Chapter 4 Political groups' positioning towards EU solidarity in the 2019 European Parliament Election

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1 Introduction

With every crisis the European Union (EU) has faced over the last decade, conflicts over what solidarity actually means and how it should be implemented has arisen within and between EU member countries.[1] These conflicts took place at several socio-political levels and between a variety of actors. Research so far has already covered an analysis of conflicts at the policy level.[2] Moreover, public opinion research has investigated such conflicts from the perspective of EU citizenry. We have learned that citizens are more supportive towards EU-level solidarity policies if they generally back their country's EU membership, are more politically left-leaning and are the so-called "winners of globalisation".[3] On top of that previous insights demonstrate that citizens differentiate between solidarity in different instances. Providing transnational solidarity in a financial crisis scenario is less popular compared to solidarity in times of natural or health disasters (like the COVID-19 pandemic).[4] The latter findings, however, again vary

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1 Alexia Katsanidou and Ann-Kathrin Reinl, 'Public Support for the European Solidarity Deal in EU debtor states: the Case of Greece' (2022) 44(3) Journal of European Integration 327.

2 Waltraud Schelkle, 'Fiscal Integration in an Experimental Union: How Path-Breaking Was the EU's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic?' (2021) 59(1) Journal of Common Market Studies 44; Silvana Târlea and others, 'Explaining Governmental Preferences on Economic and Monetary Union Reform' (2019) 20(1) European Union Politics 24; Zbigniew Truchlewski, Waltraud Schelkle and Joseph Ganderson, 'Buying Time for Democracies? European Union Emergency Politics in the Time of COVID-19' (2021) 44(5–6) West European Politics 1353.

3 Christian Lahusen and Maria Grasso, *Solidarity in Europe: Citizens' Responses in Times of* Crisis (Palgrave Macmillan 2018); Jürgen Gerhards and others, *European Solidarity in Times of Crisis. Insights from a Thirteen-Country Survey* (Routledge 2019).

4 Philipp Genschel and others, 'Solidarity and Trust in times of COVID-19' (2021) 11 RSC Policy Paper; Alexia Katsanidou, Ann-Kathrin Reinl and Christina Eder, 'Together We Stand? Transnational Solidarity in the EU in Times of Crises' (2022) 23(1) European Union Politics 66.

between EU member countries depending on the perceived culpability in a situation and one's status as a (potential) giver or receiver of solidarity.[5] Hence, both the policy and the demand-side of the democratic process are already well covered in contemporary research.

What is, however, missing from scientific investigations to date is an EU-wide comparative analysis of the political *supply side*. Actors that are particularly relevant here – as they carry out a variety of functions – are *political parties*. Parties are elected by citizens in many democracies, they act as a link between the government and the electorate, and they also form governments. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of the policy positions of this key political actor is not only necessary but also long overdue.

Probably the best opportunity for an EU-wide comparative analysis of party positions on EU solidarity are the elections to the European Parliament (EP). These take place simultaneously in all EU countries every five years, which is not the case of other national or local elections. Political parties communicate their policy positions in the run-up to EP elections, which makes it easy to compare them. In this chapter, I focus on the 2019 EP elections and analyse data from the Euromanifesto project.[6] Thus, the analysis covers a time period between major EU crises: the 2019 elections took place after the peak of the debt and migration crises, but before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter evaluates and compares the positioning of the EP political groups on different types of EU solidarity, analysing too the connection with their positioning on the political left-right and the pro-anti EU axis. It turns out that even almost ten years after the outbreak of the European Sovereign Debt Crisis, the issue of EU solidarity still receives little attention from political parties in their election manifestos. Yet, the subject is talked more about and in a more positive manner when it comes to welfare state policies at the EU level. Moreover, the positioning on EU solidarity – and here in particular on an EU-wide welfare state – is related to the

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5 Jürgen Gerhards, Holger Lengfeld and Julia Häuberer, 'Do European Citizens Support the Idea of a European welfare State? Evidence from a Comparative Survey Conducted in Three EU member states' (2016) 31 International Sociology 677; Sofia Vasilopoulou and Liisa Talving, 'Poor Versus Rich Countries: A Gap in Public Attitudes Towards Fiscal Solidarity in the EU' (2020) 43 West European Politics 919.

6 Ann-Kathrin Reinl and Daniela Braun, 'European Election Studies 2019: Manifesto Project' (*GESIS Köln*, 2023) https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7891 accessed 26 February 2024.

positioning of the political group on the so-called left-right dimension. The more left-wing the political group is, the greater the willingness to transfer more welfare competences to the EU level. In contrast, no such clear trend can be identified for all the other aspects of solidarity here examined nor for the dimension of EU integration.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I elaborate the current state of research on political parties' positioning towards EU solidarity. Then, I introduce the analysed data, present the results and interpret them in terms of content. In the final section of the article, I summarise the most important findings.

