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WHEN PARTIES (ALSO) POSITION THEMSELVES:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EU PROFILER

Alexander H. Trechsel and Peter Mair

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES
EUDO - EUROPEAN UNION DEMOCRACY OBSERVATORY

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an introduction to the EU Profiler

ALEXANDER H. TRECHSEL AND PETER MAIR

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

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For further information:
www.eudo.eu
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
European University Institute
Via delle Fontanelle 19
50014 San Domenico di Fiesole
Firenze, Italy
EUDO.secretariat@eui.eu

Abstract

This paper is intended to frame and describe a novel method of political party positioning within the European Union and beyond. Ever since the groundbreaking work by Downs in the 1950s, political scientists have derived a variety of methods to empirically determine the position of parties on dimensions measuring differences in policies or ideologies. Today, two sets of techniques dominate this research domain: expert surveys and manifesto/ programme coding. What is common to both techniques is that the positioning is done by qualified scholars and other experts outside the parties, and that it is not always possible to trace the grounds on which a party was coded in one way rather than another. The EU Profiler project, a large-scale, interdisciplinary and pan-European research endeavour, takes a step beyond these established methods by using party self-positioning and by offering full documentation. That is, and in addition to conventional expert coding, some 300 political parties in Europe have been invited to place themselves on 30 issue dimensions. Moreover, and in so far as it proved possible, each coded position for each party is fully documented with extracts from party manifestos, party leaders' speeches, or relevant press or policy statements. The resulting data offer unique opportunities for comparing the accuracy and efficiency among party positioning techniques, exploring for the first time and in a systematic way the auto-positioning of political parties throughout Europe, and offering close textual documentation for the positions taken on each issue dimension.

Keywords

Introduction

This paper introduces a novel method of positioning political parties within the European Union and beyond. Ever since the groundbreaking work by Downs, political scientists have derived a variety of methods to empirically determine the position of parties on scales measuring differences in policy positions and ideologies. Today, two sets of techniques dominate this research domain: expert surveys and manifesto/programme coding. In both techniques, the positioning is established by professionals outside the parties, i.e. by qualified researchers in the case of expert surveys and by trained or expert coders in the case of manifesto analyses. Up to now, however, the parties themselves have not been involved in the process – at least in the larger-scale comparative research versions that apply these techniques. Both techniques also share a lack of transparency in their codings. Experts who place parties in expert surveys are not asked to justify their placings or to cite evidence for those placings. As experts, their codes are generally accepted. There is greater transparency in manifesto research, in that the codes used are attributed to party documents that are available in the public domain. Even in this case, however, it is not easy to source a coding category or the decision to employ that coding category through to a concrete text. The codes are presented and the original texts are available, but it is not always possible to trace the process linking one to the other.

Both of these limitations have been tackled in an innovative fashion in the EU Profiler project, a large-scale, interdisciplinary and pan-European research endeavour, which has experimented with offering more than 270 political parties within the European Union (and in a number of neighbouring countries) the opportunity to place themselves on 30 political issues related to party competition in the 2009 European elections. The same parties are also offered the opportunity to respond to and discuss the placings that are determined by expert coders. The resulting data offer unique opportunities for comparing the accuracy and efficiency among party positioning techniques, exploring for the first time and in a systematic way the auto-positioning of political parties throughout Europe. Moreover, these data, and the party positions that they reflect are also documented as fully as possible, with almost all coded positions being directly linked to explicit party statements that have been drawn from election programmes, party leaders' speeches, or other official party sources.

This paper will offer a first introduction into the conceptual design and practical application of this new approach to party positioning. In the following section we briefly review the development of attempts to position parties in a policy space, and look at the main approaches which have been used to generate the relevant data. We then go on to show how the new EU Profiler approach differs from these traditional methods. We then go on to introduce the Profiler itself, and to outline the different stages through which it was developed. The final section of this introductory paper discusses how the parties themselves were engaged with the process and the different ways in which they responded.

Locating parties in policy space

The capacity to locate parties in some form of common space, usually in left-right terms, but also increasingly along additional and more specific policy dimensions, has always constituted a central element in the comparative analysis of party competition and party systems. Since Downs (1957), for example, and more particularly since the work of De Swaan (1973) and Dodd (1976), the capacity to locate parties in a common policy space has been used to evaluate why certain

coalitions of parties are more likely to form, and to test the extent to which policy or ideological affinity across parties can be used to explain patterns in coalition formation and partisan voting. This also facilitates the comparison of party systems in relation to the role of policy or ideological affinities in promoting alliances between different parties, as well as in promoting or constraining the degree of fractionalisation of party systems. In addition, the location of parties in policy space has been valuably employed to evaluate whether partisan politics matters, and to assess the extent to which inter-party differences connect to differential policy outputs of the governments to which they belong, and how this varies from system to system. This also helps us to understand the working and effectiveness of representative government. By locating parties in a common space, and by comparing these positions to the preferences expressed by voters, we can gain a real and measurable sense of the extent to which these two core components of representative government are mutually congruent. Moreover, by comparing what parties stand for, both in terms of policy and ideology, and what government actually produces we can gain a better sense of the extent to which representative government is responsive to the demands and preferences of a party-mediated citizenry.[1]

These concerns are also clearly relevant at the European level, where party differences are assumed to be of increasing importance not only in the European Parliament but also in the Council (e.g., Hix et al, 2007; Lindberg et al 2008). But there are also additional benefits afforded by the capacity to locate parties within a common policy space at the European level. Given that all of these parties are competing for representation in the same institution, the European Parliament, and under largely the same institutional and regulatory constraints, a comparison of party policies and preferences across the European electoral space can tell us a great deal about the boundedness of the various political families and cross-national party groupings, as well as about how some issues are emphasised in some settings but not in others, or some others are prioritised by some types of parties but not others. On the assumption that the same parameters of policy competition are potentially operable within each individual system at the European level, a comparison of the real positions occupied by the parties can therefore offer great insights into the character of cross-national differences in structures of party competition, as well as into the diffusion or limitation of ideological differences between parties. At its most simple, for example, such an analysis can tell us whether party family matters more than party nationality in determining the distribution of party positions, such that the two main parties in Germany, say, the Christian Democrats and the Social, Democrats, might be seen to have more in common with one another as German parties than either might have with their Christian or Socialist family counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

