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Multi-level Party Politics in the European Union: Assessing the Coherence Between
European Political Parties and Their Member Parties' Positions on EU Enlargement

MA thesis

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Abstract

Political parties constitute an integral part of democratic representation in the European Union (EU), however, their ability to formulate coherent positions across national and EU levels is still contested. Despite extensive research on the institutional structures of European political parties, limited attention has been paid to position coherence across party levels on specific policy issues. Even less is known about how such coherence changes over time, especially in light of major geopolitical events. Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, enlargement has become a controversial topic within the EU, providing a timely and relevant case to study multilevel party dynamics. This thesis examines 115 party manifestos from the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections to assess how coherent the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and the European Green Party (EGP) and their member parties have been on this policy area. It evaluates coherence across five key areas: overall stance on enlargement, temporal scope, geographical focus, internal EU reforms and security and geopolitical justifications. The findings suggest that over time, there has been an increase in coherence between Europarties and their member parties as well as among member parties. Although several areas showed coherence already in 2019, by 2024, coherence had strengthened in support for enlargement, a gradual approach to this process and security justification of enlargement. Nevertheless, this trend is not uniform; some categories have become fragmented on issues such as EU internal reforms, suggesting that coherence is not a static process.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Party
EGP	European Green Party
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
Europarties	European Political Parties
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
PES	Party of European Socialists
PfE	Patriots.eu

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) represents a unique setting of multilevel governance and democracy. Unlike most political systems, it blends supranational governance with the sovereignty of its member states, encompassing actors from different territorial levels that are involved and influence EU policymaking. Central to this configuration are political parties, which exist at the national and European levels in the form of European political parties (hereinafter Europarties). Parties, as Sartori (1976, p. 20) argued, are not only instruments of electoral competition, but constitute a core subsystem of democracies. Once elections take place and responsible governments are formed, political parties begin to shape how power is organized and how public will is represented. In the EU context, this means that political parties are not only actors of national politics but also increasingly influential players in the EU integration process.

With a series of treaty reforms in the European Union, political parties in the form of national political parties, political groups, and European political parties have become a significant part of the European Union as a polity (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011, pp. 152-153). Over time, they have gained formal roles in structuring party competition in the European Parliament, participating in agenda-setting and candidate selection for key EU institutions. However, their organizational strength remained debatable. While some scholars describe them as “loose confederations” (Schmitter, 2000), others highlight their growing capacity to influence EU-level politics and policy-making (Van Hecke, 2010).

One of the central questions in EU party research is the coherence of Europarties and the alignment of their positions with those of their member parties. This question is key to understanding how the EU functions as a multilevel system. Scholars have explored ideological congruence along the left-right axis (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018), legislative voting patterns (Hix et al., 2005), and the organizational development of political parties in the EU (Hix & Lord, 1997; Johansson & Raunio, 2019). However, when it comes to European political parties, the majority of the literature has focused on broad ideological alignment or highly institutionalized domains, and little attention has been paid to policy-specific coherence in the context of EU enlargement.

This gap is significant, especially given recent geopolitical developments. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the topic of EU enlargement has regained political

significance and has emerged as a strategic priority for the EU (Karjalainen, 2023). The European Commission, the European Council, and various Europarties have declared support for the accession of candidate countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkan states. At the same time, enlargement faces domestic opposition in several member states. Concerns about migration, institutional capacity and democratic backsliding continue to shape national public debates, particularly in countries with strong Eurosceptic sentiments (Jovanovic & Damgaard, 2023; Stockemer et al., 2020; Tekin, 2023). These tensions raise important questions about whether European political parties can maintain internal coherence on such a politically sensitive topic.

While the multilevel nature of the EU party system is a key feature of this process, this inquiry also builds on the broader theoretical lens of Europeanization, specifically the two-way process of uploading and downloading policy preferences between the national and EU levels (Börzel & Risse, 2000). This background helps to understand how party positions on EU enlargement may travel across different levels of governance and party structures. On the one hand, Europarties, acting as transnational actors, influence the positions of their national member parties “top-down”. On the other hand, member parties participate in forming the positions of their respective Europarties by uploading preferences from the domestic political arena to the EU level “bottom-up”. This two-way interaction is especially important for EU enlargement, where domestic political debates and geopolitical calculations overlap with supranational commitments and collective EU strategy.

Taking this background into consideration, the objective of this thesis is twofold. First, it seeks to assess the coherence between Europarties and their national member parties on the topic of EU enlargement. Second, it aims to identify how party positions and coherence have changed between the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections, especially in light of the geopolitical shifts following Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Together, these aim to contribute to a better understanding of how Europarties tackle the complexities of multilevel party politics in the EU.

The main research questions of this thesis are:

- 1) *How coherent are European political parties and their member parties on the topic of EU enlargement?*

2) *What changes can be identified in both positions and coherence considering the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022?*

To address these questions, this thesis employs a comparative qualitative content analysis of 115 party manifestos from three Europarties, the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the European Green Party (EGP) and their member parties. These manifestos, published ahead of the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections, serve as central documents in considering how parties form their positions on EU enlargement over time. This coverage of temporal scope allows for a comparison of party positions before and after the significant geopolitical shift triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Each manifesto is coded using a predefined coding framework that captures key dimensions relevant to enlargement, including overall stance, temporal framing, geographical focus, the use of security and geopolitical justifications and references to internal reforms. By focusing on this range of dimensions across two elections, the study offers insight into how Europarties function within a multilevel system and how they adapt or consolidate in response to significant geopolitical developments.

This research contributes to the literature on EU party politics by offering an empirical study of a policy area at a time of renewed strategic importance. Understanding how aligned political parties are on enlargement has implications beyond party politics. Given that each accession of a new member state requires unanimous approval from all current member states, the results of this research can help anticipate potential political conflicts in future enlargement rounds.

This thesis proceeds as follows: the second chapter develops the theoretical framework and reviews the relevant academic literature, discussing key concepts such as multilevel governance, Europeanization, political parties in the EU, party coherence and the politics of EU enlargement, which serve as the conceptual foundation for the analysis. The third chapter describes the research design and methodology, including case selection, coding dimensions and analytical procedures. The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings from the manifesto analysis, focusing on coherence between the parties and change over time. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes by summarizing the key contributions of the study, highlighting limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing the coherence of party positions on EU enlargement within the multilevel political system of the European Union. The goal is to define how party positions are shaped, aligned and contested across national and EU levels, to justify methodological choices and hypotheses that follow in the empirical chapters.

The chapter is organized using the logic of a *“ladder of abstraction”*, starting with broader theories of governance and narrowing towards the specific dynamics of party coherence on the issue of EU enlargement (Sartori, 1970). Multilevel governance provides a conceptual starting point for this thesis, which allows for looking at how political parties that operate across multiple levels coordinate positions on issues such as EU enlargement. This is especially interesting when parties are faced with competing interests and pressures between the national and EU levels. This dynamic is further analyzed through the concept of Europeanization, explaining how preferences and positions travel across these levels, both top-down and bottom-up. These frameworks are then linked to the organizational structure of political parties in the EU, emphasizing the loose and decentralized character of Europarties. Furthermore, in order to demonstrate why horizontal and vertical coherence is a relevant and measurable concept for assessing party organization, this chapter presents the main differences between member parties, political groups and European political parties. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the empirical and political background that supports the focus on EU enlargement policy. These conceptual and empirical foundations result in four hypotheses, which guide the analysis of party coherence across the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections.

2.1. Multilevel Governance

The European Union (EU) has been explored using classic integration theories - neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Indeed, these frameworks provided insights in the early stages of European integration. However, the need for a new approach arose as the EU evolved into a more complex political system. In response, scholars started focusing on a governance-oriented approach that, rather than contradicting the grand theories of European integration, complemented the study of the European Union and offered new opportunities. This marked a turning point when, instead of treating *“Euro-polity [as] the independent variable”*, a shift took place towards treating it as the dependent variable (Jachtenfuchs, 2001,

p. 250). This meant that political scientists started exploring the outcomes of the integration process.

In this context, the concept of multilevel governance emerged in the early 1990s as a reaction to the increasing complexity of the EU following a revision of the Cohesion Policy in 1988 and the appearance of new structures after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Schakel, 2020). Gary Marks (1992) described interactions between different levels of governance and institutions involved in structural policy. He introduced the term “*multilevel perspective*” to describe the empirical reality of interaction and power shifts involving multiple governance levels (Marks, 1992, p. 192). Although the empirical observations were there, the term was more systematically conceptualized in a subsequent publication describing how central governments were losing power to the Commission and local/regional governments. In 1993, Marks defined multilevel governance as: “*a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local - as the result of a broad process of institution creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level*” (Marks, 1993, p. 392), thereby challenging traditional state-centric assumptions embedded in previous conceptual frameworks.

To develop this further, it is important to consider how the concept of multilevel governance has evolved, both in its empirical applications and in its theoretical refinement by key scholars. Building on the initial definition, Liesbet Hooghe (1995), who focused on subnational mobilization and cohesion policy in the EU, argued that the EU had evolved into a “*multi-layered polity where there is no centre of accumulated authority, but where changing combinations of supranational, national and subnational governments engage in collaboration*” (Hooghe, 1995, p. 176). While this perspective highlighted the fluid and cooperative character of EU governance across tiers, Marks et al. (1996) advanced this view by moving away from a state-centric model towards “*an actor-centred approach*” (Marks et al., 1996, p. 348). This broader view of the model emphasized that power in the EU is exercised by various actors whose roles exceed traditional territorial boundaries. This broader development gave rise to two dimensions of the multilevel governance concept, vertical, where multilevel represents the “*interdependence of actors operating at different territorial levels*”, and horizontal, where governance indicated “*the growing [...] interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors*” (Bache & Flinders, 2004, p. 35).

In their seminal work, *Multi-level Governance and European Integration* (2001), Hooghe and Marks identified three central features of multilevel governance. First, national governments no longer monopolize control over EU policymaking and decision-making competencies are shared with actors at multiple levels. Second, supranational institutions such as the European Commission, European Parliament and the European Court of Justice have autonomous power and they cannot be understood as “*agents of national executives*” (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 3). Third, the authors challenge the assumption that subnational actors are nested exclusively within domestic political arenas. “*Instead, subnational actors operate in both national and supranational arenas, creating transnational associations in the process*” (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 4). Taken together, these contributions reposition multilevel governance not just as a model of authority dispersion but as a lens for understanding how strategic interdependence across levels shapes actor behavior, including party positioning on contested issues like enlargement. This conceptualization focusing on an “actor-centered” collaborative view helps explore Europarty and member party interactions not as a top-down compliance, but rather as a negotiation process influenced by considerations such as incentives, arenas and accountability structures. Furthermore, enlargement is often part of both national and EU level debates, which makes it even more challenging to align positions if there are competing views across levels. In turn, these conditions directly influence how consistent or fragmented party positions on enlargement may become.

Beyond the EU, the concept of multilevel governance has been used for the analysis of domestic (e.g., Germany, Switzerland, Canada and the US) and global dynamics (Braun, 2010; Stein & Turkewitsch, 2010; Zürn, 2010), as well as for a variety of policy areas, ranging from social policy to economic policy to environmental policy (see Enderlein et al., 2010, pp. 399-486). While it allows for exploration of several different dynamics, the choice to use multilevel governance as one of the theoretical lenses for this specific thesis is driven by the following considerations. Although multilevel governance is considered more of an analytical approach rather than a fully developed theory (Stephenson, 2013, p. 818; Christiansen, 2019, p. 106), its value for this thesis rests on its capacity to capture tensions arising when Europarties and their member parties operate within a complex system of overlapping national and supranational arenas. As Deschouwer argues, the European Union constitutes a multilevel party system composed of relations between the parties at more than one level, including horizontal and vertical relations (Deschouwer, 2000, p. 24). These dynamics become especially significant when parties are expected to respond to EU-wide issues (e.g., enlargement) that require both

ideological and strategic alignment across levels. Thus, multilevel governance provides the structural and institutional context in which party coherence, or the lack thereof, must be understood. It forms the first pillar of the theoretical framework of this thesis, which analyzes how Europarties and their member parties position themselves on EU enlargement.

Yet, multilevel governance has been criticized for its lack of predictive powers, offering little explanation of causality (Stephenson, 2013, p. 818). As such, it is not sufficient to fully understand how party positions move between different levels but rather provides a picture of how complex this process may be due to the number of layers and actors. To address this gap, this thesis also uses the concept of Europeanization to better understand the mechanisms shaping party positions.

2.2. Europeanization

This thesis builds on the concept of Europeanization to explain how party positions on EU enlargement evolve and align across multiple levels of governance. While multilevel governance provides an important structural framework for understanding how political parties interact on different EU levels, it is less equipped to explain how political preferences travel across these layers. Thus, to explain the mechanisms driving changes in party coherence and positioning, this thesis turns to the concept of Europeanization. This concept provides a more dynamic account of how different actors across different tiers shape their electoral agendas in shared political systems, especially during the European Parliament elections. Therefore, the concept of Europeanization serves as a framework for examining how party positions on EU enlargement become aligned within party families and between national and European levels. In doing so, it builds a theoretical bridge between structure (multilevel) and process (Europeanization), thereby grounding the observed patterns of alignment and coherence.

The term Europeanization gained attention in EU studies after scholars started treating the EU not simply as an international organization but as a political system of its own. This change in mindset resulted in the increasing use of a comparative politics perspective to study the EU. Following these developments, scholars started focusing on how changes within domestic institutions, processes and decision-making could be linked back to the changing nature of the EU as a polity (Ladrech, 2010, pp. 8-9). Thus, Europeanization became a core analytical tool for examining two-way interactions between the EU and domestic political systems. Although its meaning has varied depending on disciplinary angle and empirical focus, in the broadest

sense, Radaelli suggests that Europeanization is “*what happens once EU institutions are in place and produce their effects*” (Radaelli, 2000, p. 6). Similarly, Ladrech proposed that it refers to responses by actors to the impact of European integration (Ladrech, 2002, p. 389).