2 Political parties' positions towards EU solidarity

2.1 The role of political parties in the EU

In democratic regimes, political parties are part of the so-called "supply side".[7] They represent the public in the political arena, structure politics, are the connecting link between voters and governments as well as between governments and parliaments.[8]

Political parties are also important actors in the EU's multilevel system.[9] There are three types of party formations to name here. While ***national parties*** differ in numbers and ideology from country to country, they all compete for votes in European Parliament elections. At the moment each country still operates on separate electoral lists,[10] which means that national

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7   Herbert Kitschelt, 'Growth and Persistence of the Radical Right in Postindustrial Democracies: Advances and Challenges in Comparative Research' (2007) 30 West European Politics 1176; Susan C Stokes, 'Political Parties and Democracy' (1999) 2 Annual Review of Political Science 243.

8   Russell J Dalton, 'Political Parties and Political Representation: Party Supporters and Party Elites in Nine Nations' (1985) 18 Comparative Political Studies 267.

9   Simon Hix and Christopher Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union* (St. Martin's Press 1997); Björn Lindberg, Anne Rasmussen and Andreas Warntjen, 'Party Politics as Usual? The Role of Political Parties in EU Legislative Decision-making' (2008) 15 Journal of European Public Policy 1107.

10 Currently, the introduction of transnational party lists is under discussion, which would for the first time enable people to vote for the same candidates and alliances in all EU countries. For more information see: European Parliament, 'EU election reform: MEPs push for common rules and transnational lists' (European Parliament, 3 May 2022) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/2022042

parties run in the elections to the European Parliament, and later form **EP political groups**. Only a few transnational/pan-EU parties stood for the 2019 EP elections (for instance VOLT). The election programmes of the parties are coordinated by transnational associations – the ***transnational party federations***[11] – which otherwise have no political power.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of campaign manifestos for the 2019 EP elections, which are prepared by both national parties and the transnational party federations. For a more straightforward interpretation of the manifestos' content, I will, however, not go into detail for every single party – this would go beyond the scope of this chapter – but instead perform analyses on the level of EP political groups.

2.2 Political parties and EU solidarity

If we take a closer look at parties within the EU and their substantive positions towards the Union, it is noticeable that they generally seem to be more favourable to it than the EU electorate.[12] This also applies to EU solidarity preferences. Politicians tend to be more positive about cooperation and burden-sharing across EU borders than the general public.[13] On top of this, we know that politicians and parties are more likely to advocate for EU solidarity when they are placed on the political left and generally hold pro EU integration stances.[14]

2STO27706/eu-election-reform-meps-push-for-common-rules-and-transnational-li sts accessed 1 March 2024.

11 Simon Hix and Bjørn Høyland, *The Political System of the European Union* (Bloomsbury Publishing 2022).

12 Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus' (2009) 39 British Journal of Political Science 1.

13 Lina Basile, Rossella Borri and Luca Verzichelli, 'Crisis and the Complex Path of Burden-Sharing in the EU' in Maurizio Cotta and Pierangelo Isernia (eds), *The EU through Multiple Crises: Representation and Cohesion Dilemmas for a 'Sui Generis' Polity* (Routledge 2021); Francesco Visconti and Alessandro Pellegata, 'Representation in Hard Times: Party-voter Distance on Support for Social Europe in Italy' (2019) 14 Italian Political Science 188.

14 Ann-Kathrin Reinl and Heiko Giebler, 'Transnational Solidarity among Political Elites: What Determines Support for Financial Redistribution within the EU in Times of Crisis?' (2021) 13 European Political Science Review 371; Ann-Kathrin Reinl and Stefan Wallaschek, 'All for One, and One for All? Analysing Party Positions

What is lacking in previous research, however, is the simultaneous study of party positions on EU solidarity in all EU countries over a variety of dimensions of solidarity. Thus far, research has mostly focused on individual countries[15][16] or politicians' preferences;[17] party positions on a variety of forms of EU solidarity were rarely analysed.[18]

Building upon this, the following questions arise, which have remained unanswered to date, and which will be addressed in this chapter: *Are political parties generally in favour of EU-level solidarity policies? Do we find clear divides across EP political groups, depending on their positioning vis-à-vis EU integration as well as the political left-right scale?*

3 The 2019 EP elections

The 2019 European Parliament election occurred in the aftermath of the height of the financial crisis and the increased numbers of asylum seekers in 2015/16, but before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The election was held simultaneously in all 28 EU countries from 23 to 26 May 2019. In this election, voters elect national parties as their representatives to the European Parliament. Transnational lists, as elaborated by the Conference on the Future of Europe, did not (yet) exist. The 2019 election was characterised by a comparatively high turnout (50.66 %), with the largest political groups losing seats and Green and Eurosceptic parties gaining ground in the European Parliament. This empowerment of the political fringes may also have translated into a more nuanced positioning on EU solidarity issues.

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on EU solidarity in Germany in Challenging Times' (2024) 59 Government and Opposition 73.