Since at least the 1970s, political scientists have devoted considerable energies to testing and elaborating the different ways in which these policy spaces might be empirically established. To date, there have been three principal bases from which such data have been developed. The first is constituted by the *perceptions* of party positions that are held by either citizens or political elites, a source that was used most frequently in the earliest work in the field. Daalder and van der Geer's (1977) early work on the location of Dutch parliamentary parties in a two dimensional policy space was based on the reposes of MPs in a parliamentary survey, while Sani and Sartori's (1983) attempt to measure party system polarization in left-right terms was based on the self-defined location of party supporters responding to a mass survey. In both cases, what mattered

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[1] A more extended overview of these issues can be found in Mair (2001), as well in Laver (2001) more generally. For a more recent assessment, see Benoit and Laver (2006: chapter 3), as well as the special issue of the *Electoral Studies* (26:1, 2007).

here was not any 'real' position of the parties, but rather their positions as perceived – and presumably acted upon – by voters or politicians.

The second main source for such data has been the various 'expert' surveys which currently proliferate in comparative political science, and which were first experimented by Morgan (1976) and Castles and Mair (1984). These surveys are also based on perceptions of party positions in a given space, but in this case the perception is that of the expert or the scholar, rather than the political actor, and as noted elsewhere (Mair 2001), are seen to have three major advantages. First, they reflect the judgements of close observers of the parties in question, and these observers are presumably intelligent, well-read, and well-informed sources. Second, they are likely to be reasonably reliable, in that they call for a judgement of party position based on what the party is currently doing or saying, rather than on assumptions drawn uncritically from past party behaviour. Third, expert judgements are quick and easy to organize, and are increasingly comprehensive in their application. They permit the collection of comparable and standardized data across a very wide variety of party systems, and have led to very impressive and fully-rounded results (e.g. Benoit and Laver 2006). There are also disadvantages to such surveys, of course. As they proliferate, for example, expert impatience may build up, such that it becomes more and more difficult to get responsible and responsive experts to give sufficient time and attention to this sort of work. Moreover, as the studies using expert studies become more refined and more fine-tuned, the level of detail they require becomes more specialised, making it sometimes difficult to assume that all responses are equally authoritative. Finally, while experts might find it relatively easy to place more prominent parties in more salient spaces, they are often on less sure ground when it comes to locating smaller parties or those which are not extensively engaged in the debates in question. For busy experts, opting to allocate a neutral party position is in this sense an easy default response, but it is not always justified.

The third main base from which policy spaces have been constructed is constituted by the stated policy positions of the parties themselves, and by an analysis of *texts* such as party programmes, party leaders' speeches, or parliamentary debates. The main source used here, and one that continues to provide the basis for an increasingly large variety of applications and analyses, is the award-winning comparative manifesto project (CMEP), which was set up under the direction of Ian Budge and David Robertson in the early 1980s, and which now includes quantitative data on party positions drawn from the analysis of party manifestos from 50 countries covering all free democratic elections since 1945 (see http://www.wzb.eu/zkd/dsl/projekte-manifesto.en.htm; see also Klingemann et al 2006). The major alternative source for analyzing party positions through texts is the Wordscore method, whereby the content of various party documents are computer-analysed in order to use the relative frequency of particular words, with these frequencies then being employed to establish the positions of parties in relation to one another. Although both procedures are based on the analysis of texts, they differ markedly in their assumptions and in their perceived authority (see, for example, the debate in *Electoral Studies* 26:1, 2007). Nonetheless, together with expert judgements, these various forms of textual analyses now constitute the two principal means by which policy spaces are defined and party positions located. It is with these data that most comparative and empirically-based analyses of party competition tend to work (Benoit and Laver 2006).

The *EU Profiler* represents a step beyond these established methods. By taking advantage of the now voluminous material accessible on the internet, as well as the ease of communication the internet provides, it combines expert judgements and textual analysis to develop a highly original and fully-documented process of identifying party positions on key issue dimensions. These positions are then evaluated against the parties own judgement and claim as to where it is located, or, where a prior claim cannot be identified, they are presented to the party for its response. For

the first time, therefore, the location of party positions is determined *interactively* with the parties themselves. In some cases, as we will detail below, both the expert coders and the party concerned were in close agreement as to where the party was positioned on the various issue dimensions. In other cases, the party disagreed with the expert coder, and produced alternative documentation by way of speeches or policy statements which led to a revision of the expert judgement. In yet other cases, albeit rarely, the party was convinced by the coder's judgement, and modified its own response accordingly. And finally in yet other cases, no agreement could be reached. In these latter cases, the EU Profiler group opted for the coder's judgement rather than that presented as an (undocumented) alternative by the party.

The second strength of the Profiler is that in almost all cases, with some very exceptions, each position attributed to the party has been justified by reference to precise quotes from party statements, speeches, or programmes, and these texts are then made available for users to read and evaluate themselves. This also sets the Profiler apart. While the codes used in the CMEP can be linked to the party programmes analysed by the project, it is not always easy to see the precise derivation of judgements regarding specific positions. The Wordscore method, though replicable, is similarly opaque. Conventional expert judgements, on the other hand, are offered solely on the authority of the expert, and are not backed up by any documentary evidence. The EU Profiler overcomes these limitations by linking each party position to a documented speech, statement, or programme. If the party is deemed to be in favour of euthanasia, for example, it is because there is a traceable statement of record to that effect. Where no statement can be found, then the party is deemed to have no opinion. Where contradictory statements had appeared, the party was deemed to be neutral or equivocal. Each of these documented sources of party positions is then published as part of the online reporting of results, or linked to the internet site, thus offering a unique and highly innovative source of textual data on the positions of some 300 parties in 30 countries in contemporary Europe.

In other words, not only are the parties involved in positioning themselves along the relevant scales, but the positions finally determined are also fully documented in the original language, offering a clear evidential basis for the codings. It is this which allows the EU Profiler to make a unique contribution to the literature and methods of party placements.