Over time, literature on Europeanization has proposed more specific definitions differentiating between top-down and bottom-up interactions among the EU and member states, as well as third countries (Börzel & Panke, 2022, p. 113). Top-down Europeanization focuses on how EU-level decisions shape domestic politics, policies, or institutional arrangements. According to one of the first definitions by Ladrech (1994) Europeanization was conceptualized as an “*incremental process*” in which the political and economic dynamics of the EU gradually become embedded in the “*organizational logic*” of national political actors (Ladrech, 1994, p. 69). As he clarified later, by organizational logic, he meant the “*adaptive process of organizations to a changed or changing environment*” (Ladrech, 2002, p. 392). This conceptualization focuses more on policy “*downloading*” from the EU and thus views Europeanization as a top-down process. In line with this logic, Radaelli (2000) suggested that Europeanization is a “*process of construction diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies*” (Radaelli, 2000, p. 4).

On the other hand, bottom-up Europeanization captures how domestic actors (such as member states or political parties) upload their preferences to EU institutions and influence policies, hence making the EU a dependent variable (Börzel & Panke, 2019, p. 116). Bottom-up Europeanization can be conceptualized based on two interpretations: rationalist and constructivist. From a rationalist standpoint, actors are assumed to have fixed preferences and pursue them through strategic bargaining using tools such as voting weights in the Council, with the ability to form winning coalitions. By contrast, constructivist approaches see preferences as more fluid, shaped, and reshaped in the process of deliberation. In this sense, the ability of a member state or party to influence outcomes depends not on bargaining power but on the persuasive quality of its arguments and how they respond to prevailing norms, beliefs and institutional expectations (Börzel & Panke, 2022, p. 119-121).

In addition to these perspectives, literature also suggests that the Europeanization process is not so linear and unidirectional but rather a sequential one (Börzel & Panke, 2022, p. 121),

referring to both the formation and reception of EU and state-level policies, procedures and institutions. This conceptualization encompasses bottom-up and top-down processes (Börzel & Risse, 2007, p. 485). What matters here is less the direction of change than the presence of alignment. As Featherstone (2003) outlines, Europeanization may manifest in historical process, cultural diffusion, institutional adaptation and a policy preference change (Featherstone, 2003, p. 6).

According to Börzel & Risse (2006), regardless of the theoretical approach used, empirical studies suggest that for Europeanization to take place, there must be a certain “misfit”, that is, a significant difference between the national and European level policies, institutions, or processes (Börzel & Risse, 2006, p. 491). This is where the concept of “goodness of fit” comes into play. Although this concept does not provide a causal explanation, it serves as an enabling condition for a change. Since social institutions “prefer continuity over change”, transformations are unlikely to occur unless there is a necessity for it (Börzel & Risse, 2006, p. 491). However, misfit alone is not enough to bring about change. To turn this misfit into an actual adaptation, additional factors such as actor preferences or political context are needed. Therefore, adaptation pressure is a political process and is not automatically triggered by a misfit.

These conceptual differences and background are particularly relevant for this thesis, as it examines party manifestos prepared for the European Parliament elections. In this context, Europeanization is not a linear or causal process but an interaction that goes both ways. On the one hand, Europarties may shape positions of their member parties through coordination, which is limited due to their “loose” character but still exists. On the other hand, member parties also upload their agendas to the European level. The European electoral setting creates a unique institutional context in which both top-down and bottom-up aspects of Europeanization are activated.

Within the specific area of party politics, scholars have identified several potential channels through which Europeanization may be expressed. Ladrech (2002, 2010) outlines five areas where party activity may reflect Europeanization dynamics: “(1) *policy/programmatic content*; (2) *organizational*; (3) *patterns of party competition*; (4) *party–government relations*; and (5) *relations beyond the national party system*” (Ladrech, 2002, p. 396; 2010, p. 135-140). This thesis focuses on the first and fifth dimensions, the programmatic content of manifestos and

their alignment with Europarty positions. Europeanization here is observed as convergence in enlargement-related positions across time and structural levels.

While this thesis primarily draws on top-down, bottom-up, and sequential perspectives of Europeanization, it also uses Caramani's (2015) view of this concept as a long-term process of cross-national convergence. Specifically, it draws on the aspect of his framework that emphasizes Europeanization driven by common responses to major historical transformations, such as wars, the collapse of communism, or other structural disruptions, rather than through institutional adaptation alone (Caramani, 2015, p. 15-22). While the author does not prove a direct causal link between the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it serves as a contextual factor that may contribute to position alignment.

This thesis conceptualizes Europeanization as a multidirectional process through which party positions on EU enlargement become aligned across levels and countries. Building on top-down, bottom-up and sequential mechanisms, the analysis explores how Europarties and their member parties align in the context of shared elections and shifting geopolitical context. However, to understand how such alignment materializes in practice, it is necessary to shift focus to the actors themselves. The following subchapter explores the specific features and functions of political parties in the European Union, with particular emphasis on Europarties and their relationships with member parties.

2.3. Political Parties in the European Union

Political parties are central to the functioning of representative democracy. Giovanni Sartori, one of the foundational scholars of party system analysis, described parties as a “structure between society and government” (Sartori, 2005, xxi), enabling citizens to communicate their preferences to the state. Dalton et al. (2013) expand on this, stating that “political parties are vital agencies in the proper functioning of democracies” (Dalton et al., 2013, p. 3), acting as intermediaries that aggregate interests, structure competition and facilitate governance. In the context of the European Union, there are two channels of democratic representation: one direct, through the European Parliament, and another indirect, through national parliaments and governments (Crum & Fossum, 2009, p. 249).

Although some scholars had anticipated in the 1950s that party politics would become crucial in forming the new European Community and advancing the European integration process (Hix and Lord, 1997, ix), party activities at the European level started to take a more organized shape

only at the end of the 1970s (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 13). Following a series of treaty reforms, such as the introduction of direct elections in 1979 and the gradual expansion of legislative authority through the adoption of the co-decision procedure, the Parliament started to emerge as a more influential actor in the EU decision-making process (Raunio, 2006, p. 246).

Indeed, with all the changes, political parties have become a significant part of the European Union as a polity. Prior to 1979, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were nominated by national parliaments from among their members, with several consequences. Firstly, parties not represented in their national parliaments lacked the opportunity to be represented in the European Parliament. Secondly, Eurosceptic MEPs were unwilling to be nominated for these positions. Lastly, MEPs had limited time to dedicate to their European responsibilities and national parliamentary commitments (Nugent, 2017, pp. 210-211). However, with the new direct system of elections, new dynamics for the electoral system and political parties started to surface. These direct elections were expected to contribute to European integration as they would also encourage the formation and strengthening of political parties operating beyond national borders. The Maastricht Treaty defined the role of political parties in the political system of the European Union by specifying that *“Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union”* (Raunio, 2006, p. 250). This vision is in line with the broader principle that is set out in Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union, stating that *“the functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy”*.

These developments should have elevated political parties from neglected actors to key pillars of representative democracy in the EU, connecting citizens to EU institutions and helping to shape a transnational political space. Indeed, Hix and Høyland state that *“EU politics is party politics”*, stressing the increasing importance of party competition in forming EU-level decisions (Hix & Høyland, 2011, p. 137). However, this discussion requires a conceptual clarification on what exactly constitutes a “party” in the multilevel structure of the European Union. To clarify this, scholars distinguish between three different interrelated types of entities: domestic political parties (hereinafter member parties), political groups, and European political parties (hereinafter Europarties) (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011, pp. 152-153).

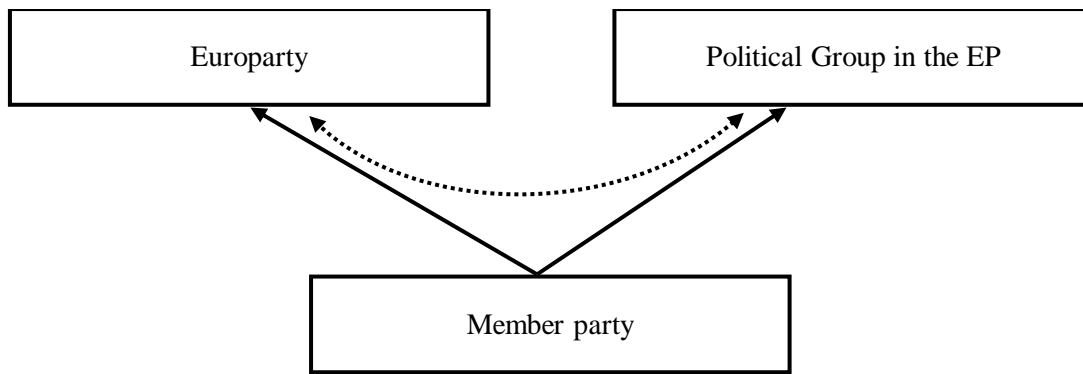


Figure 1. Member Parties, Europarties and Political Groups in the European Parliament

Source: Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011, p. 153

As shown in Figure 1, member parties are important in the party system. They refer to national-level organizations that contest elections in their respective member states and send representatives to the European Parliament (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011, p. 153). In the context of European Parliament elections, member parties play an important role in two main dimensions. First, the majority of candidates and nearly all elected MEPs are selected by their member parties (Nugent, 2017, p. 217). Second, European Parliament election campaigns are essentially national election campaigns organized and executed by these member parties to meet voter expectations in the member states (Nugent, 2017, p. 218). This leads us to the concept of second-order elections or elections that are fought “*as beauty contests [...] in the shadow of the ongoing first-order [national] election contest*” and where voters consider the European political arena to be less important than the national one (Hix & Høyland, 2011, p. 147). This theory by Reif & Schmitt (1980) was based on the observation following the first elections in 1979, where debates were focusing on national rather than European issues (Lindberg et al., 2010, p. 2). As a consequence, electoral campaigns for European elections are less about choices for European public policies and more about domestic debates (Jachtenfuchs, 2006, p. 164). Even after over four decades, the second-order elections theory continues to be relevant and holds significant explanatory power (Ehin & Talving, 2021).

Political groups in the European Parliament are cross-national alliances formed by MEPs. In order to form such groups, the rules of the European Parliament require at least 23 MEPs from at least one quarter of member states. MEPs wishing to join political groups need to submit a written declaration where they confirm that they share a common “political affinity” with the group. Even though this requirement is to ensure a minimum level of ideological cohesion

within groups, the term itself is open to interpretation. In practice, it is not ideological commitment, but rather a label that allows the formation of alliances among MEPs. Such alliances carry strategic importance since party groups in the European Parliament play a key role in parliamentary organization, accessing key positions and influential legislative dossiers (Baraník, 2024). Currently, there are 8 political groups in the European Parliament (European Parliament, n.d.). These political groups differ by their ideologies, ranging from left to right on the spectrum, attitudes towards European integration, environmental policies, and economic and social values (McCormick, 2020, pp. 267-271). Research on political groups is based on roll-call voting data and has often centered around exploring cohesion and coalition-building patterns between party groups (Cherepnalkoski et al., 2016; Hix et al., 2007).

The third layer is party federations, which emerged between 1974 and 1976 in preparation for the first direct European Parliament elections. These included the Socialist, Liberal and Christian Democratic federations. In the early 1980s, the European Free Alliance was also formed, and the Green Party federation was established in 1993. Following the introduction of the party-related article in the Maastricht Treaty, these organizations formally changed their names from “federations” or “confederations” to “parties” (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 63). European political parties are described as federations of national political parties from several Member States that are united by political affinity (European Union, n.d.). Johansson & Raunio (2019) characterize Europarties as “networks of like-minded national parties or as loose federations of member parties, especially when compared with the often centralized and strongly disciplined parties found in the member states” (Johansson & Raunio, 2019, pp. 1-2). As of 2024, there are twelve officially registered European political parties (see Table 1). For the purposes of this thesis, however, the focus will be on three of them: the Party of European Socialists, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, and the European Green Party, each of which correspond to a political group and a family within the Parliament.

Table 1. Political Groups and Parties at the European Level and Their Political Families

Political Group in the European Parliament	Political Party at European Level	Political Family
Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats)	European People’s Party	Christian Democrats/Conservatives
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	Party of European Socialists	Socialists/Social Democrats
Patriots for Europe Group	Patriots.eu	Far-right/Eurosceptics
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	European Conservatives and Reformists Party European Christian Political Party	Conservatives/Eurosceptics Christian-Social

Renew Europe Group	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	Liberals
	European Democratic Party	Centrists
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	European Green Party	Greens
	European Free Alliance	Regionalists
The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL	Party of the European Left	Non-socialist Left
	European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet	Eco-socialists
Europe of Sovereign Nations Group	Europe of Sovereign Nations	Sovereignists/Euro-sceptics

Source: Adapted from Van Hecke, 2018 based on Fu, 2025 and European Parliament, n.d.

Katz and Mair's (1993) “three faces of party organization” framework provides a helpful lens to better understand interactions between these organizational layers. It makes a distinction between the “*party on the ground*”, which includes members, activists, etc., the “party in public office”, such as in parliament or government, and the “party central office”, like the national leadership of the organization (Katz & Mair, 1993, p. 594). In the European Union context, “party on the ground” refers to member parties, “party in central office” to extra-parliamentary organizations, and “party in public office” to European party groups (Bardi, 2002, p. 296). According to Johansson & Raunio (2019), Europarties are the extra-parliamentary organizations in the EU outside the EP, which have developed into “*clearing houses for the development of joint policies and offer special channels of communication to European leaders and their parties*” (Johansson & Raunio, 2019, p. 2). However, the extent to which they function as coherent actors remains contested, especially in light of their reliance on various and often nationally constrained member parties.

This leads to the main analytical puzzle of this thesis: despite the formal status and institutional visibility that Europarties have gained, their internal heterogeneity raises doubts about their ability to function as unified political actors. Are Europarties genuinely coherent, or are they better understood as loose confederations bound together by institutional incentives and common labels? In complex policy areas like EU enlargement, which requires a certain degree of ideological unity to formulate coherent positions, this question is especially important. The next sections will further explore how vertical and horizontal party coherence can serve as an indicator of organizational strength in this multilevel context.

2.4. Party Position Coherence within European Political Parties

For parties to fulfil their democratic function, it is not enough for them to only exist as formal entities. As Dalton et al. (2013) argue, parties must also provide clear policy choices to voters (Dalton et al., 2013, p. 5). This requirement for clarity speaks directly to the concept of party

coherence, the extent to which a party or a political alliance speaks with one voice on policy issues. In representative democracies, particularly within multi-level governance systems such as the European Union, coherence is not only desirable but also a prerequisite for political accountability. Since voters cannot make informed decisions if party positions are unclear, internally fragmented, or inconsistent across levels. Therefore, party position coherence becomes a test for whether Europarties can act as unified political actors.