15 Raphaela Hobbach, *European Solidarity: an Analysis of Debates on Redistributive Policies in France and Germany* (Springer 2021)*;* Reinl and Wallaschek (n 14).*;* Peter Thijssen and Pieter Verheyen, 'It's All About Solidarity Stupid! How Solidarity Frames Structure the Party Political Sphere' (2022) 52 British Journal of Political Science 128.

16 An exception to this is: Carlos Closa and Aleksandra Maatsch, 'In a Spirit of Solidarity? Justifying the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in National Parliamentary Debates' (2014) 52 Journal of Common Market Studies 826.

17 Basile and others (n.13); Reinl and Giebler (n 14).

18 Exceptions are Reinl and Wallaschek (n 14) and Basile and others (n 13).

4 Data and analysis strategy

4.1 Data base

If one wants to analyse the positions of political parties and compare them one with the other, several data sources come into play. First, one could consult so-called expert surveys, where national experts situate political parties on numerous policy issues. The disadvantage of this measurement regarding EU solidarity is that the topic is either insufficiently covered (as in the case of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey[19]) or only available for selected countries (such as the Open Expert Survey 2021[20], for the case of Germany). Second, one could analyse the press releases of political parties or their social media communication. Both approaches again carry drawbacks. This time, it might be problematic that information is not available for all parties at the same time, and as a result, it is very difficult to compare positions. Third, electoral manifestos can be used to analyse party positions. Before every election in the EU multi-level system, most parties publish an internally coordinated election programme that sets out the political direction of a party. Since national and regional elections in the EU countries do not take place at the same time, or only rarely, and this could again jeopardise the comparability of party positions, the EP elections provide a good basis for comparison.

The Euromanifesto project codes data for all European elections, drawing on the election manifestos published by the parties themselves. In exceptional cases and if no manifestos are available, reference is made to interviews with the party leadership or party websites. Based on the published party manifestos, their contents are then coded according to an established coding scheme. This scheme has existed for many years and is only minimally adjusted for every new election and extended by new categories (current issues that have remained overlooked so far). In the case of the 2019 election, data material from a total of 221 parties was analysed;

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19 For more information see Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 'Mission' (Chapel Hill Expert Survey) https://www.chesdata.eu accessed 1 March 2024.

20 Michael Jankowski and others, 'Die Positionen der Parteien zur Bundestagswahl 2021: Ergebnisse des Open Expert Surveys' (2022) 63 Politische Vierteljahresschrift 53, see further: https://oes21.de accessed 11 March 2024.

this was done by dedicated country coders who have as their mother tongue the language of the country they code.[21]

The coders first divided the manifesto texts into individual statements (so-called quasi-sentences) using an online coding routine. Next, they assigned codes to the content of the respective individual statements. In addition, they had to decide whether a statement had a positive or negative connotation and to which political level the statement refers to (national/EU/unspecified). Table 1 provides an example of how a statement (quasi-sentence) is coded.

Text (quasi-sentences)	Policy domain	Coding category	Evaluation	Level of governance
In the European Union, we will fight for clean air	Welfare and quality of life	Environmental Protection	positive	EU
guarantee the rights of employees	Social groups	Labour Groups	positive	EU
fight against corruption	Political system (in general)	Political Corruption	positive	EU
retain our cultural diversity	Fabric of society	Multiculturalism	positive	EU

Table 1: Example Euromanifesto coding[22]

For the empirical analyses of this chapter those coding categories dealing with types of EU-level solidarity are of relevance. To that end, only statements on the EU level of governance – in contrast to the national level or unspecified statements – are considered. The following subsection discusses the selected coding categories in more detail.

4.2 Coding categories

As already discussed thoroughly in the introduction to this edited volume, solidarity can take different forms. To reflect this multidimensionality as accurately as possible in my empirical analyses, I consider five coding

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21 For more information see Reinl and Braun (n 6).
22 The table is taken from Daniela Braun, 'Text Analysis of Party Manifestos' in Neil Carter and others (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Parties* (Routledge 2023), 442.

categories, which vary particularly in their concreteness of their political implementation.

Number	(Sub-) category	Coding text
1 2 3 4 5	Social Harmony Financing the EC/EU EC/EU Structural Fund European Monetary Union/ European Currency-transnational solidarity Welfare State (WS) (all subcategories added up[23])	*Appeal for a national (European) effort and solidarity; need for society to see itself as united; appeal for pub- lic spiritedness; decrying anti-social attitudes in times of crisis; support for the public interest.* *National contributions to finance the EC/EU or its policies are supported or accepted.* *Need to maintain or to extend EC/EU funds for structur- ally underdeveloped areas.* *Favourable mentions or support for financial help with the European Union Member State/Eurozone.*

Table 2: Coding categories[24]

The first type of solidarity captured through the Euromanifesto coding scheme *Social Harmony* refers to broader values of solidarity and does not imply concrete political measures. We know from previous research that citizens are more inclined to support such rather vague solidarity statements which do not necessarily come with (financial) burden-sharing.[25] The second category talks about *Financing the EC/EU* and its policies. This category clearly implies financial redistribution and political parties might therefore be more reluctant to positively refer to the issue in their electoral manifestos. Category three adds even more information to the political purpose of redistribution, namely the *EC/EU Structural Fund.* Next, statements dealing with EU-wide risk-sharing rather than redistribution are considered, too. The coding category *European Monetary Union/ European Currency-transnational solidarity* relates to policies adopted during the

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23 A distinction is made between the following subcategories when coding the data: general, pensions, health care and nursing service, social housing, childcare, job programs. For more information see the study's codebook: Reinl and Braun (n 6). For the analyses in this chapter, the percentages of the individual subcategories were summed up into one overarching category.