The EU Profiler

The Profiler itself was designed as a Voting Advice Application (VAA) for the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009. During the EP election campaign, citizens going to the website www.euprofiler.eu were able to position themselves on 30 political issues. Having done so, they were then offered, both in text form and graphically, a thorough look at the corresponding policy offer from the parties competing in the election. That is, they were then able to match their political preferences with those advertised by the political parties competing for the voters' support at the polls. Similar systems have been used in a number of national elections (Walgrave et al. 2009). In the Dutch elections of 2006, the system mounted by Kieskompas generated 1.7 million users. The Swiss Smartvote system had 1 million users during the 2007 national elections. In Germany, the Wahl-o-mat system had over 5 million users in the 2005 national elections (on VAAs more genewrallyt, see Waalgraf….2009). These numbers clearly indicate that citizens are more curious about politics than is generally assumed, and also show that, in using VAAs, citizens are prepared to give social scientists myriad indications about their political preferences – as long as they gain something in return. In the case of VAA's, the gain for the citizen is having her curiosity satisfied. Users find out about their aggregate political profiles and are given a very good idea of how well their profile fits those of the individual parties (and

even candidates) competing in the elections. In the European case, finally, where parties from 30 countries are involved, there is the added value of discovering how one's preferences not only match those of the parties in one's own country, but also those in other countries, such that, for example, an Irish voter might find herself very close to a Dutch party, or an Italian voter to a Swedish party.

On June 7 2009, 736 MEPs were elected to represent half a billion European citizens in the 2009-2014 legislature of the European Parliament. During the campaign preceding the elections, the European University Institute (EUI), in cooperation with the Dutch 'Kieskompas' and the Swiss 'Smartvote', offered citizens a revolutionary, Europe-wide Voting Advice Application (VAA) called "EU Profiler". For over six weeks, citizens accessing the website www.euprofiler.eu[2] were able to position themselves on 30 political issues, across nine different policy dimensions. Of the 30 issue statements, 28 were identical across all EU member states (see the Annex for a list of the statements), with the remaining two being country-specific statements that varied from country to country. The countries for which the EU Profiler was offered included all 27 EU member states as well as Turkey, Switzerland and Croatia. It was available in 24 language versions, and for every country, the user could chose between a version in the language of the country and a version in English (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: EU Profiler Homepage

By the immediate aftermath of the EP elections, in the morning of June 8 2009, the EU Profiler registered a total of 2,572,891 unique sessions for a total of 919,422 fully completed list of statements across Europe. In other words, the EU Profiler produced almost one million voting advices for its users and, in the same process, gave social scientists almost one million detailed lists of citizen policy preferences. The variance among countries was substantial, and derived not only from variation in population figures but also from unequal media coverage. In the countries

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2   Most national extensions, such as .de, .fr, .it etc. were also available.

with the highest number of users (see *Table 1*), the Profiler could avail of print and online media partners who attracted users and created a lot of attention. Previous experience with similar national VAAs also helped to account for the cross-national variation in take-up.

Table 1: Number of advices generated in the EU Profiler until June 8 2009

Country	Advices	Country	Advices	Country	Advices
Sweden	223952	Czech Republic	7082	Luxembourg (DE)	1014
The Netherlands	192572	Hungary	6578	Latvia	971
Germany	97919	Bulgaria	6252	Switzerland (DE)	881
Portugal	78999	Finland	5003	UK: Wales	727
Italy	51438	Ireland	4780	Slovakia	726
France	48424	UK: Scotland	3009	UK: N. Ireland	634
Belgium: Walonia	40006	Denmark	2023	Switzerland (FR)	590
UK: England	36232	Slovenia	1868	Turkey	554
Poland	31164	Lithuania	1804	Luxembourg (LU)	553
Spain	24179	Romania	1654	Croatia	379
Belgium: Flanders	20250	Estonia	1600	Malta	378
Austria	13535	Luxembourg (FR)	1392	Switzerland (IT)	298
Greece	8789	Cyprus	1213	Total	919422

Users choosing to fill out the EU Profiler were offered for each statement a five-point scale ranging from "completely agree", to "tend to agree", to "neutral", to "tend to disagree" and "completely disagree". In addition, users could indicate "no opinion". An example is shown in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: Example of a statement
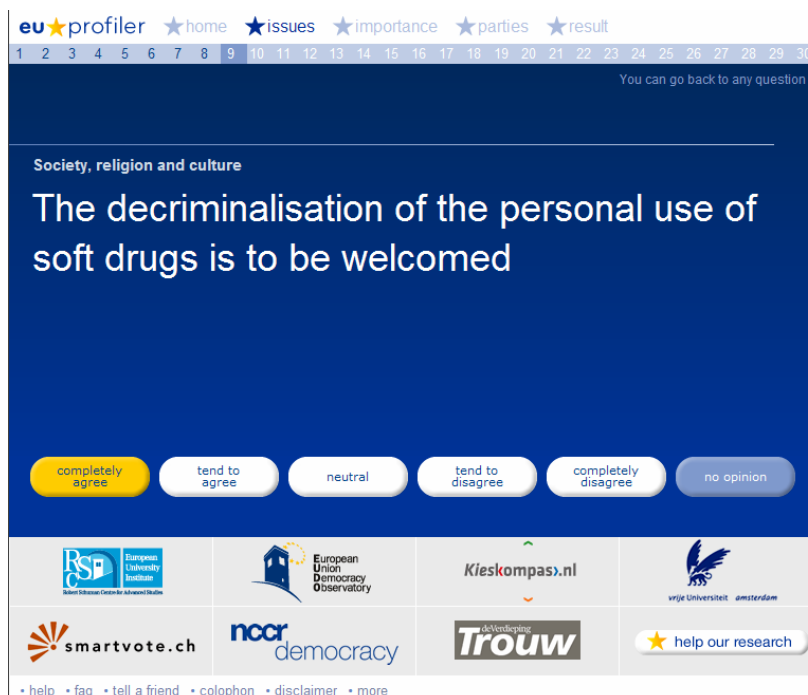
After having gone through the statements, the user was informed that "You have indicated your views on all 30 statements. Two more questions about your preferences will follow. Your result will be displayed immediately afterwards." The first additional question concerned the importance the user gave to the individual policy positions (*Figure 3*), and this measure of salience was later used to weight the results produced for the user. The user could also skip this question and therefore preclude a weighting the issues.