In the EU context, where transnational party confederations consist of multiple member parties, coming from different national contexts and with different priorities, assessing coherence is even more important. It helps understand whether these alliances are ideologically consistent or “*loose confederations*” driven only by institutional incentives. From this perspective, the concept of party position coherence becomes crucial and may even be used as an indicator for party institutionalization. As Huntington (1965) argues, “*the more unified and coherent an organization is, the more highly institutionalized it is; the greater the disunity of the organization, the less its institutionalization*” (Huntington, 1965, p. 402). In this sense, coherence is both a reflection of organizational stability and a condition for developing a clear, programmatic identity that can function across multiple levels of governance.

For the conceptualization of coherence, this thesis builds on Janda's (1980) work, which defines coherence as “*the degree of congruence in the attitudes and behavior of party members*”. However, to adapt the term for empirical analysis in the EU context, it is necessary to review its components. First, as conceptualized elsewhere, congruence refers to the alignment between the policy preferences of party voters and parties (Arnold & Sapir, 2013, p. 1294), and is typically used to assess voter-party linkage rather than intra party or inter-party alignments. Second, the alignment in “*behavior of party members*” refers to the concept of “*cohesion*”, which focuses on the tendency of elected members of a party to vote together. As Hix et al. (2007) explain, strong party systems rely on disciplined parliamentary voting in parliamentary settings. Cohesion, therefore, differs from coherence by focusing on legislative behavior (Hix et al., 2007, p. 87).

Accordingly, this thesis adopts Bressanelli's (2013) adaptation of Janda's conceptualization of coherence to suit the multilevel structure of EU party politics. He proposes that the focus of coherence assessment should be alignment between national member parties and Europarties, rather than individual party members. Given that Europarties are not composed of individual members per se, but function as federations of national parties, their policy outputs result from

internal coordination among these member parties (Bressanelli, 2013, p. 656). Furthermore, Bressanelli (2013) limits this concept to party attitudes rather than encompassing both attitudes and behavior as originally conceptualized by Janda. This thesis follows a similar approach by focusing on manifesto statements to assess coherence and, thus, attitudes on a specific policy issue.

Bressanelli (2013) explores differences in internal coherence across different Europarties, focusing on two dimensions: the traditional left-right ideological axis and attitudes toward European integration. In order to assess the degree of internal coherence of Europarties, Bressanelli calculates polarization indices for each of these dimensions. The hypothesis that larger Europarties, particularly those that expanded toward Central and Eastern Europe through enlargement, would be less coherent due to increased diversity was not confirmed. However, the results did show that polarization on the left-right axis is approximately three times greater than on the integration dimension. This suggests that Europarties are more coherent in their positions on EU-related issues than on broader socioeconomic questions.

Furthermore, to better differentiate between concepts of coherence, this thesis assesses party position coherence along two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. This alignment is not assumed to result from a one-way transmission of preferences. Drawing on the Europeanization framework, which emphasizes the interplay between both top-down (from the EU level to national actors) and bottom-up (from national actors to the EU level) dynamics, vertical coherence captures a mutual alignment process in which parties and member parties shape each other's positions on key issues, such as EU enlargement. Rather than assuming that Europarties dictate positions or that member parties just upload their preferences, this concept reflects a dynamic alignment process.

Conversely, horizontal coherence refers to the alignment of member parties within the same Europarty, assessing how similar the stances of these parties are, despite their national specificities. High horizontal coherence indicates a strong ideological foundation and issue-based unity within the Europarty; however, low coherence may indicate fragmentation resulting from, for example, diverging national interests. Europarty cannot offer voters meaningful alternatives nor develop consistent legislative agendas if it lacks internal coherence on either dimension. These two factors are essential for effective representation at the EU level and fulfilling their assigned roles at the EU level. For instance, if the European Green Party includes member parties who have radically different positions on key EU issues, this may

raise questions about party coherence and its capacity to act as a collective political actor. Therefore, coherence is not only an internal challenge but also a requirement for effective democratic representation and political competition at the EU level.

Ultimately, this conceptualization has not only practical implications but also normative implications. As discussed above, democracies depend on party competition, which also includes the availability of choices between parties. Coherence becomes especially important for ensuring accountability and democratic representation in the EU context, where party politics function on multiple levels and beyond national boundaries. Therefore, this subchapter argues that higher levels of coherence, both vertically and horizontally, are helpful indicators of whether Europarties operate as “loose confederations” held together by institutional incentives or as organized political actors. As Lefkofridi and Katsanidou (2013) argue, “*policy coherence is a prerequisite for parties’ capacity to operate beyond territorial borders and to pursue common, supranational policy goals*”. In other words, coherence is not only a technical measure of positional unity, but it is also a prerequisite for democratic representation in the party-based system of the EU.

2.5. Party Positions on EU Enlargement

This thesis selects EU enlargement as the policy issue for analysis due to its historical significance, strategic relevance and renewed political salience in the aftermath of Russia’s full scale invasion of Ukraine (Karjalainen, 2023, p. 637). There has been a continuous interest in joining the EU, and it has been considered one of the EU’s most successful foreign policies (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2022, p. 265). Enlargement often followed major geopolitical transformations such as the democratization of Southern Europe in the 1980s, the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (Anghel & Džankić, 2023, p. 488-489; Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2022, pp. 266-267). Based on Karjalainen (2023), the evolution of the EU enlargement policy is currently understood as an interplay of three key dimensions: geopolitical strategy, internal EU reforms and state-building in candidate countries. The author argues that enlargement has been stagnant since Croatia joined the EU in 2013, however, that the war in Ukraine has provided the EU with a renewed geopolitical imperative to re-engage with its neighboring states (Karjalainen, 2023, p. 638).

Koval and Vachudova (2024) analyze how the Russian invasion of Ukraine reshaped politics across France, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Using qualitative content analysis of parliamentary debates, they show how parties formulate their positions on the candidacies of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans. They observed that parties have different perspectives on enlargement, specifically parties in Central and Eastern Europe focus more on solidarity and security, while parties in Western Europe emphasize institutional readiness, economic costs, and migration concerns. This demonstrates how national contexts influence party positions on enlargement and that there is a clear East-West divide. These findings highlight the need for this thesis to go beyond the analysis of support versus opposition on EU enlargement and rather focus on what is hidden behind this simple binary categorization.

On the other hand, Panchuk (2024) brings forward another side of politics – public opinion. Drawing on survey data from five Western EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain), the study shows that war-related concerns have led to positive politicization of Ukraine’s membership, however, attitudes toward other candidate countries (e.g., Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Turkey) remained unchanged. This study supports the idea that EU enlargement has become more salient and, given dynamics between voters and parties, has offered parties both new opportunities and constraints in shaping their manifestos. The author’s findings are important in contextualizing why party positions may have changed between 2019 and 2024.

Consequently, as a result of these dynamics, enlargement has become more politicized and contested. The Russian invasion of Ukraine dramatically changed the EU’s approach to its neighborhood policy, resulting in the advancement of candidate statuses and the opening of accession negotiations with a number of countries. As of today, there are nine states recognized as candidates for membership in the European Union, namely Albania (since 2014), Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 2022), Georgia (since 2023¹), Moldova (since 2022), Montenegro (since 2010), North Macedonia (since 2005), Serbia (since 2012), Turkey (since 1999²), Ukraine (since 2022) and one potential candidate, Kosovo (since 2023). Out of all these countries, five advanced following the outbreak of war, signaling both a revival of political will and also a deeper reconceptualization of enlargement as a strategic necessity.

¹ In June 2024 European Council found the Georgian government’s course of action jeopardizing Georgia’s EU path, leading to a halt of the accession process.

² In 2018 Accession negotiations officially at a standstill in line with the decision of the Council

Nonetheless, enlargement remains an intergovernmental process requiring unanimous approval of accession treaties by all member states (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2022, p 272). Governments are an extension of domestic political parties. Therefore, parties play a central forming political outcomes. Furthermore, enlargement is a politically contentious issue, both within and across member states. It brings to the agenda sensitive debates on migration, institutional capacity, democratic standards and the EU's own identity. By focusing on this policy area, this thesis engages with a politically charged and substantively rich domain that provides a strong case for exploring vertical and horizontal coherence within multi-level party politics in the European Union.

2.6. Hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical perspectives and empirical literature discussed above, the author puts forward four hypotheses to assess the coherence of party positions on EU enlargement. These hypotheses distinguish between vertical and horizontal coherence, as well as temporal change. In particular, these hypotheses consider the loose organizational character of Europarties. This decentralized nature makes coherence more politically charged, especially in areas such as EU enlargement, where national interests are highly salient.

H1a: Europarty positions on EU enlargement reflect the prevailing position among member parties (vertical coherence)

Europarties rarely impose their policy preferences on member parties, since their positions are not legally binding. Rather, their positions often reflect those of member parties, who base their policy decisions on their own domestic contexts. Accordingly, this hypothesis suggests that since there is no strong central authority, Europarties will support the prevailing position of their member parties in order to keep internal legitimacy.

H1b: Europarties are more likely to adopt clear positions on EU enlargement when member party positions align (vertical coherence)

As relatively loose and consensus-based organizations, Europarties are expected to tend to avoid internal disputes by choosing ambiguous or deliberately vague language in their manifestos. In situations of internal contestation, weak party organizations avoid polarizing issues to preserve unity. Therefore, leads us to an expectation that internal fragmentation will result in unclear positions of Europarties.

H2: Member parties within the same Europarty adopt similar positions on EU enlargement (horizontal coherence)

Despite their organizational looseness, Europarties are built on ideological affinity. Even though coordination mechanisms are weak, member parties voluntarily associate based on shared broad principles such as social democracy, liberalism and environmentalism. On an issue like enlargement, which touches on concepts of European integration, solidarity and institutional design, parties within the same Europarty are still expected to exhibit a degree of shared positioning. This hypothesis expects that ideological background provides at least a partial basis for coherence in party manifestos, even if national context leads to variation.

H3: The increased importance of EU enlargement leads Europarties and their member parties to demonstrate greater coherence after 2022 compared to the period before (temporal change)

Prior to 2022, enlargement had largely stalled and was a low-salience issue in many contexts. However, the geopolitical consequences of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine introduced enlargement as a strategic priority. In this context, even loosely organized Europarties faced pressure to clarify their positions and project unity on this now politically salient topic. This hypothesis, thus, expects an increase in vertical and horizontal coherence in the 2024 European Parliament elections compared to 2019.

This chapter has laid the theoretical foundation for analyzing party position coherence on EU enlargement in the multilevel political system of the European Union. The above discussions bring together two main concepts that capture the structural complexity of the EU and the mechanisms through which preferences are formed on different levels. While multilevel governance explains the overlapping political arenas in which Europarties and their member parties function, Europeanization offers a lens to trace how party positions are shaped and aligned. By integrating these with party structure and coherence, the chapter sets up a framework for evaluating whether Europarties act as unified political actors or loose federations that respond to national pressures. The hypotheses that follow and guide the empirical analysis of party manifestos in the following chapters reflect the theoretical assumptions.

3. Research Design, Data and Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to examine the coherence between European political parties and their national member parties on the topic of EU enlargement. It details the research design, sources of data, case selection and the analytical strategies used to assess both party coherence and changes over time. The chapter explains how the study compares party positions using party manifestos from the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections.

3.1. Research Design

This thesis employs a comparative research design framework to address the research questions and achieve the empirical objectives posed by the author. The comparative framework (see Figure 2) distinguishes between two key dimensions of coherence: vertical and horizontal. As established in the theoretical framework of this thesis, vertical coherence refers to the alignment between a Europarty and its member parties, whereas horizontal coherence captures the alignment among member parties within the same Europarty.

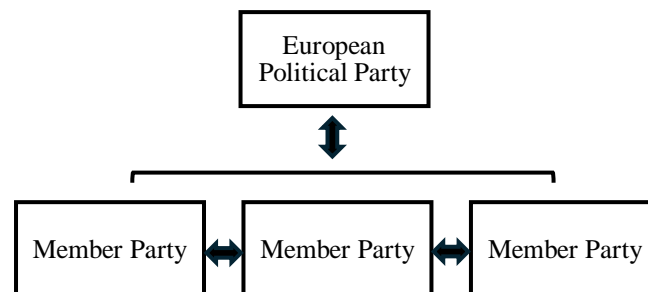


Figure 2. Comparative Framework of Horizontal and Vertical Coherence within European Political Parties

Note: Figure created by the author

The empirical analysis is based on party manifestos issued by Europarties and their member parties in the lead-up to the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections. These manifestos serve as primary sources for assessing how parties articulate their positions on EU enlargement. The European Parliament elections provide a unique opportunity to study alignment between the national and EU levels. During this period, while Europarties are “loose” organizations, they are still expected to coordinate their messages with their member parties. Both party levels

adopt election manifestos around the same time, offering a synchronized and comparative dataset. Moreover, the EP elections are one of the few moments where member parties are expected to explicitly engage with EU-level issues, such as enlargement, which increases the likelihood that enlargement becomes a topic of discussion in their manifestos.

Based on this dataset, the next step is to establish how coherence is measured in practice. Vertical coherence analysis focuses on whether the Europarty's position is consistent with the prevailing position among member parties. As a result, the vertical dimension is classified as either coherent or incoherent. The initial approach was to determine whether the Europarty position is supported by the majority of member parties (>50%). However, after analyzing the empirical results, it became clear that applying a 50% threshold risked missing important patterns of alignments. In some cases, exactly half of the member parties supported the same position, while the remaining positions were highly fragmented across alternative positions. In such cases, even though the numerical majority threshold was not formally met, the prevailing position was still substantially more prominent than any other position. As a result, to better capture this nuance and avoid labelling such cases as incoherent, the assessment criteria were refined to recognize a prevailing position even when it had exactly 50% support, as long as the remaining parties were divided among several minority positions. This change in approach ensures that the vertical coherence assessment is both methodologically consistent and substantive, capturing not only the presence of a majority but also the relative strength and concentration of support in the context of internal party variation.