24 The table only contains the texts describing the statements that are to be classified positively. Negative statements usually describe the opposite. For more information on all formulations, see the study's codebook.

25 Ann-Kathrin Reinl, 'Euroscepticism in Times of European Crises: The Role of Solidarity' in Marco Baldassari and others (eds), *Anti-Europeanism: Critical Perspectives towards the European Union* (Springer 2020); Ann-Kathrin Reinl, 'Transnational Solidarity Within the EU: Public Support for Risk-Sharing and Redistribution' (2022) 163 Social Indicators Research 1373.

time of the European Sovereign Debt Crisis when some EU member states received a financial bailout from fellow countries. Even though the issue might no longer be as relevant in 2019, Eurosceptic parties in particular could refer to it negatively in their electoral manifestos. The last category analysed within the scope of this chapter talks about an EU-level *Welfare State* (including all subcategories). This type of solidarity, instead of referring to risk-sharing between member countries, focuses on welfare directed towards EU citizenry.

4.3 Analysis strategy

It is assumed that the more concrete a policy and the financial burden it places on one's own state, the greater the opposition towards it.[26] Political parties might therefore either discuss these negatively loaded issues less in their party manifestos than other issues or, if they do so, in a rather negative tone. Moreover, parties that are more on the political left should be more in favour of EU solidarity than right-wing groups; the same applies to pro EU parties.[27]

The results of the analyses are not broken down by individual party; with 221 parties in the data set this would go beyond the scope of this contribution. Further, I am not interested in country differences, but want to take a closer look at political groups. For this purpose, the Euromanifesto project distinguishes between seven party groups, which were the political groups represented in the EP in 2019. In addition, all parties having seats in the EP but not belonging to any specific group are considered:[28]

1. EPP: Group of the European People's Party *(N=40)*
2. S&D: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats *(N=31)*
3. Greens/EFA: Greens/European Free Alliance *(N=27)*
4. RENEW: Renew Europe *(N=32)*
5. GUE/NGL: Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left *(N=19)*
6. ECR: European Conservatives and Reformist Group *(N=16)*

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26 Ibid.
27 Reinl and Giebler (n 14); Reinl and Wallaschek (n 14).
28 The chapter's analysis sample covers a total of 183 political parties (excluding all those parties which did not make it to the parliament in 2019).

7. ID: Identity and democracy *(N=9)*
8. Non-attached *(N=9)*[29]

5 Results

5.1 EU solidarity positions by EP political groups

Figures 1 to 5 give a descriptive overview of the relevance of the topic of EU solidarity in the European election campaign 2019. The respective Y-axes range from 0 to 100 percent. The lower the value indicated, the less the topic was addressed by the parties in their respective election programmes, i.e. the less relevant it was during the election campaign.

In mentioning ideas on EU-wide social harmony – which is appealing to joint efforts and solidarity – in their electoral manifestos (Figure 1), the S&D as well as the Greens/EFA show the highest positive values. Consequently, the issue is more popular among mainstream left parties; the right-wing ID group even speaks negatively about it. On top of that, this is the second highest overall endorsement for EU solidarity compared to all the other categories considered here. This is in line with previous research showing that the vaguer the wording on EU solidarity, the higher its approval.[30]

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29 For more information on the party groupings see the Euromanifesto project's codebook in Reinl and Braun (n 6).
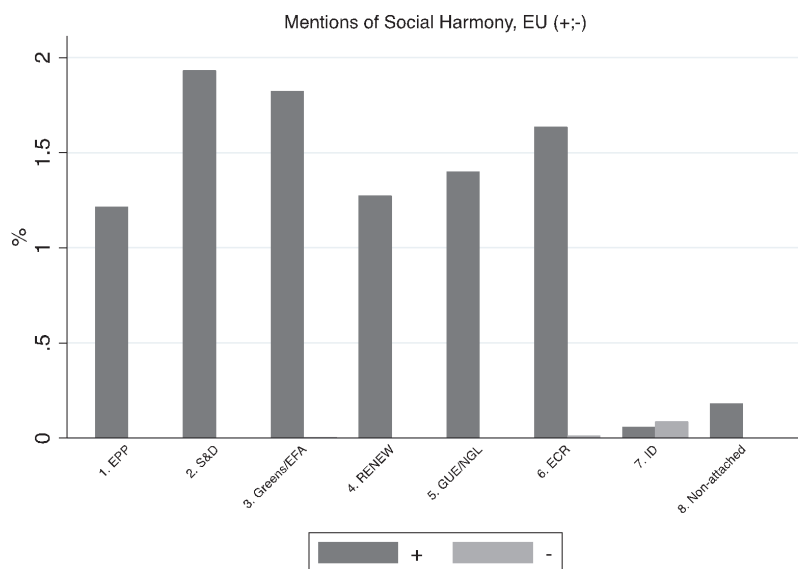30 Reinl (n 23).