Figure 3: Saliency screen

The second optional question asked to the user was the standard question for measuring propensities to vote for parties ("How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties?"). This is the question that is now used in the European Election Study (EES) and in many national election studies, and is deemed more valuable than conventional partisan preference questions. The question listed the major parties running in the EP elections in the country selected, and the user could then indicate her propensity to vote for each party on an 11-point scale, ranging from "not probable at all" to "very probable". It was also possible to skip this question. It is important to note that the propensity to vote question did not alter in any way the calculations of the results, which were based solely on the answers to the 30 statements and on the saliency attributed to the latter by the user.

Figure 4: Propensity to vote question

Once all the questions had been completed or skipped, the user then entered the webpages containing her political profile. The first stage in this process located the user in a bi-dimensional space called "the compass", made up of a horizontal dimension, ranging from "socioeconomic left" to "socioeconomic right", and a vertical dimension, ranging from a "pro EU integration" position at the top to an "anti EU integration position" at the bottom. Note that not all statements could be used to calculate an individual's position on these two particular dimensions.[3]

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[3] Details on the method used can be found under http://www.euprofiler.eu/help/

Figure 5: Compass
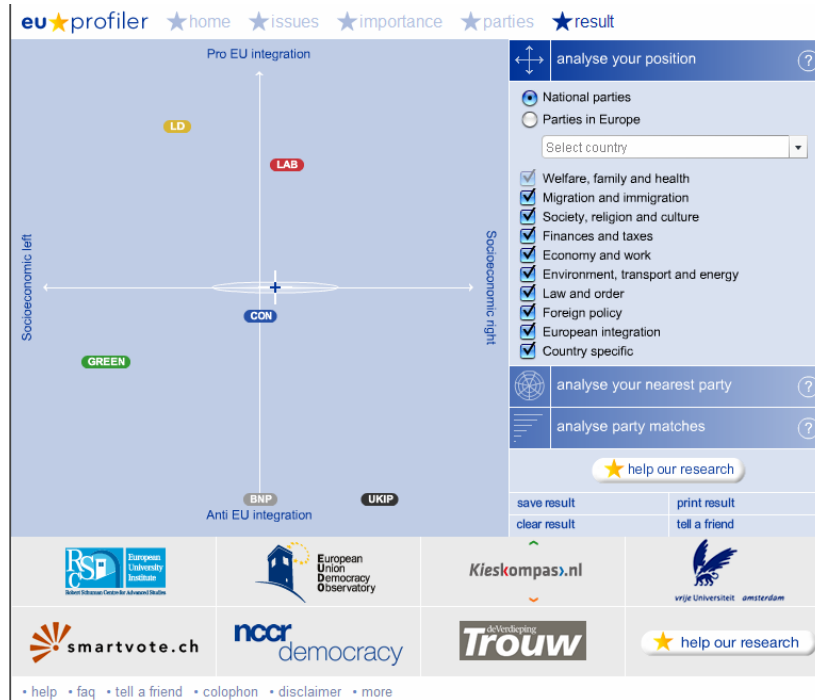
In the compass a "+" sign showed the position of the user based on the answers given to the statements used to establish the dimensions. The compass also reported the positions of the political parties that were selected for inclusion in the system. Overall, 274 political parties were included in the EU Profiler final version that went online on April 24 2009, six weeks ahead of the European Parliamentary Elections of June 7. The positions of the parties were calculated in precisely the same way as the position of the user, so ensuring maximum comparability between party supply and voter demand. That is, and based on its public statements and its own claims, each party was also allocated a position on the 5-point scale for each issue statement, or was deemed to have no opinion.

Other than through the compass, the user was given the possibility to match his political preferences in a "spidergram" (*Figure 6*), initially developed by the Swiss technological partner Politools/NCCR Zurich, and in a more simple "matchlist".

Figure 6:Spider
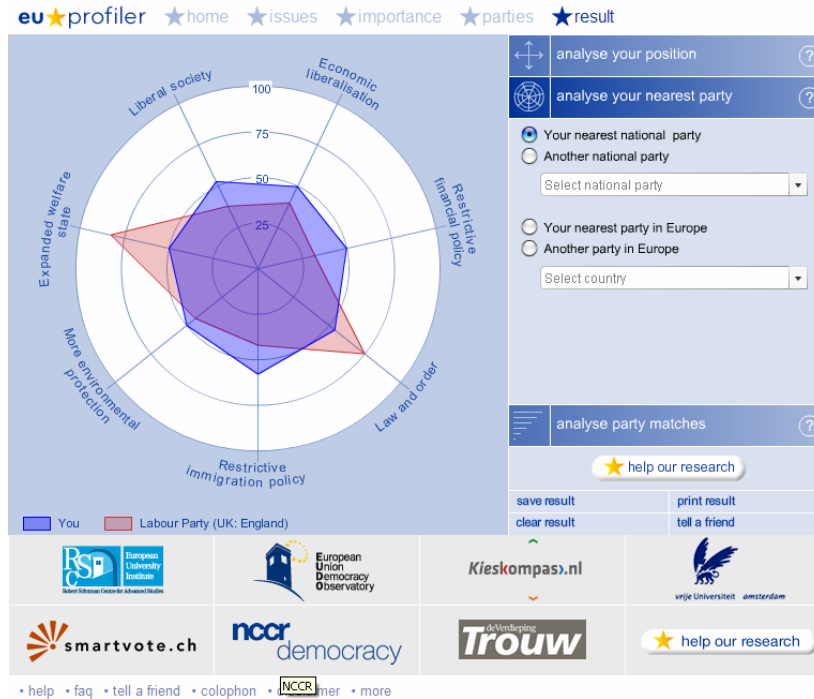
The spider shows the overlap between any of the national parties and the user's position on seven dimensions (for details see http://euprofiler.eu/help/). In this way, the user could match her preferences with any of the 274 parties in Europe on any one of seven dimensions – or combination of dimensions – thereby revealing in graphic form the scale of the overlap between her positions and those of any given party. The "matchlist" showed the overlap in a list format, ranked from the party with the strongest overlap to the one with the largest divergence from the user's positions. In the matchlist, the user could also either include or exclude the saliency of issues, which, of course, could alter the rank of parties. Moreover, at any stage the user could also compare her own spider profile and matchlist with those of any party in Europe, and not only with those competing within her own national polity. In practice, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the greatest overlap between a user and a particular party tended to involve one of the hundreds of parties outwith the national polity rather than one of the smaller number competing in the user's own polity.