Horizontal coherence, on the other hand, focuses on the degrees of alignment between member parties' positions in a given category. While the assessment is based on a qualitative content analysis of party positions in their manifestos, a corresponding scale is used to translate observed patterns into a scale. This scale categorizes coherence into four levels: coherent (80-100%), moderately coherent (60-79%), minimally coherent (51-59%), and incoherent ($\leq 50\%$) (see Table 2). These thresholds are based on the logic of majority agreement, distinguishing between different levels of internal alignment. First, a coherence level of 80% or higher indicates a strong consensus among member parties. Second, 60-79% represents a substantial, but not complete, consensus. Third, when just over half of the parties (51-59%) agree on a position, it indicates a weak consensus and is categorized as minimally coherent. Finally, if no position is shared by at least half of the member parties, internal fragmentation is deemed too great, and the case is considered incoherent.

Table 2. Horizontal Coherence Assessment Scale

Percentage	Assessment
80-100%	Coherent
60-79%	Moderately coherent
51-59%	Minimally coherent
≤50%	Incoherent

Source: Author's own compilation

This approach provides a structured yet flexible framework for interpreting party alignment. In addition to measuring active alignment on stated positions, the analysis takes the absence of engagement as an indicator of horizontal coherence. In qualitative content analysis, silence on a specific issue can indicate its priority or lack thereof. As a result, when a prevailing position among member parties does not address a specific category (e.g., a geographical region), it is interpreted as a form of alignment. In this case, coherence is determined by what is unaddressed. This approach allows for reflection on categories that are ignored in most manifestos and provides room for interpretation for such cases as well.

To deepen the analysis further, a temporal comparison is conducted, allowing for the comparison of changes in party positions and coherence over two electoral cycles: the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections. It is important to note that the research does not seek to prove causality, but rather to assess alignment patterns across levels and time in the manifestos' content. Accordingly, the research design is structured to examine three interrelated elements: vertical coherence, horizontal coherence and change over time. For each of the three Europarties examined: the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the European Green Party (EGP), the analysis begins with an overview of party positions on EU enlargement in 2019 based on predefined categories. Within each Europarty, a comparison is made first between each member party and the Europarty (vertical coherence) and then among the member parties themselves (horizontal coherence). The same analytical structure is then applied to the 2024 manifestos to evaluate continuity and change. Finally, a summary of position and coherence change is provided to assess the patterns that have emerged over time among all of the parties.

3.2. Data and Case Selection

This section outlines the rationale and the process behind the selection of data sources and empirical cases analyzed in this thesis. Since the core objective is to assess the coherence of

party positions on EU enlargement across two levels of party organization, Europarties and their member parties, it is essential that the data used captures both the official positions and the structural relationships within and across these political organizations. The selection was thus guided by both theoretical relevance and practical considerations of data availability, representativeness and comparability over time.

3.2.1. Data sources

While there are different data sources that allow for measuring party policy positions, including expert surveys and mass public opinion surveys (Carter et al., 2023, p. 202-203; Dinas & Gemenis, 2010; Ray, 1999), this thesis relies on official party manifestos published in the lead-up to the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections as the primary data. This choice is motivated by data availability and several advantages highlighted in the literature.

Unlike expert or public opinion surveys, which reflect external perceptions of party stances, manifestos represent the intentional and formally agreed policy positions of the parties themselves and provide a more accurate picture of where parties stand on policy issues (Braun et al., 2019; Dinas & Gemenis, 2010). Manifestos are considered ‘uniquely representative and authoritative’ documents that explicitly outline party policy positions at a given point in time (Budge, 1987, p. 18). Therefore, stances on particular subjects articulated in manifestos represent formally adopted positions, which makes them a reliable data source for comparative analysis (Braun & Schmitt, 2020).

While party manifestos provide several advantages for studying party policy positions, they are not without limitations and have been the subject of scholarly criticism. One such point is the validity of manifestos as true reflections of party positions, given that they are strategic documents drafted by party elites with the goal of electoral success (Laver & Garry, 2000). As a result, they might downplay divisive issues or issues that are electorally disadvantageous (Netjes & Binnema, 2007). Pelizzo (2003) argues that party manifestos serve to shape voters’ perceptions rather than objectively reflect party stances and are characterized by a high degree of subjectivity. However, while being campaign instruments written with strategic considerations in mind (Braun, 2023; Braun et al., 2019), manifestos still represent a more direct statement of intended policy direction that is a result of extensive internal discussions, negotiations and approval within parties (Budge, 1987). This suggests that the manifestos reflect a degree of consensus within the party, at least on the broad policy areas (Braun et al.,

2019; Carter et al., 2023). Therefore, manifesto data remains an invaluable resource for studying party positions.

Furthermore, manifesto data is particularly well-suited for this research due to its high degree of comparability across cases and time. Party manifestos are issued in the same electoral context, the European Parliament elections, and are typically released within a similar time frame across all member states. This synchronicity provides a unique opportunity to conduct a systematic, cross-national comparison of party positions under shared institutional and temporal conditions. Unlike national elections, which vary across time and context, the European Parliament elections offer a common reference point where both Europarties and their member parties are expected to articulate their views on EU-wide issues, including enlargement.

Since party position research based on party manifestos is a highly developed domain in political science, there exists a widely used and authoritative source for such data. The Manifesto Project Database, launched in 1989, has long served as a foundational reference, offering a free, multilingual, and annotated collection of electoral programs from over 60 countries in nearly 40 languages (*Manifesto Project Database*, n.d.). Building on the methodological model of the Manifesto Project, the Euromanifesto Project was established in 2000 at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) to address the specific context of European Parliament elections. Its objective is to collect and analyze the party programs of all relevant political parties and European parties from all EU member states that participate in European Parliament elections (Carteny et al., 2023). The Euromanifesto Project serves as a primary reference for this thesis, particularly for the 2019 election cycle, for which a comprehensive dataset of officially published manifestos is available³. This includes all Europarties that issued a manifesto, as well as the majority of their national member parties. While this project produced a comprehensive dataset for the 2019 elections, the manifestos for 2024 were not yet available at the time of writing this thesis. Consequently, the author attempted to access the unpublished dataset of 2024 manifestos by contacting the coordinator of the Euromanifesto project, Prof. Dr. Daniela Braun; however, was informed that data collection was still in progress. Given that the 2024 manifestos are still in the process of being aggregated for the Euromanifesto project, the author created the 2024 manifesto dataset herself.

³ The dataset is publicly available at: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7892

Since the initial aim of this thesis was to include the five largest Europarties represented in the tenth European Parliament (2024–2029), the author conducted an independent search for 2024 manifestos. This search began on the official websites of Europarties and their respective national member parties. In cases where manifestos were not available online, further efforts were made to locate them through electoral commission websites and public archives. These additional searches resulted in several relevant documents. To supplement the dataset further, the author contacted individual member parties directly, successfully obtaining some manifestos that were not publicly accessible.

Despite these efforts, a small number of manifestos remained inaccessible. Consequently, the final case selection was influenced not only by structural and analytical considerations but also by the practical availability of data. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the following section on case selection. To ensure transparency and replicability, Appendix contains a full list of all manifestos used in the analysis, including their sources and the channels through which they were obtained. It offers a comprehensive overview of the documents analyzed.

3.2.2. Selection of European Political Parties

The first step in the case selection process started with the creation of an exhaustive list of all registered European Political Parties based on data from the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations website (see Table 3). This initial mapping defined the empirical universe of potential cases from which the final selection would be drawn.

Table 3. Number of MEPs by European Political Party in the 9th and 10th European Parliaments

European Political Party	Registration year	9 th European Parliament (2019-2024) ⁴	10 th European Parliament (2024-2029) ⁵
European People’s Party	2017	173 MEPs	167 MEPs
Party of European Socialists	2017	134 MEPs	127 MEPs
Patriots.eu ⁶	2017	50 MEPs	64 MEPs
European Conservatives and Reformists Party	2017	51 MEPs	52 MEPs

⁴ As of 30 September 2023, information publicly available at: <https://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties>. The author contacted the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations to request an official list of Members of the European Parliament from 2019 but did not receive a response. Consequently, the 2023 list was used as the most recent publicly available reference for the 9th European Parliament (2019–2024).

⁵ As of 30 September 2024, information publicly available at: <https://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties>

⁶ Previously known as the Identity and Democracy Party

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	2017	67 MEPs	51 MEPs
European Green Party	2017	57 MEPs	44 MEPs
Europe of Sovereign Nations	2024	NA	25 MEPs
European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet	2024	NA	18 MEPs
Party of the European Left	2017	27 MEPs	16 MEPs
European Democratic Party	2017	11 MEPs	10 MEPs
European Free Alliance	2017	8 MEPs	8 MEPs
European Christian Political Movement	2017	5 MEPs	5 MEPs

Note: Author's own compilation based on data from the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations official website

In the second step, a set of criteria was applied to narrow the scope of the analysis and determine which Europarties would be included in the study:

1. The party must have participated in both the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections (continuity)
2. The party must not have undergone significant structural changes between the two elections (continuity)
3. The party must hold at least 5% of the total seats in the European Parliament after the 2024 elections (relevance)
4. Official party manifestos for both the 2019 and 2024 elections must be available, as well as at least 80% of member party manifestos (data availability)

Based on the first two criteria, the European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet, Europe of Sovereign Nations and Patriots.eu were excluded from the analysis. Applying the third criterion resulted in the exclusion of smaller parties with fewer than 20 seats after the 2024 elections, namely, the Party of the European Left, the European Democratic Party, the European Free Alliance (EFA) and the European Christian Political Movement. While the goal was to capture a broad spectrum of political ideologies, smaller parties were excluded due to their limited institutional influence. Despite the author's efforts to include the five largest Europarties, the limited availability of manifestos resulted in adjustments to the case selection. In particular, the European People's Party (EPP), the largest party in the European Parliament, was excluded since only around 60% of its 2024 member party manifestos were accessible, despite efforts to retrieve additional documents through direct party contact. This level of

coverage was deemed insufficient for a reliable analysis of coherence. Similarly, the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR) was not included in the final sample due to the absence of a Europarty-level manifesto for the 2019 elections. The only available Europarty document for the 2019 elections was Jan Zahradil's personal manifesto as ECR Spitzenkandidat, which does not formally represent the party's collective position (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2019).

Consequently, the final selection of Europarties included in this thesis is as follows:

1. Party of European Socialists (PES)
2. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)
3. European Green Party (EGP)

Although limitations, such as missing manifestos from major Europarties and relatively narrow coverage of the ideological spectrum, the final case sample still provides substantial empirical ground for conducting a meaningful comparative analysis. These three Europarties represent distinct ideological orientations and include a sufficient number of national member parties to assess both horizontal and vertical coherence on the issue of EU enlargement.

3.2.3. Selection of Member Parties

The selection of national political parties was primarily driven by the availability of party manifestos, which served as the core data source for assessing positions on EU enlargement and policy coherence between Europarties and their member parties. Even though the thesis does not aim to conduct direct comparisons between individual member parties across two dimensions, obtaining a representative sample of manifestos for both the 2019 and 2024 electoral cycles is essential for several reasons.

First, to evaluate the overall coherence of a Europarty, it is necessary to capture the range of member party positions on EU enlargement. By analyzing a large number of manifestos, the study can map internal variation and determine the extent to which national parties align with one another (horizontal coherence) and with their respective Europarty (vertical coherence). Moreover, the comparative design of the study, which analyzes coherence at two distinct time points (2019 and 2024), depends on consistent and comprehensive manifesto availability to allow for temporal analysis.

With this in mind, the selection began with identifying member parties represented in the 9th European Parliament (2019-2024) and the 10th European Parliament (2024-2029). This was done by consulting the official lists of Members of the European Parliament by Europarty affiliation, as published by the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations in September 2023 and September 2024, respectively. These lists served as the basis for determining which member parties were affiliated with each Europarty in both electoral cycles.

Next, the author collected the relevant party manifestos to evaluate the feasibility of including each party in the analysis. Initially, member party manifestos were collected for EPP, PES, ALDE and EGP. However, the EPP was excluded due to insufficient manifesto availability, accounting for only 60% (21/35) of its member parties' manifestos in 2024. In contrast, manifesto coverage was significantly higher for PES, ALDE and EGP (see Table 4), ensuring sufficient empirical coverage for comparative analysis. As a result, 109 member party manifestos were included in the final dataset, together with six Europarty manifestos. A detailed list of the included parties and corresponding manifesto sources can be found in Appendix .

Table 4. Selected Member Parties and Share of Available Manifestos

European Political Party Affiliation	9th European Parliament (2019-2024)	10th European Parliament (2024-2029)
PES member parties	20/23 (87%)	21/25 (84%)
ALDE member parties	22/23 (96%)	23/24 (96%)
EGP member parties	10/12 (83%)	13/14 (93%)

Note: Author's own compilation

The following member party manifestos were available for PES in the 9th European Parliament (2019–2024): Social Democratic Party (Austria), Socialist Party (Belgium), Onward (Belgium), Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgaria), Danish Social Democratic Party (Denmark), Estonian Social Democratic Party (Estonia), Social Democratic Party of Finland (Finland), Socialist Party (France), Social Democratic Party of Germany (Germany), Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Greece), Democratic Party (Italy), Social Democratic Party "Saskaņa" (Latvia), Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (Lithuania), Socialist Workers' Party of Luxembourg (Luxembourg), Labour Party (Malta), Dutch Labour Party (Netherlands), Socialist Party (Portugal), Social Democrats (Slovenia), Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Spain), and Swedish Social Democratic Party (Sweden). For the 10th European Parliament

(2024–2029), manifestos included all the above except the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Greece), Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (Lithuania), and Social Democratic Party (Romania), whose manifestos were unavailable. New additions included the Democratic Coalition (Hungary), the Labour Party (Ireland) and the New Left (Poland).

The following member party manifestos were available for ALDE in the 9th European Parliament: NEOS – The New Austria and Liberal Forum (Austria), Reformist Movement (Belgium), Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Belgium), Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Bulgaria), Yes 2011 (Czechia), Danish Social Liberal Party (Denmark), Left, Denmark's Liberal Party (Denmark), Estonian Reform Party (Estonia), Centre Party (Finland), Swedish People's Party of Finland (Finland), Union of Democrats and Independents (France), Free Democratic Party (Germany), Momentum Movement (Hungary), Soldiers of Destiny (Ireland), Liberals' Movement (Lithuania), Democratic Party (Luxembourg), Democrats 66 (Netherlands), People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Netherlands), Save Romania Union (Romania), Progressive Slovakia (Slovakia), Citizens (Spain), Centre Party (Sweden) and Liberals (Sweden). For the 10th European Parliament, manifestos included most of the above, with the exception of: Yes 2011 (Czechia), Momentum Movement (Hungary), Save Romania Union (Romania) and Citizens (Spain). New additions include the Estonian Centre Party (Estonia), For Latvia's Development (Latvia), the Freedom Party (Lithuania), the Liberal Initiative (Portugal) and the Union of Democrats and Independents (France).