Mentions of Social Harmony, EU (+;-)

Figure 1: Mentions of social harmony

Figure 2 is devoted to statements about national contributions for financing the EU and its policies. It is not only evident that this topic was less of a theme in the programmes of the 2019 election but also that some political groups – more precisely ECR and ID – even talked negatively about it. Again, the most positive comments in this category were made by mainstream parties but the overall percentage shares are very low, and the mix of positive and negative statements is considerable. Consequently, we see a much stronger rejection of EU solidarity when financing the community is the issue compared to the solidarity category just discussed. More cohesion and cooperation are appreciated (Figure 1; *social harmony*) but not unconditionally supported by all political groups (Figure 2; *financing the EU*).
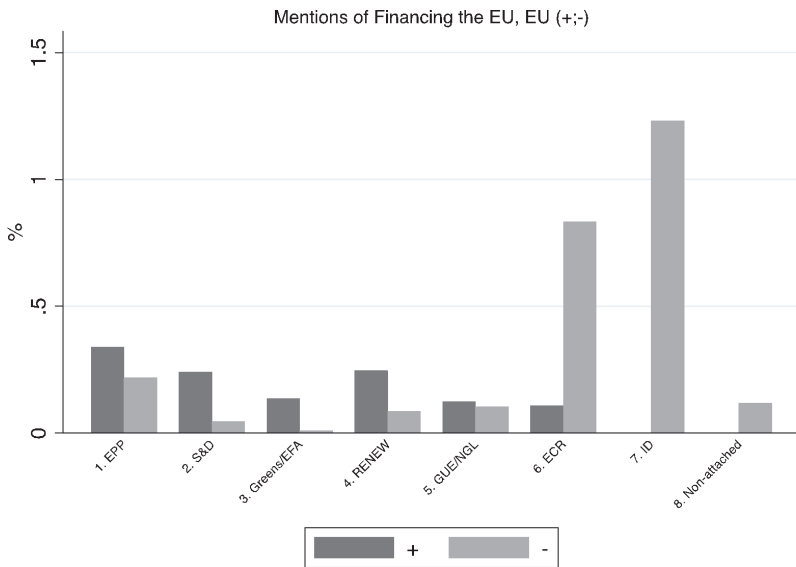
Figure 2: *Mentions of financing the EU*

Next, a much more concrete policy is considered, one that has been implemented in the EU since the 1970s: financial redistribution in favour of economically weaker EU regions. The issue of EU structural funds receives almost entirely positive mentions in the election programmes (Figure 3). Exceptions to this are brought forward by the Eurosceptic and right-wing camp consisting of the ECR and ID groups. The need to maintain or to extend EC/EU funds for structurally underdeveloped areas is most frequently mentioned by the EPP (slightly above 1%) and the RENEW group (fewer than 1% of their total manifestos). This policy also comes at a financial cost, but the good experience of the past, or the still ongoing need, nevertheless seems to evoke mostly positive feelings among the political groups. The fact that the topic was also discussed very little in the 2019 election campaign may be because it is a highly consolidated policy.
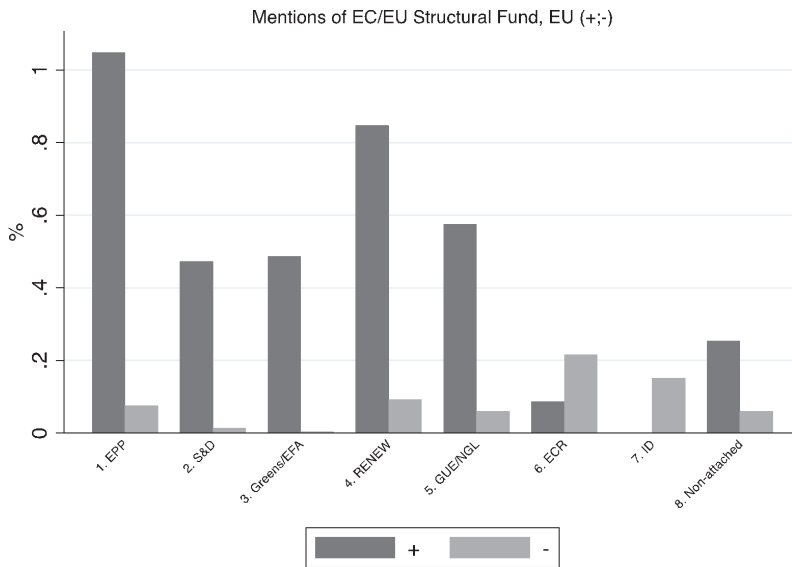
Mentions of EC/EU Structural Fund, EU (+;-)