Figure 7:Matchlist
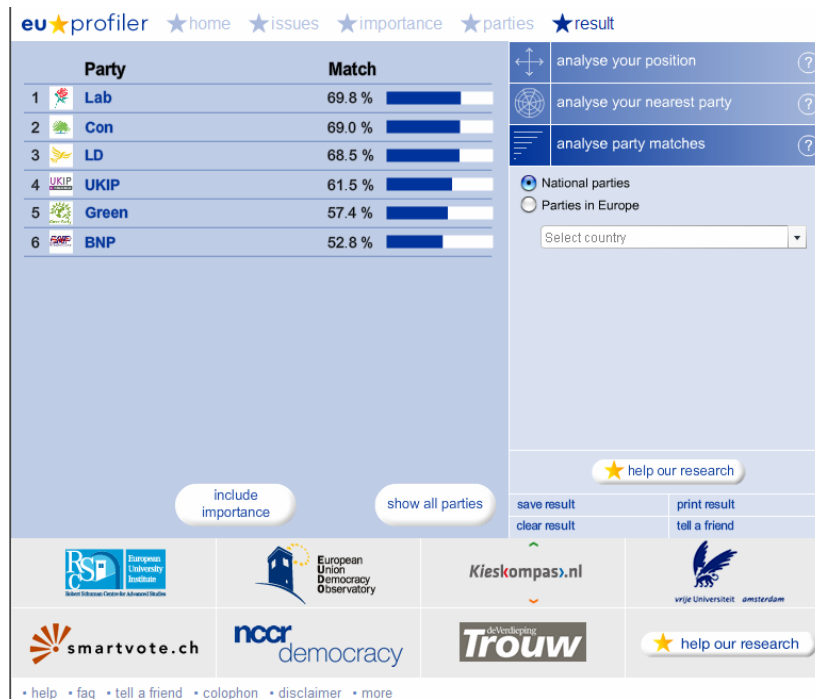
Finally, both in the compass and in the spider and matchlist, users could click on any given party and cal up a comprehensive list of all statements, including the user's answers, the given party's answers, and the documentation used for the positioning of the party (text excerpts of party platforms, weblinks, quotes etc.). A link called "help our research" then led to an online questionnaire which was developed in coordination with the EES.

When parties position themselves

As noted above, one of the most novel methods used by the EU Profiler to locate the parties was to invite them to position themselves on the same 30 statements that were proposed online to the citizens. The coding of the party positions was therefore organised in three largely parallel processes: first, the parties' self-positioning process; second, the positioning process as determined by expert coders; and third, the interaction between coder and party.

Parties' self-positioning. In early January of 2009 the EU Profiler website included a text-box inviting all political parties intending to run in the European Parliamentary elections to get in touch with the team in order to code themselves. On February 11 the team became proactive and launched a large contacting campaign across Europe. The group was subdivided into 30 country teams and consisted of over 100 researchers from these 30 countries, ranging from PhD students to professors in the various fields of the social sciences. A majority of collaborators are or were based at the European University Institute in Florence[4].

Each country team first selected the parties likely to run in the European Parliamentary elections. In addition, they identified electronic and postal addresses of these parties and prepared an email-message as well as paper-based letters in the corresponding country's language that were sent off simultaneously. In the letter/email, the purpose of the EU Profiler was explained, and the responding party was invited to click on a link which led it to an online-survey. Surveymonkey.com was used for this link, with one survey per country. Information on the name of the person filling out the survey, the person's position in the party, the official name of the party and the contact details were also sought. The 30 statement were then spread over 10 screens. Most importantly, the parties were asked to document their claimed positions with reference to specific election manifestos, party leader's speeches or similar material. Below each statement there was a field at their disposal where parties could include references to documentation, short extracts and, where appropriate, web-links (see *Figure 6*). In the online guide on how to complete the survey it was stated that "users of the system, including potential voters, will then see the content of these fields. When you cannot document your position properly, we might have to take it upon ourselves to code your party's position, and this may be different from the position that you select. When we find conflicting information compared to how you have coded yourself, we will contact you about this." On screen number 11 the parties were thanked for their cooperation and given the opportunity to leave comments.

Figure 6: Screen-shot of the self-placement survey

The initial deadline given to the parties to complete the survey was February 27. In many cases, however, an extension was sought in that the party's EP election programme had not yet been approved. In fact, the process was quite flexible in this regard, and the deadline was pushed to March 28, when the online surveys were closed. Ten days into the self-placement stage, the parties that had not by then completed the online survey were contacted systematically.

Coders' positioning process. At the same time that the self-placement survey was launched, the team began its own coding of the parties' positions, with specialised country teams completing the coding of each of the 274 parties within seven weeks. The coding process itself followed a number of rules, among which it was required to follow a given rank-order of the different sources of information. Whenever a party carried out its own self-placement and

documented its positions thoroughly and convincingly, this coding became final. Note that the expert coders had in every case the last word on this, based on their opinion and judgement. When self-placed codes and documentation was not available, our coders maintained the following hierarchy of sources for documenting their coding:

1. EU Election Manifesto 2009 of national party

2. Party Election Platform

3. Current/latest national election manifesto

4. EU Election Manifesto of Europarties

5. Other programmatic and official party documentation

6. Actions/statements of party representatives in government and parliament

7. Interviews and other coverage in media outlets in 2008-2009

8. Older Election Manifestos, party documentation, actions/statements and interviews

9. Other

When coding, the teams tried to gather as many texts as possible to document the party position regarding each statement, a process that has now become relatively feasible, if still time-consuming, possible through the availability of extensive internet resources. These texts were copies into a workspace and became visible to the user when clicking on a party's name in the EU Profiler results screens (see below). Problematic cases (i.e. where coders disagreed among each other) were discussed in a section of the workspace dedicated to calibrating issues. Generally, coders followed five consecutive Likert-items when coding[5].