The following member party manifestos were available for EGP in the 9th European Parliament include: The Greens – The Green Alternative (Austria), Green (Belgium), Green Left (Denmark), Green League (Finland), The Ecologists – Europe Ecology The Greens (France), Alliance 90/The Greens (Germany), Irish Green Party (Ireland), The Greens (Luxembourg), Green Left (Netherlands), and Green Party (Sweden). For the 10th European Parliament manifestos included: The Greens – The Green Alternative (Austria), ECOLO (Belgium), Green (Belgium), Green Left (Denmark), Green League (Finland), The Ecologists – Europe Ecology The Greens (France), Alliance 90/The Greens (Germany), Green Europe (Italy), The Progressives (Latvia), Union of Democrats "For Lithuania" (Lithuania), The Greens (Luxembourg), Green Left (Netherlands) and Green Party (Sweden).

Several limitations emerged during the data collection process. In some instances, member parties issued joint manifestos in coalitions with parties that were not affiliated with the same Europarty. These coalition manifestos were included in the analysis under the assumption that

the participating member parties endorsed the positions in them. However, such documents may reflect compromises between coalition members, or some issues may not be addressed at all due to disagreements within the coalition.

An additional limitation was encountered in the case of Belgium, where regional, federal, and European Parliament elections are held on the same day. As a result, political parties often issue a single, comprehensive manifesto addressing all three levels of governance. This presents a limitation as parties attempt to cover a broad set of policy areas relevant to different levels, leading to the exclusion of some topics due to space limitations or other considerations.

3.3. Qualitative Content Analysis

Broadly defined, content analysis constitutes a research method that allows for the systematic and reliable drawing of inferences from texts in relation to the contexts in which they are produced and used (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). For researchers researching political information, quantitative indicators may be insensitive and shallow, and therefore, require making qualitative interpretations of textual data in a qualitative way (Krippendorff, 2004). This is why this thesis adopts qualitative content analysis as the primary methodological approach, as it allows for a systematic description of meanings within qualitative data in manifestos (Schreier, 2012).

The choice to use this method, rather than other qualitative approaches such as framing or discourse analysis, is based on practical and conceptual considerations. Framing and discourse analysis, while valuable for unpacking deeper ideological or rhetorical nuances, require in-depth contextual knowledge of the cultural and political settings in which texts are produced. Given the scope of the study, which includes multiple Europarties and a large number of member parties from various jurisdictions, using such context-dependent methods would increase the risk of subjective misinterpretation and undermine the reliability of comparative findings.

In contrast, qualitative content analysis allows for a more structured and transparent coding process based on pre-defined categories that are consistently applied across all cases. This is especially important when analyzing large amounts of data, such as party manifestos from multiple election cycles. While it does not consider implicit discursive strategies like discourse analysis, it does keep the analysis focused on the content of texts. Moreover, this method provides enough depth to capture not only what parties say about EU enlargement, but also

how they present their positions on key dimensions such as timing, geography, institutional reforms, and security, all while ensuring analytical validity.

While qualitative content analysis is a systematic method, it is also highly flexible, allowing for the combination of a deductive coding scheme and inductive coding. This ensures that the manifestos are thoroughly analyzed both according to predefined categories and for emerging concepts within the texts not anticipated in the initial coding scheme. This approach allows for more grounded empirical interpretation. Furthermore, this method helps reduce large amounts of rich qualitative data into a more manageable format through segmentation and categorization.

To ensure comparability and consistency across languages, all manifestos not originally available in English were translated using DeepL Translator. DeepL was selected due to its recognized reliability and prior use in political science research, such as in the translation of manifesto texts by the Manifesto Project Corpus, which performed extensive validation checks of the tool translation quality (Ivanusch & Regel, 2024). While most languages were supported, the absence of Croatian translation functionality led to the exclusion of manifestos in that language to ensure consistency in translation quality. The translation process followed the guidelines outlined in the Manifesto Corpus Translation Handbook (Ivanusch & Regel, 2024).

Following data preparation, the author used Google Sheets to manage both segmentation and coding. While software like NVivo was considered, Google Sheets offered greater flexibility for the segment-based, meaning-focused, and comparative nature of this study. Metadata columns included party name, Europarty affiliation, country, year (2019 or 2024), and corresponding manifesto segments.

The coding process began with the development of a concept-driven coding framework derived from the research questions (Schreier, 2012). The next step involved reading each party manifesto to segment the textual material. In line with Krippendorff (2004, p. 102), the segmentation of each manifesto was based on units of text that were “meaningful” for the analysis, specifically sentences, paragraphs or sections that were talking about enlargement. However, to preserve context, titles and 2-3 surrounding sentences were included where appropriate. Instead of breaking down the manifestos line by line, all relevant statements were grouped into single rows to reflect each party’s overall stance.

During this process, the initial coding framework was tested to assess its applicability (Schreier, 2012). As coding progressed, additional relevant categories emerged. These themes were integrated through a data-driven, inductive approach to the coding framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The framework was also revised to eliminate repetitive codes and avoid excessive coding levels that could overcomplicate the coding process without adding analytical value. The code application approach was guided by Schreier's (2012) a principle that each segment can be coded multiple times, as long as each assigned code corresponds to a distinct category of the coding framework. While human hand coding requires time and therefore is resource-intensive, it is also more appropriate to capture nuances that automated coding might miss (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). The specific coding rules with definitions and coverage of each individual code are presented in Appendix 1: Coding Rules. This ensured that the codes were applied in a consistent manner in line with pre-defined criteria.

First, the overall stance on EU enlargement was coded as a mutually exclusive nominal variable with four possible values: *support*, *opposition*, *unclear* and *not mentioned*. A key rule applied throughout the analysis is that if a manifesto does not explicitly mention EU enlargement, it is coded as "*not mentioned*" under the dimension of overall stance. Such cases are included in the overall stance results to capture the pattern of silence, but they are excluded from further analysis under the other coding categories. This approach ensures that deeper dimensions, such as geographical focus or internal reforms, are only analyzed when enlargement is addressed by the party.

Temporal scope was treated as a mutually exclusive variable, capturing whether the party supported a *gradual* or *immediate* approach to enlargement. The segment was coded as *not mentioned* if no temporal framing was present.

Next, non-mutually exclusive binary variables were used to capture specific content mentions. For geographical focus, segments were coded to indicate whether they referenced the *Eastern Partnership*, *Western Balkans*, or *Turkey* (1 = mentioned, 0 = not mentioned). In addition, the analysis included three types of anticipated EU-level reforms in response to enlargement, coded as separate binary variables: *financial adjustments*, *policy adjustments*, and *institutional adjustments* (1 = mentioned, 0 = not mentioned).

Finally, the presence of security and geopolitical justification was coded as a binary variable (1 = present, 0 = not mentioned). This captures whether enlargement was explicitly justified in

the context of security concerns, stability or strategic geopolitical considerations, which is a particularly relevant dimension following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. For a more comprehensive overview of the Coding framework, see Appendix 1: Coding Rules.

A second round of coding was performed on a separate sheet after a week, aiming to enhance coder reliability. In this phase, the author independently re-coded all the segments using the same coding framework for the second time. This step served to identify potential uncertainties within the framework and contributed to greater consistency and reliability in the coding process. A third and final round of coding was carried out prior to the final analysis to ensure the accuracy and consistency of data interpretation. As a result, the author created a coded dataset with applicable codes ready for the analysis (see Table 5). Finally, the coded data were sorted, filtered, and compared to identify patterns of coherence between Europarties and their member parties across the two election years.

Table 5. Coding Example

Europarty	Country	Member Party	Year	Segment	Overall stance	Temporal Scope	EP	WB	TR	Financial reforms	Policy reforms	Institutional reforms	Security and Geopolitical Justification
PES	Malta	Partit Laburista <i>Labour Party</i>	2024	We also envision a future-proof European Union, potentially welcoming new members , that responds effectively to the needs of its citizens. [...] In the wake of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the debate on the European Union enlargement is being intensely addressed. We believe the European Union should continue its discussions with potential member states, focusing on each country’s merits and the quality of their reforms.	Support	Gradual	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ALDE	Ireland	Fianna Fail <i>Soldiers of Destiny</i>	2024	Fianna Fáil supports a European future for the people of Ukraine and views EU membership as a long-term security guarantee. We actively lobbied for and support the decision to open accession negotiations.	Support	Gradual	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
EGP	Finland	Vihreät - De Gröna <i>Green League</i>	2019	EU as a Peace Project: Common Foreign And Peace Policy [...] FOCUS WESTERN BALKANS: Europe has a special interest and responsibility for our neighbouring countries, both to the east and to the south. We are working to facilitate the accession of the Western Balkan countries on the basis of European values.	Support	Gradual	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

When it comes to limitations of this approach, although qualitative research is inherently interpretive, influenced by researchers’ backgrounds, contexts and prior understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018), qualitative content analysis places a large emphasis on systematic consistency, aspects closely related to quantitative notions of objectivity and reliability (Schreier, 2012). This is achieved through clear and precise definitions and coding rules for all categories and subcategories within the coding framework, ensuring that material is classified according to explicitly defined criteria and reducing ambiguity and the potential for subjective

interpretation (Schreier, 2012). Furthermore, the use of decision rules to handle any potential overlaps and uncertainties between categories helps further enhance the consistency of the coding process. Lastly, performing coding three times allows for assessing coder agreement over time with specific rules in place, allowing for this process to be replicable. Therefore, while acknowledging the interpretive nature of qualitative research, qualitative content analysis integrates systematic procedures and consistency checks to enhance the shared understanding of the findings, aiming to move beyond individual interpretations (Schreier, 2012).

3.4. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the primary limitations concerns data availability, which influenced the final case selection. The initial research design aimed to include the five largest Europarties in the European Parliament, namely, the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). This would ensure that a broad range of the ideological spectrum would be assessed. However, due to the unavailability of a significant share of 2024 manifestos for the EPP's member parties and the lack of a formal ECR Europarty manifesto for 2019, both parties were excluded from the final sample. As a result, the analysis focuses on PES, ALDE, and EGP, all of which fall towards the liberal, centrist and progressive end of the political spectrum. This limitation narrows the ideological range of the study and means that parties from the conservative, right-wing, or Eurosceptic segments, such as EPP and ECR, are not represented. Had these parties been included, it is likely that greater divergence on the topic of EU enlargement would have emerged, particularly in the form of more critical or sceptical positions. However, since the objective of this thesis is not to map the entire spectrum of opinions on enlargement, but rather to assess coherence within and across party levels. From this perspective, the cases selected still offer valuable insight into patterns of alignment and divergence, particularly within more pro-European political families. Nonetheless, the absence of Eurosceptic or conservative parties should be taken into account when interpreting the generalizability of the findings.

Another key limitation is that the author was the sole coder. While this raises concerns about subjectivity, this was mitigated through a three-stage coding process conducted at different points in time, as recommended by Schreier (2012), to ensure internal consistency and reliability.

The inclusion of coalition manifestos also introduces limitations. In some cases, member parties issued joint manifestos with non-affiliated parties. While these were included under the assumption that the member parties endorsed their content, such documents may reflect compromises or exclude contentious topics, such as enlargement, altogether.

A further limitation is the unavailability of the Croatian language in DeepL Translator, which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant data. Given that the exclusion of Croatian manifestos represents a small fraction of the total dataset and considering that manifesto availability issues were present across multiple cases, this absence is unlikely to have a big impact on the overall findings.

Additionally, while this research spans a wide geographical scope, it does not engage deeply with the specific political or cultural contexts of each member state. While this could be seen as a limitation, it also enhances the comparability of party positions by focusing strictly on the content of the manifestos themselves, thus reducing contextual bias.

Lastly, it is important to note that manifestos represent what parties choose to communicate publicly during electoral campaigns. They may not necessarily reflect the full extent of a party's internal discussions, strategic calculations, or actual behavior in policymaking. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as an analysis of parties' communicated positions, rather than definitive indicators of their internal preferences or actions.

4. Analysis of Party Manifestos

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the qualitative content analysis conducted on 115 party manifestos of three Europarties (PES, ALDE and EGP) and their member parties. It examines vertical coherence, horizontal coherence and changes in positions and coherence over time. The findings are organized by Europarty and electoral cycle, moving from descriptive discussions of party positions toward more analytical reflections on coherence patterns across levels and over time. The analysis looks at five key categories related to the enlargement, specifically, overall stance on enlargement, temporal scope, geographical focus, internal reforms and security and geopolitical justifications.

The following sections provide a detailed analysis of each Europarty, starting with PES in the 2019 European Parliament elections, followed by ALDE and EGP. For each electoral cycle, the analysis is divided into two parts: first, a Europarty-level analysis of manifestos and second, a member party-level analysis and the comparison of the two levels. This structure allows for a reflection on vertical and horizontal coherence between the two European Parliament elections. This chapter concludes with comparisons across parties and wider reflections on changes in coherence and positions over time.

4.1. Party of European Socialists (PES)

4.1.1. Party positions in 2019

Europarty

The 2019 manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES) does not include any explicit discussions or references to EU enlargement. Instead, the manifesto focuses on topics such as welfare, social security, labour rights, environment and sustainability, equal rights, a common European defence policy and migration. While the document includes general statements about strengthening a united Europe, supporting democracy abroad and presenting the EU as a “*beacon of democracy, peace and stability*”, it does not address the topic of enlargement or mention any specific countries such as those in the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), or Turkey (Party of European Socialists, 2019). Based on the coding rules applied in this thesis, documents that do not address enlargement are coded as “*not mentioned*” and are excluded from further coding. Accordingly, no additional codes were assigned to the PES 2019 manifesto.

