gaining a Parliament reflecting public opinion. The majority has then to be built by the deputies themselves. This is the tradition of the European Parliament. That's why forming a majority coalition before the European elections would be very difficult. It seems therefore more realistic that the primaries should be limited to the future parliamentary group of Social-Democrats. If it wins the elections, this group would be the core of the parliamentary majority which will propose its candidate for the European Commission Presidency.

Should the program be designed by the PSE or the candidate?

Should the PES adopt a common program, a new manifesto, for the next European elections? Would the candidates be tied to this program or would they be able to develop their own agenda, since they will be also selected on the basis of their proposals?

The second part of the alternative is more consistent with the primaries system. That said, the formulation of a well-balanced program, reflecting the different lines of the European centre-left, would certainly be a tricky work for a candidate, but remains essential for a truly democratic debate. If

the PES program is elaborated in a constructive way, it can be a solid set of proposals. Each candidate could then adapt this agenda, adding or subtracting points and focusing on specific objectives according to their views. The PES may play a key role here to provide the candidates with a solid electoral basis.

The selection of candidates for the primaries

We lack experience to envisage a democratic choice of a leader at the European level. We don't know for instance how many candidates might be interested in a Commission Presidency with such legitimacy. Two problems can arise: a consensus on a candidate or a flood of applications. In the first case, the primaries would become artificial. In the second one, the high number of applicants could make the participation process too complex and daunting. It could also significantly increase the campaign costs, which may introduce inequality at the expense of candidates lacking funds.

It is therefore necessary to preselect three to five candidates. A technical screen will eliminate those who are not eligible, mainly because of their nationality. The rotation system which will come into force in 2014 for the European Commission College can only be modified with the Council's unanimity. Candidates who couldn't be appointed as commissioner because of their nationality would not have the right to participate in the primaries.

Three more or less open options are available for this first selection:

- *A choice by the PES Presidency or by the PES leaders meeting.* This method is simple but may favor the choice of the lowest common denominator.
- *Organizing an ad hoc PES Congress including all parties involved in the primary.* The choice would then be given to well-informed voters, aware of the value of the candidates, and would represent the diversity of platforms within the PES. The delegates would be appointed shortly before the Congress so that a short information campaign could brief them.
- *Involvement of PES activists.* The activists are well-informed as well, considering their commitment and the information they receive. At the interface between two visions of the PES, as a confederation of parties and as a federal structure, the activists play a key role in integrating the centre-left in Europe. They were initially considered as mere PES' relays within the national structures but the Prague Council decided to better involve them in the PES' activities. However, they cannot formally submit amendments, while they often formulate them, and they cannot be represented by delegates. Building on PES activists would mobilize them upstream of the European polls to boost their national organizations. The results should be reassess considering the sister parties weight, because the spread of PES activists status remains very uneven across parties and would favor for instance a French candidate. Their consultation by electronic voting would be easy, since it is the process already used to join the PES. However, considering a high number of activists and the free registration, the screening could be distorted by numerous and coordinated

registrations. If the PSE wants to involve its activists, it would be preferable to allow them to vote for a number of delegates proportional to the weight of their party at the Council.

Two selection methods can be considered:

- *Sponsorship of a specific number of delegates.* Sponsorship leads to selecting the most famous candidates in the public opinion or among the delegates. The sponsorship conditions should be clearly defined for ensuring a fair and effective representation. The obligation to involve a minimum number of different European nationalities should for instance be a criteria to prevent solely national candidates. The sponsors being not numerous, the crucial threshold should be determined in the light of the wanted number of candidates.
- *The majority decision.* This new type of ballot does not ask the voters to choose one candidate over others, but to assess them all individually. A grid is used to indicate whether a candidate should, "absolutely" to "not at all," represent the PES for the next elections. Three to five candidates with the highest median score would be selected. This system allows pushing aside the least serious candidates or those who have a strong but too local support.

These two selection methods should not significantly alter the choice of the top three candidates, but they lead to significant different results for the additional ones. Majority voting is particularly interesting in preparing European primaries: considering the wide range of political views and of national cultures in the left-wing, a procedure allowing the identification of the most popular candidates is likely to select the most serious challengers.

2.2 - THE COURSE OF THE PRIMARIES

Open or closed Primaries?

Who should choose the candidate? Socialist parties' members or the citizens?

- *closed primaries*, reserved for activists, is a first option. The PES parties would decide upon the way of organizing the primaries because the PSE is unlikely to impose general internal procedures. Such closed primaries have the advantage of giving greater leeway to the sister parties. Thus they would facilitate their commitment to the primaries. They would also introduce European issues in a very practical way in the activist's internal debate.
- *open primaries*, calling upon all citizens to vote, would be the most democratic option. Already experienced in Italy and Greece, their principle is accepted in France for the next presidential elections. Their added value is based on the citizens' involvement in the campaign. U.S. Democrats talk of empowerment, "power given to the citizens". This process has a strong inclusive dimension, bringing people closer to the political structures and inviting them to commit to a common initiative. In Italy, 4 million voters turned out to

choose Romano Prodi, sole candidate in the primaries. This mobilization confirms that the willingness to support a campaign is a key element of this mechanism.

The voting arrangements for open primaries should be based as much as possible on the experience gained in national elections. National parties would have to set up polling stations in the usual conditions. Practice shows that this system does not raise any additional problems in principle, but the workload implied. Concerns on organizational costs and the system efficiency naturally lead to organise polls by city district and in larger groups in the countryside. The use of electronic voting, however, would require prior identification of voters, all citizens, and the assignment of a personal code. The cost of a general mailing would be high and could probably only be considered for sparsely populated areas where polling stations are likely to be far from the voters' homes.