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[5] The five Likert items were described in a coder manual as follows:

"Assumption: issue = X

Statement = X is good / Statement = X is bad

1. If X is not mentioned in any way in any document or in the self placement notes.

-> code as **no opinion**

2. The centre – neutral position – is an argued position, unlike the "no opinion" position.

If the party only addresses X indirectly, or vaguely. Or if a party clearly emphasises

both sides of the issue and makes a point about not taking sides, emphasising the

positives and negatives, the pro's and con's.

-> code as **neutral**

3. If a party makes restrictions or has doubts, or if it only focuses on one part or element

of X.

-> code as **tend to (dis)agree**

4. If a party emphasises X and does not place any restrictions, doubts (etc.) on X

-> code as **completely (dis)agree**

5. If two or more Likert items still seem equally accurate:

-> discuss with your fellow country team members

-> discuss in the list of 'debated calibrations' (as mentioned above)

-> try and consult other country teams or national experts

-> ask the EU Profiler leadership" (EU Profiler Coding Manual, February 2009).

Taken together, the EU Profiler therefore contains documented and online available party positions for 30 statements for each of 274 parties. That is, the Profiler now disposes of a total of 8,220 party positions, with documentary evidence for the latter being available online in 24 languages. These data were gathered in the spring of 2009 by over one hundred highly qualified social scientists. When released to the public this database will become one of the world's largest and most diverse party positioning datasets.

Coder-party-interaction stage. During this stage, which we will return to in more detail in the next section, the country teams tried via the telephone and email to convince as many parties as possible to fill out the self-placement. In addition, the teams also got back to those parties that had carried out the self-placement and discussed any discrepancies that had appeared in the coding. Finally, we also sent to all the parties that had not taken part in the self-placement the EU Profiler's own coding, showing the parties concerned precisely where they had been located on each of the issue dimensions. Here too, the Profiler broke new ground, in that the results of none of the other expert and manifesto codings that have been carried out over the years have ever been checked back with the parties themselves.

Interacting with political parties

In total, 119 political parties in Europe placed themselves on the 30 statements we proposed, either via Surveymonkey (113) or by email (6). Among the 274 parties finally included in the EU Profiler, 103 parties used the opportunity to position themselves, which represents a remarkably high 37.6 percent response rate. It is also worth repeating that this was the first time that parties themselves have been involved in a cross-national effort to identify their policy positions, and this high response rate suggests that more use might be made of their input in similar exercises in the future.

Figure 7: Degrees of cooperation
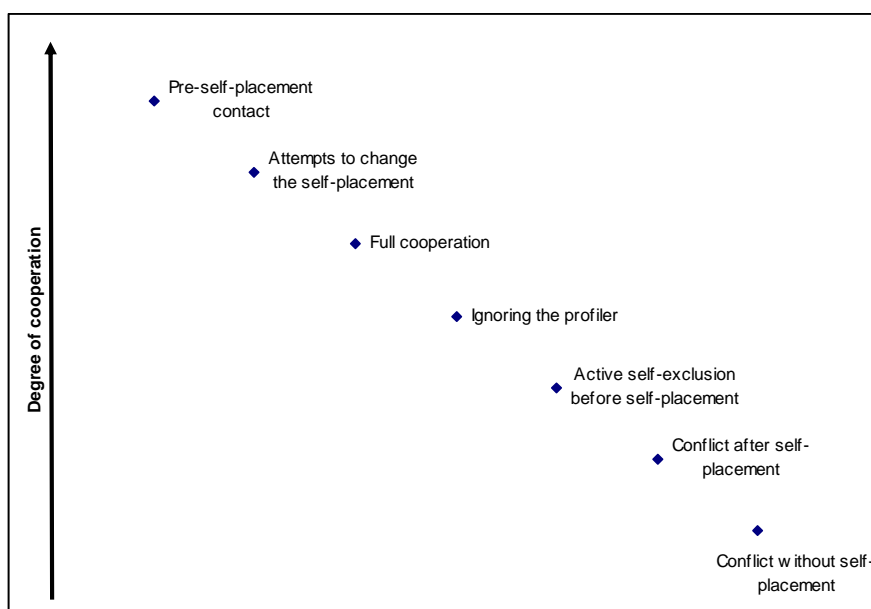
The interaction with political parties throughout Europe also proved quite diverse, with party responses varying considerably between full cooperation and explicit conflict. In other words, while some parties cooperated fully with the Profiler, others were openly hostile to the exercise and threatened to try to sabotage the project. In itself, this variation is also of interest to party scholars (see *Figure 7*). A very limited number of political parties can be placed into the two categories coming on top of the cooperation scale. Examples for pre-self-placement contacts can be found in the Netherlands, where both D66 and CDA asked for an early version of the list of statements once they had become aware of the effort to produce the EU Profiler (a first press conference announcing the project was held in May 2008 in Brussels and was widely reported by, among others, the Dutch media). The parties asked to be sent them the questionnaire as soon as possible in order that they might coordinate the content of their party platforms with the Profiler statements. In the category "attempts to change the self-placement" we also find examples of Dutch parties. Indeed, almost every self-placing party in the Netherlands called on several occasions seeking a change in the wording of those statements they had difficulty in answering. Needless to say, these requests were never met.

The bulk of the parties who positioned themselves fall in the "full cooperation" category. In fact, there were numerous parties across Europe that proved keen to complete the survey and to document their positions. This also meant that the Profiler received a lot of text-based data, including references to party-produced documents and online information from the parties themselves. Parties in this category range from large parties (such as the German SPD or the Hungarian Socialist Party) to smaller parties (such as the Irish Greens or the Galician Nationalist Block) and spread across the entire political spectrum. In Greece, the Green party went so far as to change their position following a discussion with our Greek team that convincingly argued that the Greens' real position on a given statement was different from that initially indicated in the party's own self-placement.