The interpretations offered below are not exhaustive and do not claim to establish causality. The goal is to highlight factors that may have contributed to the absence of enlargement content. Specifically, the lack of references to enlargement may be linked to several factors. First, the 2019 manifesto of the Party of European Socialists is concise, consisting of only 3.5 pages, which may have constrained the Europarty's ability to address broader policy issues at the time. Second, and perhaps more importantly for this thesis, the lack of reference could also reflect internal divisions within the Europarty regarding the topic of EU enlargement. Given the differing positions among member parties, which will be presented below, it is possible that the Europarty chose to avoid the topic altogether to preserve vertical coherence. Lastly, the lack of reference may indicate that enlargement was not a prominent topic for the PES at the time. Regardless of the reason, the lack of discussion of the EU enlargement issue prevents the assessment of vertical coherence on categories other than the overall stance in 2019.

Member Parties

The analysis of 20 PES member parties' manifestos prepared for the 2019 European Parliament elections reveals a considerable variation in engagement with the topic of EU enlargement. More than half (11 out of 20, or 55%) did not discuss enlargement at all in their manifestos, while eight parties (40%) expressed support for enlargement. These supportive parties included statements such as "*we support the continuation of one of the EU's most successful policies - enlargement of the European Union*" (Estonian Social Democratic Party, 2019), or "*we will continue to support the enlargement of the European Union*" (Slovenian Social Democrats, 2019). While some parties had a more positive outlook on the topic, others adopted a more cautious position. For example, the Dutch Labour Party advocated for "*good relations with neighboring countries and cautious enlargement*", indicating conditional support (Dutch Labour Party, 2019). Geographically, support for enlargement among European Socialists was found among parties from Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Spain. Only one party (5%), the Socialist Party of Belgium, adopted a stance that was classified as *unclear*. Although the party pointed to the importance of upholding European values as pre-conditions for accession, like other parties taking a supportive stance, the statement lacked an explicit position supporting or opposing enlargement. However, none of the parties explicitly opposed enlargement.

While the analysis does not allow for definitive conclusions, these differences can be caused by several factors. As discussed in the Europarty-level analysis, some parties may not have

perceived enlargement as an important issue during the 2019 campaign, especially in light of competing priorities such as climate change and migration within the EU. Others may have strategically avoided the topic if it would not attract more votes, or if public opinion on enlargement was divided. In case of coalitions (e.g., France), parties may have deliberately excluded enlargement to maintain coherence within alliances. Additionally, some parties may have viewed enlargement as not an salient or important issue, given the perception at the time that the process had stalled (Karjalainen, 2023). Thus, this should not be understood as indifference or opposition but rather as a reflection of strategic silence, competing agenda priorities, or limited political relevance of the issue in 2019. In 2019, PES Europarty did not include a position on enlargement in its manifesto, similarly to the majority of its member parties (55%). Accordingly, since the prevailing position among member parties and the PES Europarty position align, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent*. In contrast, with 55% of member parties silent, 40% supportive, and 5% unclear, horizontal coherence within PES in 2019 is *minimal*. While opposition was absent and there is a clear prevailing position, overall distribution of positions within the Europarty is fragmented.

As per the coding rules, parties that did not mention enlargement were excluded from further analysis, and only parties with supportive, opposing, or unclear positions were considered for the remaining categories. When looking at the positions from a temporal perspective, the results show a lack of timeframe precision. Out of the nine parties that addressed the enlargement issue, only two parties (22.2%), the Social Democratic Party of Finland and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, supported a gradual approach, referring to the need for candidate countries to meet the membership criteria. However, the remaining seven parties (77.8%) made no reference to the pace or timeline of the enlargement process. This suggests that, even among parties that discussed enlargement, discussions were abstract, with little connection to concrete timelines. Therefore, horizontal coherence among member parties can be assessed as *moderately coherent*, based on the tendency to avoid specifying a concrete timeline. However, as mentioned earlier, since the Europarty does not mention enlargement in its manifesto, vertical coherence cannot be assessed for this category.

Moving to the geographical scope of EU enlargement, PES member parties in 2019 focused primarily on the Western Balkans. This region was mentioned by seven out of the nine parties (77.8%) that addressed enlargement, making it the most frequently discussed region in this context. This suggests that member parties are *moderately coherent* in viewing Western

Balkans as one of the geographical foci of this policy. This was not the case, however, for Turkey and the Eastern Partnership, which are mentioned by four parties (44.4%) and one party (11.1%), respectively. This pattern indicates that, in 2019, PES member parties perceived the Western Balkans more actively in the context of enlargement. All four mentions of Turkey, address the suspension of accession negotiations with the country due to misalignment with European values. Hence, given that five out of nine member parties (55.6%) did not mention Turkey in their manifestos, this is assessed as *minimally coherent* in leaving the topic of Turkey unaddressed. The only member party of PES that addressed Eastern Partnership explicitly was the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party which stated: “*we support the active efforts of the Western Balkan countries to achieve EU membership, and we hope that this perspective will remain open to the Eastern Partnership countries*” (Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, 2019). It should also be noted that, while this statement is clearly referring to the Eastern Partnership region, the supportive position is directed towards the future. With this, overall, member parties are *coherent* in not mentioning Eastern Partnership.

A further area of interest in the analysis concerns the extent to which PES member parties linked enlargement to anticipated internal reforms within the EU. In 2019, only two of the nine manifestos (22.2%) mentioned the need for institutional reforms in the context of enlargement, the German Socialist Party stated that “*The EU must ensure its ability to act through internal reforms*” (Social Democratic Party of Germany, 2019) and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party specified that “*Future enlargements must be preceded by institutional and political deepening, specifically through the elimination of unanimity, to prevent an EU of 30 or more states from becoming paralysed*” (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, 2019). This results in a *moderately coherent* (77.8%) horizontal dimension on institutional reforms not being a subject of discussion. Furthermore, no party explicitly addressed financial or policy reforms in this context. This suggests that in 2019, PES member parties detached enlargement from the structural preparedness of the Union itself, resulting in a *coherence* of not discussing the matter with reform considerations. Rather than putting forward a vision of what EU enlargement would require in practice, the issue was addressed in abstract terms.

Finally, when it comes to security and geopolitical justification of enlargement, six of the nine parties (66.7%) that discussed enlargement referred to such considerations. For example, the Social Bulgarian Socialist Party highlighted the importance of “*continuing the process of integration of the Western Balkan countries in order to permanently guarantee peace, stability*

and prosperity throughout Europe” (Bulgarian Socialist Party, 2019), whereas the Social Democratic Party of Finland stated that *“the prospect of EU membership and enlargement promotes peace and stability in the neighbouring regions”* (Social Democratic Party of Finland, 2019). This suggests that even before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a large portion of PES member parties viewed enlargement as a strategic tool for promoting security. As per the assessment scale, this category is evaluated as *moderately coherent*.

In conclusion, vertical coherence could only be assessed for the category of overall stance, reflecting the alignment between the PES Europarty and its member parties. Since the Europarty adopted the prevailing position of its member parties, this category was classified as *vertically coherent*. In contrast, horizontal coherence among member parties varied across categories. Member parties were *coherent* in their exclusion of the Eastern Partnership within the geographical focus category, as well as in not addressing financial or policy reforms. *Moderate coherence* was observed in the exclusion of institutional reforms (mentioned by only two out of nine parties), limited mentions of Turkey and in the discussion of enlargement in the context of security and geopolitical justification (addressed by six out of nine parties). The temporal scope of enlargement and focus on the Western Balkans similarly reflected *moderate coherence*, due to general alignment with no significant opposition. The lowest level of alignment or *minimal coherence* was observed in the overall stance category, where member party positions were fragmented across several options. This indicates that member parties were least coherent in their overall stance on enlargement. However, when they did address the topic, their positions on specific dimensions, such as geographical focus, timing, institutional reform, or security justification, tended to show moderate to coherent alignment and engage with these categories in coherent way.

4.1.2. Party Positions in 2024

Europarty

The 2024 manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES) shows a clear change compared to 2019, presenting an explicit discussion of enlargement. The document describes enlargement as a historical success and supports further expansion of the EU, provided that candidate countries meet all accession criteria. Furthermore, the Europarty welcomes the start of EU membership negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina and supports the European aspirations of Georgia. The manifesto also acknowledges the stalled status of

Turkey's accession process, linking this to the actions of the Turkish government. With this, the manifesto engages with all coding categories related to geographical scope, Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership countries and Turkey. In terms of temporal scope, the Europarty advocates for a gradual approach and highlights that enlargement must be tied to candidate countries meeting accession criteria. Additionally, it links enlargement to internal reform considerations, noting that: “[E]nlargement must go hand in hand with a serious assessment of what reforms of the EU architecture are needed” (Party of European Socialists, 2024). However, no explicit references are made to financial or policy reforms. Lastly, the party situates enlargement within a broader security and geopolitical context, as demonstrated by the enlargement discussion being placed under the chapter “*Securing Europe’s Place in the World*”.

While the 2019 manifesto made no explicit mention of enlargement, the 2024 manifesto includes enlargement as one of the policy areas. This change may be related to broader changes in attitudes towards enlargement policy within the EU following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which reshaped the geopolitical priorities of the EU (Karjalainen, 2023). It may also reflect a higher degree of coherence within PES member parties, allowing the Europarty to include a clearer and more confident position in its manifesto. Furthermore, the change may simply be attributed to the longer length of the 2024 manifesto, which, at 10 pages, provided more space to address enlargement than the 2019 manifesto, which was only 3.5 pages.

Member Parties

The analysis of 21 member parties affiliated with the PES in the 2024 European Parliament shows a significantly higher level of engagement with the topic of EU enlargement compared to 2019. None of the parties explicitly opposed enlargement, and only one party, the Social Democratic Party “Saskaņa” from Latvia, accounting for 4.8% of the 21 member parties, did not mention enlargement at all. This trend marks a sharp decline in the silent approach compared to 55% in 2019. Among the remaining parties, a clear majority (20 out of 21, or 95.2%) expressed support for enlargement, showing a significant increase from 40% in 2019 with statements such as “[t]he EU should be open to new members” (Social Democratic Party of Finland, 2024), or “[w]e welcome any European country that wishes to join our common project of peace, prosperity and modernisation in the region” (Socialist Workers’ Party of Luxembourg, 2024). Additionally, whereas the Socialist Party of Belgium had an *unclear* stance in 2019, in 2024, it included an entire section on “*Strategy for the enlargement and*

deepening of the European Union” explicitly stating that “[...] the SP is in favour of enlargement and the immense potential it represents” (Socialist Party of Belgium, 2024). Taken together, these changes suggest a strong increase in horizontal coherence among PES member parties in 2024 compared to 2019, while in 2019 it was already evaluated as *coherent*, the degree of vertical coherence is significantly higher in 2024. Unlike in 2019, when PES member parties were split between silence and support, by 2024, most had placed support for enlargement on their electoral agendas. Based on the scale, horizontal coherence is assessed as *coherent*.

In terms of temporal scope, the findings show a higher level of specificity compared to 2019. Among the 20 parties discussing the enlargement, 18 parties (90%) supported a gradual approach, putting emphasis on candidate countries meeting accession criteria before joining the EU. Examples of such statements include: “[t]he accession process generally takes several years” (Socialist Party of Belgium, 2024) and “[w]e believe the European Union should continue its discussions with potential member states, focusing on each country’s merits and the quality of their reforms” (Labour Party of Malta, 2024). Two parties (10%), the Social Democrats of Slovenia and the Social Democratic Party of Austria, refrained from specifying a temporal scope. Despite this minor deviation, the overall trend of horizontal coherence points to a *coherent* stance between member parties viewing enlargement as a conditional and gradual process, same as vertical coherence as the Europarty views enlargement in step-by-step way.

When it comes to geographical scope, the Western Balkans continued to be a key focus for PES member parties in 2024, mentioned by 12 out of 20 supportive parties (60%). This marks a decrease compared to 2019, when 77.8% of those that discussed enlargement referred to the Western Balkans. By contrast, references to the Eastern Partnership countries increased substantially: 14 out of 20 parties (70%) mentioned them in 2024, compared to just 11.1% in 2019. Turkey was mentioned by three parties (15%) in the context of democratic backsliding and conditionality for any further accession progress, compared to 44.4% in 2019. This pattern suggests member parties are *horizontally coherent* in excluding Turkey from discussions on EU enlargement, this is also echoed at the Europarty level resulting in *vertical coherence*. On the other hand, mentions of Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership among member parties are *moderately coherent* on horizontal dimension and *coherent* on vertical. Overall, while the Western Balkans remained an important geographical focus, the data shows a clear shift: the

Eastern Partnership countries became a more prominent focus in PES member party manifestos between 2019 and 2024.

The link between enlargement and internal reforms within the EU also became more prominent. Among the 20 manifestos that discussed enlargement, 13 (65%) highlighted the need for institutional reforms ensuring the EU remains functional even in an enlarged format, which is an increase from only 22.2% (two of the nine parties) in 2019. Such positions included statements such as “*enlargement must go hand in hand with a major reform of the EU’s architecture in order to democratise and streamline it*” (New Left Poland, 2024) and “*future enlargement must go hand in hand and in parallel with the reforms needed in the Union’s architecture and decision-making to ensure that the EU*” (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, 2024). Mentions of financial reforms were found in 3 parties (15%) same as policy reform references (15%), for instance, “[w]e want a Europe that has the courage to adapt the European Union budget to the new challenges of a larger Europe, in particular with regard to support for agricultural policy and cohesion policy” (Democratic Party, 2024). These discussions remained comparatively limited, however higher than no mentions of these categories in 2019. This indicates that while parties are increasingly aware of structural challenges the enlargement might pose, their emphasis remains concentrated on institutional issues such as decision-making efficiency. As a result, on vertical dimension all EU reform categories, including financial, institutional and policy are *coherent* between member parties and Europarty. On horizontal dimension, member parties are *moderately coherent* on mentioning institutional reforms, whereas *coherent* on not discussing policy and financial reforms. Overall, the growing mentions of reform-related discussions reflects that PES parties are increasingly aware of the practical implications future enlargements may entail for the EU’s architecture.

Finally, security and geopolitical justifications were mentioned by 17 out of 20 parties (85%) linking enlargement to the promotion of regional stability and a guarantee for European security. For instance, the French Socialist Party stated: “[i]t is also a strategic investment in our security, a geopolitical victory against powers that interfere these territories and run a high risk of political, social and economic upheaval.” (Parti Socialiste & Place Publique, 2024). Similarly, the Social Democratic Party of Germany highlighted that “[t]he EU’s enlargement policy was and is a driving force for peace” (Social Democratic Party of Germany, 2024). This suggests a change in emphasis compared to 2019, when security considerations

were addressed by 66.7% of member parties. While security considerations were already present in previous discussions, they have now become a more frequent justification for supporting enlargement. Accordingly, horizontal coherence in this category is assessed as *coherent*, given the strong alignment among member parties. The vertical dimension is evaluated as *coherent* as well, since the Europarty's position reflects the prevailing view expressed by its member parties.