Figure 3: Mentions of EC/EU structural fund

Support for financial assistance among the European Union Member States/within the Eurozone seems to be a more polarising issue (Figure 4). Political groups on the extreme left (GUE/NGL) and the extreme right (ECR, ID) strongly oppose the issue, albeit for different reasons. At the top, it is also negatively referred to by "non-attached" parties. Once again, the RENEW group depicts a comparatively high share of positive only evaluations (about 0.8 %). The fact that this topic was not much of an issue in 2019, i.e. after the end of the financial crisis, can probably be attributed to the timing of the election.
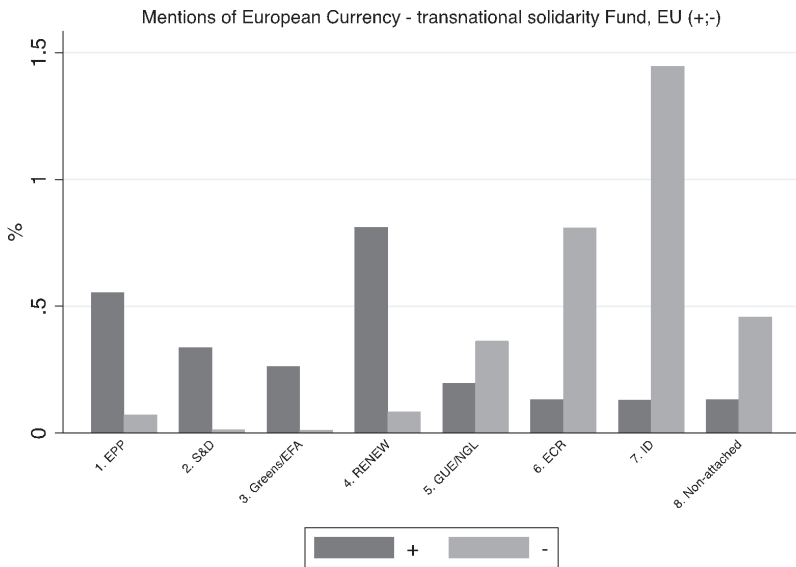
Figure 4: *Mentions of European Currency – transnational solidarity fund*

Finally, I consider the idea of extending or introducing social policies at the EU level. So far, the Union has hardly any competences in this field, but because of the upsurge of various EU-wide challenges over the last decade, an adaptation of competences in this direction is increasingly called for. Figure 5 provides information on the salience and positioning of EP politic-al groups on the issue. We see that this topic, too, only played a minor role in the election manifestos. Probably this is also because until 2019 only few concrete social policies were discussed at the EU level. However, if we com-pare the percentages here with the other solidarity dimensions discussed earlier, emphasising EU welfare policies was definitely the most prominent solidarity issue during the 2019 EP election campaign. Moreover, in spite of the (presumably) additional costs coming along with the introduction of such policies, political groups tend to be rather positive towards such proposals (except for nationalist parties). The percentage share of positive statements on this category even exceeds 4 % for the S&D group. This raises hope for ideas currently under discussion of more intensive coopera-tion at the EU level in the future.
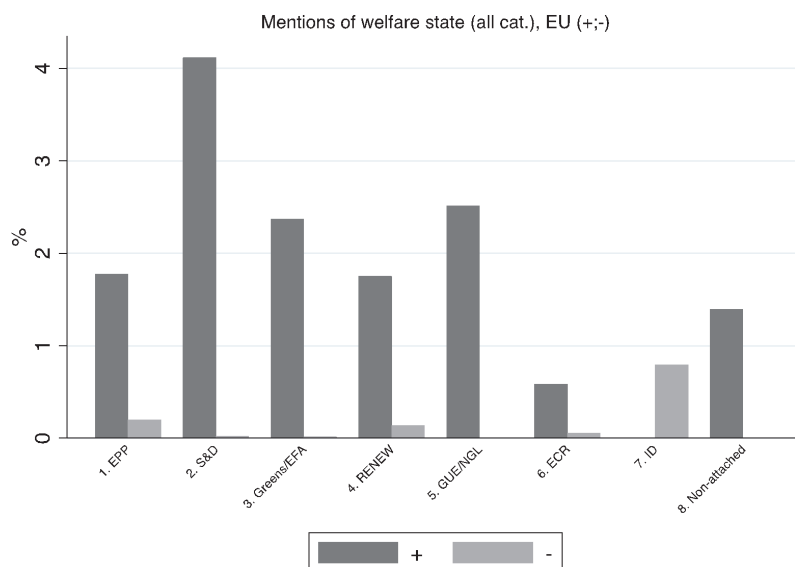
Mentions of welfare state (all cat.), EU (+;-)

Figure 5: Mentions of welfare state

In summary, across all illustrations, interpretation suggests that solidarity did not have a high priority in the 2019 election campaign, at least not in the official election programmes. For all categories considered, the percentage share never exceeds 5 % and is often even below 1 %. In addition, depending on the type of EU solidarity under discussion, political groups are more or less in favour of it. This suggests that it is indeed important to look at the solidarity dimensions separately and to avoid drawing general conclusions across all of its forms and EP political groups.