On the non-cooperation side we find a majority of parties in Europe that simply ignored the call for self-placement. This also includes examples of large and small parties, of governing and opposition parties, and of parties that range across the entire political spectrum. A number of parties fall into the category of "active self-exclusion before self-placement". This, for example, was the case of Chancellor Angela Merkel's governing CDU in Germany. Despite numerous contacts via email and by telephone, the German team leader eventually received a polite and clear letter on March 26 in which it was explained to him why the CDU did not wish to participate. The party deplored the fact that it was not included in the conceptualisation stage of the EU Profiler, contrary to the practice that has been adopted in a national voting advice application, the "Wahl-O-mat". The CDU underlined that the formulation of the statements – which were devised without any direct input from the parties – risked leading to partisan answers.

The penultimate category contains parties that openly criticised our own coding and refused to accept the Profiler's rejection or qualification of their own self-placings. This was the case of the Austrian Socialist party, the SPÖ, for example. Following many requests from the Austrian team, the SPÖ carried out a self-placement which included a number of implausible positions which could not be convincingly documented. In this case, as was normal practice, the documented codings of the expert researchers were preferred by the project. As with all the party positions, the Austrian team informed the SPÖ about these final codes, following which the Head of Research and Analysis of the party decided to withdraw from further cooperation with the project.

One of the most telling examples of the final category, "conflict without self-placement", was that of Fine Gael, Irelands' second largest political party. Fine Gael ignored repeated attempts to convince the party to position itself on the 30 statements. Moreover, it reacted strongly after

receiving the expert codings, which, as in all cases, were sent to the party for information. Fine Gael argued that the party position on a number of statements has been misinterpreted, but was unable to produce any alternative documentation that might have sustained these claims. Given that the expert coding had the support of documentary evidence, this was the preferred positioning, even though Fine Gael went so far as to threaten legal action. [6]

Table 3: Self-placement by political parties in Europe

Country	Parties	Self-placement	%
Cyprus	6	6	100.0
Finland	12	10	83.3
Netherlands	11	9	81.8
Belgium	13	10	76.9
Sweden	11	8	72.7
Denmark	9	6	66.7
Austria	6	4	66.7
Hungary	6	4	66.7
Spain	11	7	63.6
Switzerland	6	3	50.0
Germany	10	5	50.0
Estonia	8	4	50.0
Malta	4	2	50.0
Slovenia	9	4	44.4
Greece	7	3	42.9
Bulgaria	8	3	37.5
Luxembourg	8	3	37.5
Czech Rep.	9	2	22.2
Poland	9	2	22.2
Croatia	7	1	14.3
Ireland	7	1	14.3
France	16	2	12.5
Italy	8	1	12.5
Portugal	12	1	8.3
UK	24	2	8.3
Latvia	9	0	0.0
Lithuania	9	0	0.0

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[6] The Profiler also received 16 self-placements from parties that were too small to be included in the final list used by the EU Profiler. Most of these parties came from Germany. While acknowledging their willingness to help, we had to accept that we were unable to include all parties running in the EP elections in every country. To give an idea of the enormity of such a task, it can be noted that there was a total of 656 lists in the elections of June 2009, of which 160 came from France. In Germany, 32 political parties ran in the elections. In most cases, the small, self-coding parties accepted our decision. In a number of cases, however, we received Fine-Gael-like threats of legal action.

Romania	5	0	0.0
Slovakia	6	0	0.0
Turkey	8	0	0.0
Total	274	103	37.6

In *Table 3* we represent the frequency of self-placements per country, ordered from the country with the highest self-placement ratio (Cyprus) to a group of countries where no single political party cooperated with the EU Profiler team. There are several interesting patterns here. First, among the six leaders in party cooperation, we find the three Scandinavian countries, confirming the traditional acceptance in these countries of a high level of transparency in political and partisan affairs. The same goes for the Netherlands and Belgium, two countries in which the EU Profiler's main technological partner from Holland – kieskompas.nl – had a large experience of developing and running VAA's. The same is true for Swiss parties, which, although not campaigning in the European Parliamentary elections, cooperated largely with the project, not least because of the experience and reputation of our second technological partner, Politools/NCCR University of Zurich, based in Switzerland. Both Austria and Germany also had also previous experiences with voting advice applications. In each of these cases parties knew about the idea behind the VAA and, though not necessarily thinking that they would gain votes from cooperating with the EU Profiler, probably did accept that the potential electoral costs of non-participation would be higher than those of cooperation. The leader in the list is Cyprus, where all six parties contained in the EU Profiler cooperated and did the self-positioning, a tribute in particular to the efforts and contacts of the Cypriot team leader, Sofronis Clerides.

The levels of cooperation in Eastern Europe were generally low. No single party from Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia took part in the self-placement. In the Czech Republic, Croatia (though in this non-EU-member state the parties did not run in the EP elections) Poland and, to a lesser extent in Bulgaria, parties were below the mean level of cooperation. Exceptions to this pattern are Hungary, Slovenia and Estonia. While we lack, at this stage, a plausible explanation for the first two cases in this group, we believe that the general "e-culture" that reigns in Estonia, a country at the vanguard of internet voting and online citizen-state interactions (see Alvarez et al. 2009), possibly contributed to the above-average level of cooperation in the self-placement.

Southern Europe presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, Portugal, France and Italy are among the least cooperative. On the other hand, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Spain have high levels of cooperation. Although it is difficult to explain these patterns, it may be connected to differential levels of party organizational development, as well as to flux in party alignments and alliances in France and Italy in particular. This may also be one of the sources of the low-response rate in some of the post-communist polities. In the United Kingdom and in Ireland the situation is similarly dismal: almost none of the parties running in the EP elections cooperated with us on the self-placement front. In this case it is hardly organizational weakness that is the problem, but more a likely wariness of external reporting and evaluation in parties that are particularly sensitive to media presentation, and that are also facing substantial waves of voter dissatisfaction and scepticism. In this case, there may well be a sense of lack of trust on both sides.

Finally, it is also clear that ideological divisions among party families affected the probability of parties to participate in the self-placement (*Table 4*). While parties belonging to the far-left, the centre-right, and the national conservative family were particularly non-cooperative, green parties stand out by virtue of their very strong participation in the self-placement exercise. Indeed, two

out of three green parties in Europe took part in the self-placement, possibly reflecting the importance given by these parties to values of political transparency and openness.