All things considered, on a vertical dimension, PES was *coherent* across all categories, as the Europarty adopted the prevailing positions of its member parties. On the horizontal dimension, however, coherence degrees varied across categories. Member parties were *coherent* on supporting enlargement and viewing it as a gradual process, as well as excluding Turkey from discussions on enlargement. Additionally, member parties were *coherent* on excluding financial and policy reform discussion from their manifestos. Security and geopolitical justification for enlargement was echoed coherently among member parties. *Moderate coherence* was observed in references to the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and institutional reforms.

4.2. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)

4.2.1. Party positions in 2019

Europarty

In contrast to PES, the ALDE Europarty manifesto addressed the issue of EU enlargement already in 2019. In the section titled “*Europe that leads on the global stage*”, the party states: “*We support [...] the future enlargement perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans and its common European neighbourhood, once these countries meet the accession criteria*” (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, 2018). This statement is part of a manifesto consisting of 11.5 pages and shows a supportive stance towards enlargement. However, this support is conditional on the fulfilment of accession criteria, making the process gradual.

The geographical scope includes the Western Balkans and the broader “*common European neighbourhood*”, although the latter is not explicitly defined and does not clearly refer to the Eastern Partnership or Turkey. In addition, the manifesto frames enlargement as a stabilizing force for the region, linking the policy to broader geopolitical and security considerations.

While the references are concise, they reflect a clear political commitment to enlargement. No references are made to any types of EU internal reforms.

This shows that, unlike PES, the ALDE Europarty took a clear stance on enlargement in 2019, and a few factors may have contributed to this decision. While its discussion is limited to a couple of sentences, the inclusion of enlargement among the issues reflects a higher degree of prioritization than PES in 2019. Furthermore, the manifesto's length (11.5 pages) may have allowed more space to address a broader range of external policy issues, including enlargement. Finally, as will be shown in the member party analysis, ALDE appears to have experienced a higher level of alignment among its members regarding enlargement, possibly enabling the Europarty to adopt a common position without risking internal fragmentation.

Member Parties

Following the analysis of 22 ALDE member party manifestos prepared for the 2019 European Parliament elections, 8 parties (36.4%) did not mention enlargement at all. Among those who addressed the topic, 11 parties (50%) expressed a supportive stance, two parties (9.1%), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) from the Netherlands and the Swedish Centre Party, referred to enlargement but adopted an unclear position without explicitly endorsing or opposing accession. For instance, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy from the Netherlands stated: "*Cooperation with neighbouring countries is possible in several ways. Accession of new countries to the EU is not an end in itself*" (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, 2019). One party (4.5%), the Democratic Party of Luxembourg, expressed opposition to further enlargement, stating: "*So long as respect for our fundamental values cannot be guaranteed, the DP will oppose any enlargement of the Union*" (Democratic Party, 2019). This distribution suggests a fragmented approach towards enlargement within ALDE member parties in 2019. While the majority of those who engaged with the issue supported enlargement this number did not reach the threshold even for minimal coherence, a substantial number either remained silent or expressed unclear or opposing views. As a result, horizontal coherence is assessed as *incoherent*. However, since the Europarty adopted the prevailing stance (support for enlargement) vertical coherence is classified as *coherent*.

In terms of the temporal scope of enlargement, among the 14 ALDE member parties that addressed the issue in their 2019 manifestos, nine parties (64.3%) supported a gradual approach, linking enlargement to the fulfilment of accession criteria. For example, the Belgian

Reformist Movement party stated that: “*This process [enlargement] will take a long time before these countries meet the obligations imposed by the European Union and can assume all their responsibilities as member countries*” (Reformist Movement, 2019). Five parties (35.7%) did not specify any temporal framework. This distribution suggests that, from a vertical dimension, the positions of the Europarty and member parties are *coherent*, as the Europarty’s position aligns with the prevailing member party position. As for the horizontal dimension, this is assessed as *moderately coherent*.

Regarding geographical focus, the analysis reveals a relatively uneven distribution of attention. Among the 14 parties that discussed enlargement, eight parties (57.1%) referred to the Western Balkans and the same number (57.1%) mentioned Turkey. By contrast, only five parties (35.7%) mentioned the Eastern Partnership countries. These figures suggest that while the Western Balkans and Turkey were relatively important for ALDE member parties, the Eastern Partnership region received less attention in 2019. In terms of vertical coherence, the ALDE Europarty endorsed enlargement toward the Western Balkans, aligning with the prevailing position among its member parties. Therefore, this category is assessed as *coherent*. However, the Europarty did not mention Turkey, even though the prevailing position among member parties was to address it, resulting in vertical *incoherence*. As for the Eastern Partnership, the Europarty’s exclusion of the topic aligns with the majority of its member parties and is thus considered *coherent*. With regard to horizontal coherence, member parties are assessed as *minimally coherent* in their references to both the Western Balkans and Turkey, given the fragmentation of positions. In contrast, they demonstrate *moderate coherence* on the Eastern Partnership, as the prevailing pattern was to exclude the region from their manifestos.

With regards to internal EU reforms, no party explicitly linked enlargement to financial or policy reforms. Among the 14 parties that discussed enlargement, only one party (7.1%), the German Free Democratic Party mentioned the need for institutional reforms “*the EU must adapt its structures and strengthen its mechanisms for safeguarding the rule of law in the member states in order to become receptive again*” (Free Democratic Party, 2019). This low level of engagement suggests that internal reform considerations are not taken into account during the enlargement discussions among ALDE member parties in 2019. Accordingly, both vertical coherence and horizontal coherence are assessed as *coherent*, as the Europarty and the prevailing position among member parties did not address institutional, financial, or policy reforms in this context.

Finally, security and geopolitical justifications were included in seven member party manifestos (50%) with statements such as “*The EU’s enlargement policy is the EU’s policy to ensure stability and prosperity across the European continent*” (Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania, 2019). The remaining seven parties (50%) did not mention security-related arguments. This suggests that while geopolitical considerations were important for half of the ALDE parties, the issue was not a dominant theme across the ALDE member parties in 2019. The prevailing position among member parties must align with the Europarty’s stance, in order for vertical coherence to be established. However, since the parties are evenly split, there is no prevailing position. Although the Europarty includes a security justification for enlargement, the absence of a dominant pattern among member parties results in vertical *incoherence*. Similarly, horizontal coherence is also assessed as *incoherent*, given the fragmentation among member parties.

Taken together, the ALDE Europarty aligned with the prevailing position among its member parties on several key categories: overall stance, temporal scope, emphasis on the Western Balkans, exclusion of the Eastern Partnership, and the exclusion of all three types of EU internal reforms. Thus, in these categories vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent*. Nonetheless, there are two categories where vertical *incoherence* emerges: the Europarty did not mention Turkey and security and geopolitical justifications for enlargement was not a prevailing position among member parties. Coherence levels differed between categories on the horizontal dimension. Member parties were most *coherent* in excluding EU internal reforms, where the absence of engagement constituted a shared position. The absence of discussion about the Eastern Partnership and explicit but limited discussion of temporal scope showed *moderate coherence*. *Minimal coherence* was identified on the geographical focus on the Western Balkans and Turkey, where coherence was weakened by fragmentation in positions. Finally, horizontal *incoherence* was found in two categories, overall stance and security and geopolitical justification, where member parties were evenly split and/or did not reach necessary coherence threshold.

4.2.2. Party positions in 2024

Europarty

The 2024 manifesto of the ALDE Party shows an increase in the salience of enlargement compared to 2019. A dedicated section titled “*ALDE Party fights for: Enlargement as a tool*

for reform and security” accounts for one page out of a 26-page document, under the broader focus of *“Keep Europe free, safe and democratic”*. In this section, the Europarty reaffirms its commitment to *“an open-door policy for Europarty countries that fulfil the Copenhagen criteria”*, thereby indicating a supportive stance towards enlargement similar to 2019. In terms of temporal scope, the manifesto introduces a more concrete timeline compared to 2019, stating: *“our ambition is to ensure that the countries of the Western Balkans, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine are ready to meet all accession criteria by 2029”* (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, 2024). This temporal framing points to a gradual but a specific timeline for enlargement.

The geographical scope has also expanded and unlike the 2019 manifesto, which explicitly mentioned only the Western Balkans, the 2024 document includes the Eastern Partnership countries (Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine). However, Turkey, is not part of the section again. The manifesto introduces clear references to internal reforms within the EU, particularly *“Reform the EU decision-making procedure to ensure efficiency also with a larger number of Member States and diverging views. Reform the EU budget so it is ready to absorb financial consequences of enlargement”* (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, 2024). This demonstrates that Europarty recognizes institutional and financial challenges associated with future enlargement. Lastly, the manifesto refers to security and geopolitical justifications, presenting enlargement as a necessary response to regional instability and external threats from Russia, China, and other disruptive actors. Taken together, these factors imply that by 2024, the ALDE Europarty had not only kept but also strengthened its commitment to enlargement.

Member Parties

The analysis of 23 ALDE member party manifestos issued for the 2024 European Parliament elections reveals a high degree of coherence on the topic of EU enlargement. Out of 23 parties, 22 (95.7%) expressed support for enlargement, while only one party (4.3%), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) from France, did not mention the issue at all. Both horizontal and vertical dimensions, can be assessed as *coherent*. Compared to 2019, when only 63.6% of parties discussed enlargement and only 50% took a supportive stance, this represents a notable increase in engagement and alignment.

In terms of temporal scope, 18 out of the 22 member parties (81.8%) that discuss enlargement described enlargement as a gradual, criteria-based process. Two parties (9.1%), the Lithuanian

Freedom Party and the Swedish Centre Party advocated for the immediate accession of Ukraine, stating, respectively: “*We are in favour of Ukraine's and Moldova's early accession to the European Union*” (Freedom Party, 2024) and “*Centre party wants Ukraine to join the EU as soon as possible*” (Swedish Centre Party, 2024). Two remaining two parties (9.1%), the Bulgarian Movement for Rights and Freedoms and the Latvian “For Latvia’s Development” did not specify temporal framework. Compared to 2019, when only 64.3% of those discussing enlargement viewed it as gradual, this indicates an increase in consensus around a phased approach to accession. Accordingly, both vertical and horizontal coherence are assessed as *coherent*, as the Europarty position aligns with the prevailing stance among member parties, and there is a strong level of internal agreement across parties.

Regarding geographical scope, references to the Western Balkans remained relatively stable, with 12 parties (54.5%) out of 22 parties mentioning the region, closely matching the levels observed in 2019. By contrast, references to Turkey declined to 7 parties (31.8%) from 57.1% in 2019, likely reflecting stagnation of accession negotiations. The Eastern Partnership countries were referenced by 16 parties (72.7%) doubling from 35.7% in 2019. This trend suggests increased interest in these countries, driven in part by the geopolitical consequences of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the growing salience of enlargement in this context. In terms of coherence, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent* across all three regions: the Europarty and the majority of member parties align on supporting enlargement towards the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, while both largely exclude Turkey. On the horizontal dimension, coherence varies with member parties being *minimally coherent* on the Western Balkans due to fragmented engagement, *moderately coherent* on referencing the Eastern Partnership and in excluding Turkey from their manifestos.

In the context of internal EU reforms, engagement with this increased. Financial reforms were mentioned by four parties (18.2%) out of 22 parties. For instance, the Latvian party For Latvia’s development advocated for “*changing the principles of EU budget distribution*” (For Latvia’s Development, 2024). Policy reforms were mentioned by five parties (22.7%), focusing on Common Agricultural Policy. However, what is interesting is that this issue was raised by both Finnish member parties of ALDE, the Finish Centre Party stated that “*EU enlargement will have a major impact on the common agricultural policy*” (Finnish Centre Party, 2024), while the Swedish People’s Party of Finland highlighted that “*The EU's upcoming enlargement to be considered when reforming the common agricultural policy*” (Swedish People’s Party of

Finland, 2024). Similar concerns were expressed by both Dutch member parties, with the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy warning that “Ukraine's admission to the EU gateway must accompanied by massive reforms in agricultural funding, or the budget will explode” (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, 2024) and Democrats 66 stressing that “The accession of Ukraine [...] to the European Union will have a major impact on the European Common Agricultural Policy. Agricultural policy reforms must take Ukraine's future membership into account” (Democrats 66, 2024). The Luxembourgish Democratic Party also referenced the need for Common Agricultural Policy reform. These discussions likely reflect domestic debates around the budgetary and sectoral impacts of enlargement. Institutional reforms are addressed by 11 parties (50%). This is a clear rise from 2019, when only three parties (21.4%) discussed institutional reforms, and none addressed financial or policy reforms. This reflects a growing awareness among ALDE member parties of the structural adjustments that future EU enlargement would require. In terms of coherence, vertical coherence is assessed as *incoherent* for both institutional and financial reforms, as neither issue constitutes a prevailing position among member parties, despite being addressed by the Europarty. For policy reforms, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent*, since both the Europarty and the majority of member parties excluded the topic. On the horizontal dimension, member parties are *coherent* in excluding financial reforms, *moderately coherent* on policy reforms, and *incoherent* on institutional reforms due to the lack of a clear prevailing position.

Finally, security and geopolitical justifications were cited by 17 out of 22 parties (77.3%), an increase from 50% in 2019. This confirms a tendency to justify enlargement as a strategic response to instability and external threats. Given that the ALDE Europarty also incorporated security and geopolitical arguments in its 2024 manifesto, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent*, as the prevailing position among member parties matches the Europarty's stance. On the horizontal dimension, coherence is evaluated as *moderate*, reflecting the fact that while a majority of parties engaged with security-related justifications, some parties did not reference this category.