Two possible interpretations suggest themselves to explain these patterns. *First*, the 2019 European elections took place in a period "between crises". In other words, the issue of solidarity was less relevant compared to the years of the financial crises and the long summer of migration, but also not as pronounced as during the pandemic. *Second,* the low relevance of EU solidarity in the 2019 election campaign could also be because most EP groups (apart from the Eurosceptics) have come to terms with the redistribution mechanisms already installed and the crisis aid programs. Some political consensus may have prevailed requiring no further discussion.

5.2 Preferences for EU solidarity and more general political dimensions

Next, the positioning of the EP groups towards EU solidarity dimensions is correlated with their stances on the so-called left-right and pro-anti-EU scales. After the coding of each election programme had been completed, the coders of the Euromanifesto project were asked via a survey about the general positioning of the parties on several scales. One such scale asked for the parties to be positioned between a left (1) and right (10) pole. A second presented an EU-scale ranging from (1) Anti-EU-integration to (10) Pro-EU-integration.[31] The EP political group classified as most left-wing is GUE/NGL (followed by the Greens), whereas the most right-wing group is ID (followed by ECR). On the EU-scale the group being on average the most Eurosceptic is ID (followed by ECR) and the most Europhile group is the Greens (followed by Renew). Consequently, ID – followed by ECR – represents one of the endpoints of both scales. As far as the other pole is concerned, the Greens are in each case very close to one of the extremes – or form it themselves – but differently accompanied by either the GUE/NGL group in terms of left-right positioning or RENEW concerning European integration.

The positioning of the political groups on some solidarity dimensions correlates strongly with their respective left-right positioning. Figure 6 shows a linear relationship between the two dimensions 1) EU welfare state; positive and 2) left-right position. The closer a party is positioned to the political left, the more likely it advocates EU-level welfare policies. Thus, we find by far the highest salience for the S&D group, followed by the GUE/NGL and the Greens. The liberal oriented RENEW group as well as the conservative EPP range in-between the left and the radical right (ECR & ID) pole.

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31 The original scale ranges from (1) Pro-EU-Integration to (0) Anti-EU-Integration. I reversed the scale for matters of interpretation.
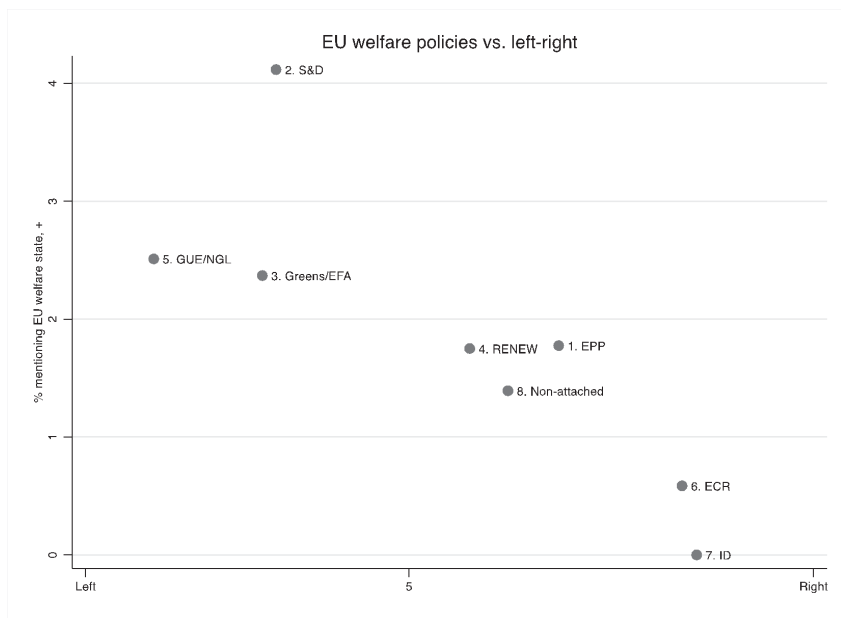
Figure 6: EU welfare policies vs. left-right position

For the remaining solidarity dimensions[32], however, no such clear connection with the political left-right orientation can be found. For the dimension "social harmony", the ECR group in particular speaks highly and positively about the issue, whereas EPP and RENEW articulate a more positive opinion on rather economically oriented questions (EU funds, financing the EU, EU monetary union). The latter finding may be explained by the fact that these two mainstream groups evaluate the EU and their country's membership from a more economic point of view. Although they favour stronger economic ties, they do not want to limit their national sovereignty (by transferring welfare policies to the EU level) and the concept of solidarity as such is not a guiding principle of their political agenda (social harmony).