Table 4: Self-placement of parties and party families in Europe

Party family	Parties	Self-placed	% self-placed	Discrepancy score
GUE-NGL, far left	27	6	22.2	28.9
EPP-ED, centre-right	58	14	24.1	21.0
UEN, national-conservative	15	4	26.7	29.2
ID, eurosceptic	10	3	30.0	26.4
PES, centre-left	38	13	34.2	20.3
ALDE, liberal	33	13	39.4	21.3
G-EFA, greens	29	19	65.5	15.1
NA, all other parties	64	31	48.4	20.4

The last column in *Table 4* contains the "discrepancy scores" between the parties' self-positioning and the final version of the codes contained in the EU Profiler. We calculated this score for each of the 103 parties that took part in the self-positioning exercise.[7] On average, the persisting conflict between the expert coding and the self-placement of parties amounts to 20.7 percent. In other words, one out of five self-placed codes were changed by the Profiler team and remained changed in the final version. The initial discrepancy between the self-positioning and the coders' positions was higher than this figure, especially in cases where the self-placement was submitted only after the EU Profiler experts had coded the party's position. In some of these cases, moreover, the interaction with the political parties led in a number of cases to a change of codings in favour of the parties' self-placed positions. It should be underlined, however, that the bulk of the disagreement between coders and parties involved disagreements about nuance (between "completely agree" and "tend to agree", for example) rather then about the net direction of the positions (between "agreement" and "disagreement", for example).

In *Table 4* we calculated the average discrepancy score per party family. The pattern revealed is one of transparency linked to cooperation, and also to accuracy. The Green parties stand again out as the most convincing in their self-placement. In only 15 percent of all cases do the final codes diverge from those in the self-placement. The opposite is true for the parties at the left and right extreme of the ideological spectrum. Both the national conservative parties and the far left parties had greater difficulty positioning themselves in line with the opinions of the expert coders.

Conclusion

The EU Profiler offers a new and experimental approach to locating the policy positions of political parties in the different European polities. We go beyond both expert surveys and the conventional manifesto studies in two important ways. First, we have involved the parties themselves in the coding of positions, and second, we have documented every coded position as thoroughly as possible, online, and with reference to policy statements in the original language. The result is a unique dataset that offers researchers an immensely rich panoply of cross-sectional information on party positions across Europe.

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[7] For computational purposes, we set all self-positioned codes "no opinion" to "no answer", as it appears in the EU Profiler.

The EU Profiler has created a pan-European snapshot of parties' political stances on a large number of issues, covering most policy fields in which partisan competition takes place today. The snapshot was taken through a well-crafted lens and the outcome is extremely fine-grained: it contains over 8,000 political stances of parties, measured on an identical 5-point scale. It also includes 60 country-specific statements, two per country, capturing the key national specificities of the June 2009 EP election campaign. All of this is based on a thorough and comparison-guided conceptualisation of the issue matrix. The latter stands out as an innovation in itself. Contrary to most party positioning schemes, which are often tied to the reproduction of dimensions and emphases that have an established temporal pedigree, the EU Profiler team developed its own original list of statements. These were formulated in relation to contemporary dimensions of political conflict and could thereby disregard items that continue to be included in other studies even though they have become, over the past decades, less relevant.

The quality of the coding decisions in the EU Profiler was also enhanced by the scale of cooperation and discussion among the 130-strong network of qualified experts who worked on the data. This cooperation was facilitated by the common base provided by the European University Institute, as well by the use of a specifically designed online workspace. In this way, common problems could be identified and jointly discussed and resolved. This was particularly important given that the variety of categories of sources that were taken into account was probably larger than in any other party positioning project. It was also important in that each of the national teams was seeking to establish contact with each of the parties that was being coded, and here too experiences could be compared among the teams, and useful guidelines and practices shared.

None of these innovations could have taken place in the period preceding the information and communication technology revolution that has been brought about by the internet. In particular, without the interactive and collaborative tools offered by the "Web 2.0", it would have been impossible to code and document so many party positions, in so many different countries, over the course of a relatively short electoral campaign. By making use of these new features, such as online collaborative workspaces and online surveys, we hope that the EU Profiler also indicates the scope for future innovations in the field of electoral research and party politics.

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Annex

The 28 EU Profiler statements by category

Welfare, family and health

1. Social programmes should be maintained even at the cost of higher taxes
2. Greater efforts should be made to privatise healthcare services in the country
3. State subsidies for crèches and child care should be increased substantially

Migration and immigration

1. Immigration policies oriented towards skilled workers should be encouraged as a means of fostering economic growth
2. Immigration into the country should be made more restrictive
3. Immigrants from outside Europe should be required to accept our culture and values

Society, religion and culture

1. The legalisation of the same sex marriages is a good thing
2. Religious values and principles should be shown greater respect in politics
3. The discrimination of the personal use of drugs is to be welcomed
4. Euthanasia should be legalised

Finances and taxes

1. Government spending should be reduced in order to lower taxes
2. The EU should acquire its own tax raising powers
3. Governments should bail out failing banks with public money

Economy and work

1. Governments should reduce workers' protection regulations in order to fight unemployment
2. The EU should drastically reduce its subsidies to Europe's farmers

Environment, transport and energy

1. Renewable sources of energy (e.g. solar or wind energy) should be supported even if this means higher energy costs
2. The promotion of public transport should be fostered through green taxes (e.g. road taxing)

3. Policies to fight global warming should be encouraged even if it hampers economic growth or employment

Law and order

1. Restrictions of civil liberties should be accepted in the fight against terrorism
2. Criminals should be punished more severely

Foreign Policy

1. On foreign policy issues, such as the relationship with Russia, the EU should speak with one voice
2. The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy

European Integration

1. European integration is a good thing
2. [Your country] is much better off in the EU than outside it
3. The European Union should be enlarged to include Turkey
4. The European Parliament should be given more powers
5. Individual member states of the EU should have less veto power
6. Any new European Treaty should be subject to approval in a referendum in [your country]

Authors contacts:

Alexander H. Trechsel
European University Institute
Department of Political and Social Sciences
Villa San Felice
Via dei Roccettini 9,
I-50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
Email: Alexander.Trechsel@eui.eu

Peter Mair
European University Institute
Department of Political and Social Sciences
Villa San Felice
Via dei Roccettini 9,
I-50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
Email: Peter.Mair@eui.eu