The leverage of open primaries for the success of the campaign and the politicization and democratization of the EU institutional system would certainly be more important than the impact of closed primaries.

In case of successful polls, the selected candidate would not be a head of government with considerable leeway, but the European Commission President face the EU Council. In order to give the Commission as much power as possible to propose legislation, its President's political legitimacy should be as strong as possible when facing the member-states.

Another factor in favor of openness: the success of the primaries will rely on the citizens' mobilization for the leading candidate selection as well as for the European Parliament elections. The closed primaries introduced in 2006 by the French Socialist Party are not a useful precedent for assessing citizens mobilization for a European primary. The importance of the French presidential election is recognized by all citizens so those are naturally interested in the candidates' nomination by the major parties. The situation is far from being similar at the European level. The primary purpose of primaries is precisely to create a shock in public opinion. That's why a direct call to voters seems definitely preferable to an internal mechanism to launch a democratic momentum which does not exist so far. Moreover, the media impact of open primaries would obviously be much higher than in closed primaries.

Cost-related issues should not be overlooked. The impecunious national parties would not want to spend too much for European primaries. The open option as the closed one involve the establishment of campaign teams, national headquarters and local offices, as well as communication and travel expenses. Insofar as they address a much wider audience, open primaries imply significant costs - printing flyers and ballots, and organizing the polling stations. However the Italian experience shows that open primaries can become profitable or at least much less costly if citizens are asked to financially support the initiative upon voting. Open primaries are also more likely to attract funding thanks to their media impact.

But a consensus on the type of primaries to choose is likely to be difficult to reach. Several national parties may be reluctant to organizing a popular vote, while others could prefer this system considering its political impact and its potential lower costs. An mix of these two systems is perhaps

the most likely scenario. The PES cannot force one model on the sister parties and should facilitate a consensus on the mere choice of the primaries.

The existence of different systems is not a major obstacle to effective primaries. In the U.S., the elections processes can be extremely different depending on the states and this situation does not undermine the public interest for the primaries and the winner's legitimacy. At the EU level, the organization of primaries in some countries can raise enough media attention to give a greater visibility to the European campaign.

2.2 - DIRECT OR INDIRECT PRIMARIES?

Centralising the European level the results of direct votes following the "one man, one vote" principle is hardly conceivable today. First of all, the political cultures among the European countries are still very different. The Walloon PS has for instance a number of members comparable to the French PS. Direct headcount would therefore lead to over-representing some parties or countries due to different historical legacies.

Closed primaries can therefore only lead to a PES nomination Congress which would follow the usual procedures. Each party would send delegates with a mandate for a specific candidate. Similarly, open primaries in some countries could run on the U.S. model. A first election could select electors or delegates, distributed according to population weight and mandated to a particular candidate. A direct headcount of the results would actually only be possible in an open primary covering the whole of Europe, option which remains extremely unlikely.

Mobilising delegates allows furthermore each sister party to decide how to internally organise either a two-round system, where all the delegates would vote for the same candidate, or a proportional poll, whose results would be reflected by the composition of the delegations.

The primaries calendar

Should the vote be held on the same date across Europe? Would open primaries be accepted by all the parties, efficiency would certainly require a simultaneous vote. For closed or mixed primaries, however, the answer would depend on the duration of the process. A short campaign with votes taking place on the same day reduces costs, but is more risky, especially if a few countries only opt for open primaries. If the media are not interested in the primaries from the very beginning, it will be very difficult to capture their attention on a tight schedule.

On the contrary, a different date for each country would give candidates the opportunity to adapt their positions. Successive polls would provide the candidates with regular feedback on the impact of their campaigns. Such a calendar would allow the runners to get familiar with the exercise of a transnational campaign. Moreover, these successive events and intermediate results as well as the candidates' reassessments and inflections are more likely to catch the attention of the media. This scenario allows to build an actual dramaturgy. The media coverage is crucial to the primaries' success, since it gives fame to the candidates and sets out the components of the political debate. That's why it would be very interesting indeed to plan a calendar with different steps, including ideally

regular primaries, for this nomination process. This calendar should be short enough to avoid too high expenses and the lassitude of the public opinion. A period of two to three months seems reasonable.

The candidate nomination must occur quite late in the legislative electoral process. The European elections cannot yet mobilise public attention over a long period. The election polls have to take place quickly after the primaries to benefit from their momentum. The primaries could therefore be completed approximately two months before the elections.

In theory, a designation Congress would not be necessary after open primaries. However, it could be very useful to publicly show the unity of European Socialists behind their candidate and to facilitate the transition from the internal campaign to the campaign against the European conservatives.

A PES leaders meeting, gathering parties leaders and socialist governments, could be organised during the congress to prepare the EU Council's proposal of the PES candidate for the European Commission Presidency.

As the EU Council proposes the President of the Commission under a qualified majority, the Government of the PES candidate's nationality cannot have any veto on the decision. It doesn't need to be this government which proposes the candidate. The Treaty simply states that one national from each country only can be a commissioner. Socialist governments would have to work together with the parliamentary coalition, which has a veto on the President, the entire Commission and, in fact, each commissioner individually to achieve the designation of the Commission that would actually reflect the elections' results and be mandated to implement the PES program.