Looking at the EU integration scale – i.e. the coder rating of whether a party is generally more in favour or against integration – the connection is not so clear cut. With regard to the dimension of "social harmony", the ECR group once again stands out, as it positions itself very positively and thus

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32 The figures for the remaining dimensions are available upon request.

no explicit overall trend can be identified. Considering the more economic dimensions (EU funds, financing the EU, EU monetary union), EPP and Renew are again the groups that break a clear trend in these areas.

And even if the trend is more obvious for the welfare dimension (compared to all other forms), it still has its limitations (see Figure 7). In general, it turns out that the more pro-EU the EP political group, the more likely it favours increasing social policies at the EU level. However, the party groups breaking a clear pattern here are (1) the left-wing group GUE/NGL, which despite a not particularly strong pro-EU stance is in favour of more social policies at this level, (2) the very strongly pro-welfare group S&D, and (3) the less enthusiastic support by RENEW.
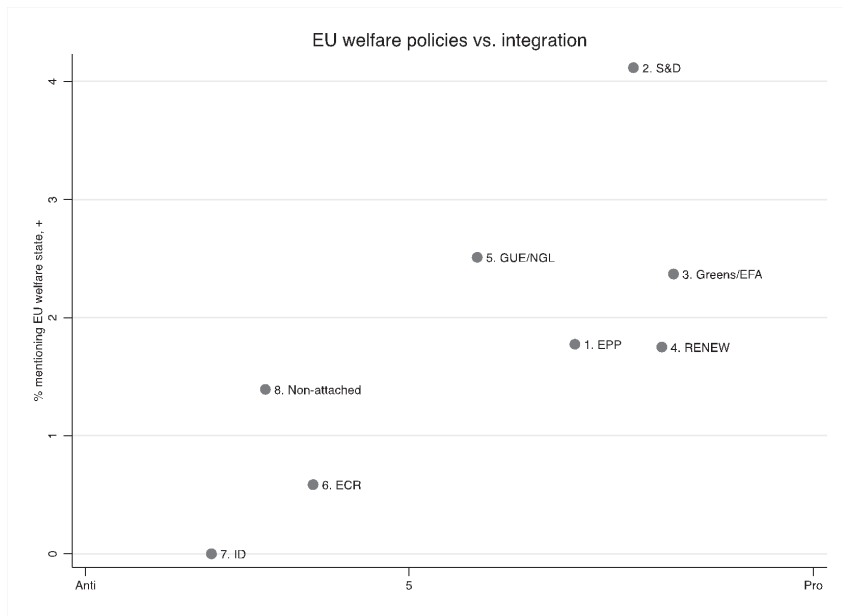

Figure 7: EU welfare policies vs. EU integration position

In conclusion, when looking at support for EU solidarity policies, neither of the two general political scales is universally appropriate to justify the patterns found. Rather, it depends on what kind of solidarity is being looked at. If it is more economic, neither of the two explanations work. This may be because such economic issues are just not perceived as solidarity by the parties themselves, but rather as a necessity of living together in a

globalised world. With regard to welfare-state policies, i.e. those policies that clearly go in the direction of permanent redistribution, the left-right positioning appears to be meaningful. As observed at the level of nation-states, those parties that are politically on the left tend to be more in favour of a joint welfare state agenda.[33]

6 Conclusion

For the first time, this chapter has looked at the positioning of political parties on different forms of EU solidarity from an EU-wide comparative perspective. For this purpose, I used and analysed data from the Euromanifesto project on the 2019 European elections. The results show that EU solidarity played only a minor role in the manifestos of the parties in this EP election. The percentage of the topic covered in the manifestos was very low on average. This does not mean, however, that parties are necessarily negative towards these forms of EU solidarity, but only that the topic was little discussed in the published election manifestos. It remains to be seen whether this was different for other communication platforms of the parties, such as social media or press releases; future studies should address this. What we also see is that the topic of EU solidarity is generally discussed positively by most parties (except for right-wing, Eurosceptic parties) and that the evaluation is even more affirmative depending on the policy field. We see consistently positive values for "appeals to (national) efforts and solidarity" and the "welfare state" category, whereas financing the EU and the joint currency face more antipathy. Moreover, the issue of financial support for EU crisis countries is no longer prominent for the parties following the end of the euro crisis. Instead, there is more talk about welfare policies at EU level. The latter is an interesting finding in light of the pandemic that broke out in 2020 and the political developments that followed. It will be interesting to study what changed in the 2024 election. As fringe parties gain more and more votes – in national and EP elections – this might also signal an even greater polarisation between the nationalist right-wing and the pro-EU left-wing parties on the issue of EU solidarity.

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33 Jæger, Mads Meier, 'Does Left–Right Orientation Have a Causal Effect on Support for Redistribution? Causal Analysis with Cross-sectional Data Using Instrumental Variables' (2008) 20 International Journal of Public Opinion Research 363.