To sum up, on the vertical dimension, ALDE was *coherent* in most categories, with the Europarty aligning with the prevailing positions of its member parties on overall support for enlargement, gradual accession, inclusion of the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, and the exclusion of Turkey and policy reforms. However, vertical coherence was not achieved in categories related to institutional and financial reforms. On the horizontal

dimension, coherence varied across categories. Member parties were *coherent* in supporting enlargement and adopting a gradual approach, as well as in excluding financial reforms. Moderate coherence was observed in excluding Turkey and in references to the Eastern Partnership and security justifications. By contrast, only minimal coherence was found in discussions of the Western Balkans. The institutional reforms category was incoherent due to the absence of a clear prevailing stance. Overall, the 2024 manifestos of ALDE member parties reflect a high level of engagement and increasing alignment on key aspects of enlargement, compared to 2019.

4.3. European Green Party (EGP)

4.3.1. Party positions in 2019

Europarty

The 2019 manifesto of the European Green Party (EGP) includes only a limited reference to EU enlargement, with one sentence addressing the topic across a 16-page document. While the manifesto primarily focuses on issues such as climate action, environmental protection, economic sustainability and social progress, it briefly addresses enlargement in the context of the “*International solidarity*” subchapter. Specifically, the manifesto states: “*Europe has a particular interest and responsibility in our neighbourhood, both in the east and in the south. We are working to make the accession possible of Western Balkan countries, based on European values*” (European Green Party, 2019). In line with the coding rules, this statement is classified as supportive of enlargement, which links enlargement to European values, also indicating a gradual temporal approach where accession is conditional on meeting normative criteria. In terms of geographical scope, the only region explicitly mentioned in the statement is the Western Balkans and no references are made to the Eastern Partnership countries or Turkey. Moreover, the manifesto does not engage with topics such as internal reforms, financial or policy adjustments, as well as broader security or geopolitical considerations in the context of enlargement. This suggests that while the EGP formally supported enlargement to the Western Balkans in 2019, it was not a central issue on the party’s electoral agenda. This may be attributed to the strong focus of the party on environmental and climate issues, which had gained particular salience in the EU in 2019 following the rise of the “*green wave*” and increasing public concern over environmental issues (Pearson & Rüdiger, 2020, p. 336). Thus,

although the EGP supported the enlargement agenda, the issue remained secondary compared to other priorities.

Member Parties

Following the analysis of the 10 manifestos of member parties of EGP in the 2019 elections, only half of them addressed the topic of EU enlargement in their manifestos. Among those that did, none expressed opposition to the policy. Instead, the parties were evenly split: five parties (50%) expressed support for enlargement, while the remaining five made no mention of the issue at all. Supportive parties included, for example, Alliance 90/The Greens from Germany, which stated it was *“in favor of a responsible enlargement policy”* (Alliance 90/The Greens, 2019), and the Greens from Luxembourg, which noted that *“the aim of European states should be to open up the prospects for EU accession”* (The Greens, 2019). This distribution suggests that enlargement was not a salient issue for many EGP member parties during the 2019 campaign. As there is no prevailing position among member parties and Europarty adopts one of the two equally represented positions, vertical coherence is assessed as *incoherent*. According to the grading scale applied in this study, horizontal coherence is likewise assessed as *incoherent*.

Looking at the temporal scope of enlargement among EGP member parties in 2019, all five parties (100%) that supported enlargement linked accession to the fulfilment of membership criteria. This demonstrates a strong consensus among supportive parties that enlargement should take place gradually and conditionally. For instance, the Dutch Green Left party stated that: *“The countries of the Western Balkans may only join if they meet all the conditions in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”* (Green Left, 2019). These findings point to both vertical and horizontal *coherence* among the supportive parties regarding the pace of enlargement.

The geographical scope of enlargement in 2019 also showed interesting patterns. Among the five EGP member parties that addressed enlargement, four parties (80%) referred to the Western Balkans, making it the most frequently mentioned region. Two parties (40%) mentioned the Eastern Partnership countries. For example, the German Alliance 90/The Greens stated: *“we continue to support the steps of the EU-associated Eastern Partnership countries in particular - i.e. Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia - towards European integration and want to keep the path to EU accession open for them.”* (Alliance 90/The

Greens, 2019). Three parties (60%) referred to Turkey, mostly in the context of democratic backsliding and the suspension of accession negotiations. The Greens from Luxembourg, for instance, noted: “*we are against the abandonment of the accession negotiations, so that we can continue supporting the democratic and pro-European forces in Turkey.*” (The Greens, 2019). This distribution suggests that, while the Western Balkans were the primary regional focus, Turkey and the Eastern Partnership countries were also part of the discussion for a considerable share of EGP member parties that engaged with the enlargement topic. In terms of vertical coherence, the emphasis on the Western Balkans aligns with the Europarty’s position and is thus assessed as *coherent*; the exclusion of the Eastern Partnership is also vertically *coherent*. However, the Europarty’s silence on Turkey, despite references from a majority of its member parties that engaged with the topic, results in vertical *incoherence*. On the horizontal dimension, member parties are *coherent* in referencing the Western Balkans, *moderately coherent* regarding Turkey, and *coherent* in giving limited attention to the Eastern Partnership.

When looking at the references to internal reforms in the context of enlargement, the manifestos show much weaker engagement with this topic. None of the parties addresses financial or policy reforms, and only one out of five parties (20%), Alliance 90/The Greens referred to institutional reform in this context, although in very general terms stating that: “*We also want the EU to take enlargement policy as an opportunity to finally address its internal functioning with determination*” (Alliance 90/The Greens, 2019). This suggests that most EGP member parties in 2019 did not look at the enlargement through the lens of structural implications. As a result, both vertical and horizontal dimension for all three categories of internal reforms: financial, policy and institutional is assessed as *coherent*, on limited to no engagement with these topics.

Finally, three out of five parties (60%) referred to enlargement within a security and geopolitical context. This indicates that a considerable share of EGP member parties perceived enlargement as a process to promote regional stability. These parties linked enlargement to peace, security and the containment of authoritarian influence. In terms of vertical coherence, this category is assessed as *incoherent*. The Europarty did not address the security and geopolitical justifications category in its manifesto, which led to a misalignment with the prevailing stance among member parties. On the horizontal dimension, coherence is evaluated as *moderate*, in line with the adopted assessment scale.

Overall, both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the 2019 EGP showed a mixed picture for coherence. The Europarty was vertically *coherent* in its alignment with member parties on temporal scope, the emphasis on the Western Balkans, the exclusion of the Eastern Partnership region, and the general absence of engagement with all three types of EU internal reforms (institutional, financial, and policy-related). However, vertical *incoherence* was identified in two key areas: the overall stance on enlargement and security and geopolitical justification. In both cases, the Europarty adopted a position or remained silent although there was no prevailing stance among member parties or contrary to the dominant trend within them. On the horizontal dimension, coherence levels also varied across categories. Member parties were *coherent* on the temporal scope of enlargement, referencing a gradual and criteria-based approach. They were also coherent in not addressing financial and policy reforms and in giving limited attention to the Eastern Partnership region. *Moderate coherence* was observed in the discussion of Turkey and security-related justifications. However, horizontal *incoherence* was identified on the overall stance toward enlargement, where parties were evenly split between support and silence.

4.3.2. Party Positions in 2024

Europarty

Compared to 2019, the 2024 manifesto of EGP shows a noticeable change in the importance of the enlargement. There was only one sentence within a 16-page document in 2019 but in 2024, there are two subsections dedicated to the topic “*Stronger together: enlarging the Union*” and “*Keeping our promises: a pathway to joining the European Union*”, making up one page out of a 47-page manifesto. The greater importance of the topic is also reflected in the detailed paragraphs addressing enlargement.

In terms of overall stance and temporal scope, the EGP clearly expresses support for gradual, criteria-based enlargement stating that: “*All European countries who strive to be part of or re-join the EU and who share our values must be welcomed on the path to EU membership and given all the support they require to fulfil the criteria*” (European Green Party, 2024). This shows continuity in the approach compared to the 2019 manifesto, which also linked enlargement to values but did so much more briefly. Regarding geographical focus, the 2024 manifesto explicitly mentions both the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries, expanding geographical focus compared to 2019, when only the Western Balkans were

mentioned. However, Turkey is absent from both manifestos. Although there are no references to financial or policy reforms in the context of enlargement, the manifesto refers to institutional reforms that are needed for the EU to accommodate the enlargement. Specifically, pointing out that *“Welcoming new members must serve as a vital push for internal reforms to make it easier for the EU to make decisions efficiently and effectively”*, which indicates a more detailed awareness of the consequences of enlargement that was absent from the 2019 manifesto (European Green Party, 2024). Finally, the 2024 manifesto introduces a more explicit security and geopolitical justification for enlargement, stating: *“The EU has always been a project with geopolitical implications. As the EU is built on shared rules and values, it helps make borders less important. The EU’s enlargement is therefore the best prospect for lasting peace and security in Europe”* (European Green Party, 2024). Compared to 2019, when security considerations were absent, this aligns with the broader shifts within the EU following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Member Parties

The analysis of 13 EGP member parties’ manifestos that secured seats in the European Parliament following the 2024 elections show a high degree of horizontal coherence, with 12 out of 13 parties (92.3%) expressing support for EU enlargement and only one party (7.7%), the Italian Green Europe (Europa Verde), not mentioning the topic at all. Supporting statements included, for example, the French Greens stating: *“All European countries striving to become part of the EU or to join it and which share our values must be welcomed on the path to EU membership and must receive all the support necessary to fulfil the criteria”* (The Ecologists - Europe Ecology The Greens, 2024). This level of support is an increase compared to 2019, when only half of the EGP member parties explicitly supported enlargement. This also points to vertical *coherence* with the Europarty mirroring the prevailing position among member parties.

In terms of the temporal scope, among the 12 parties that support the enlargement, 11 parties (91.7%) advocate for a gradual approach. For instance, the Austrian Greens noted: *“By granting them candidate status, the EU has taken an important first step in a long accession process”* (The Greens – The Green Alternative, 2024). In a similar vein, the Swedish Green Party noted that *“The EU must be an active and credible partner, but cannot compromise on the accession process and the requirements for new members”* (Green Party, 2024). The only party that did not address the temporal aspect was the Danish Green Left party, accounting for

8.3%. Thus, in spite of a minor deviation, the overall trend points to a horizontal and vertical *coherence* within EGP in 2024, viewing enlargement as a gradual process.

When it comes to the geographical scope of enlargement among EGP member parties in 2024, there is a noticeable change compared to 2019. The Western Balkans were mentioned by 7 out of 12 parties (58.3%), marking a decrease from 80% in 2019. By contrast, references to the Eastern Partnership countries increased, with 11 out of 12 parties (91.7%) compared to only 40% in 2019. For example, the Austrian Greens stated: “*The European Union will remain incomplete until the Western Balkan states and countries such as Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia are also part of it*” (The Greens – The Green Alternative, 2024). This change reflects the growing geopolitical importance of the Eastern Partnership region following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Conversely, references to Turkey, became less frequent, with only 3 out of 12 parties (25%) mentioning Turkey in 2024 compared to 60% in 2019. In terms of vertical coherence, the Europarty aligns with the prevailing positions of its member parties by referencing both the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership and excluding Turkey. Therefore, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent* on all three categories. On the horizontal dimension, member parties are *minimally coherent* in their references to the Western Balkans, *coherent* in emphasizing the Eastern Partnership category and *coherent* in excluding Turkey.

When looking at references to internal reforms in the context of enlargement in 2024, the results show an increase in mentions compared to 2019. In total, 8 out of 12 parties (66.7%) referred to the need for institutional reforms. For example, the German Alliance 90/The Greens stated: “*To remain capable of action, an enlarged EU must reform its structures: enlargement and reform must go hand in hand*” (Alliance 90/The Greens, 2024). By contrast, only one party (8.3%) mentioned financial reforms, Belgian ECOLO highlighted that: “*We must also ensure that the EU and its institutions are ready to integrate new members, both economically and procedurally*” (ECOLO, 2024). Similarly, just one party (8.3%) addressed policy reforms. The Lithuanian party Union of Democrats “For Lithuania” highlighted that: “*For a smooth accession process, it is also important to prepare the EU: to prepare and present, as soon as possible, an analysis of how the accession of the new countries will affect different areas of the EU, such as agriculture, cohesion policy, decision-making*” (Union of Democrats ‘For Lithuania’, 2024). Taking these results together, there is clear increase in engagement with this category compared to 2019, when none of the EGP parties addressed financial or policy reforms, and only 20% discussed institutional reforms. In terms of coherence, vertical

coherence is assessed as *coherent* for institutional reforms, as the Europarty position aligns with the prevailing stance among member parties. For financial and policy reforms, both are considered vertically *coherent* due to the absence of these topics in the Europarty manifesto and their non-prevailing status among member parties. On the horizontal dimension, member parties are *coherent* in excluding financial and policy reforms, and *moderately coherent* on institutional reforms due to the clear, but not overwhelming, majority.

Finally, following the analysis of the use of security and geopolitical justification for enlargement among EGP member parties in 2024, an increase in engagement can be observed compared to 2019. In 2024, 10 out of 12 parties (83.3%) link enlargement to broader security and geopolitical considerations, marking an increase from 2019 when only 60% of those that addressed enlargement used security or geopolitical arguments. These results indicate that, by 2024, security concerns had become a much more common justification for enlargement among EGP member parties. For instance, the French Greens note that: “*We must never forget what these candidate countries can offer us in terms of the revival of democracy and European values, but also in terms of agricultural and military resilience*” (The Ecologists - Europe Ecology The Greens, 2024). Similarly, the Luxembourgish Greens stated: “*The enlargement of the EU is therefore the best prospect for lasting peace and security in Europe*” (The Greens, 2024). Given that the Europarty also addressed enlargement in terms of its security and geopolitical implications, vertical coherence is assessed as *coherent*. Horizontal coherence is likewise evaluated as *coherent*, reflecting the strong consensus among member parties on this justification.

To conclude, on the vertical dimension, the EGP in 2024 demonstrated *coherence* across all categories of analysis. The Europarty aligned with the prevailing positions of its member parties on overall support for enlargement, the gradual and criteria-based nature of the accession process, the prioritization of both the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions, the exclusion of Turkey, emphasis on institutional reforms, while not engaging in discussions on financial and policy reforms, as well as the framing of enlargement within a broader security and geopolitical context. On the horizontal dimension, coherence was equally strong across several categories. Member parties were *coherent* in supporting enlargement, advocating for a gradual approach and justifying enlargement in terms of regional security. They also showed high levels of *coherence* in emphasizing the Eastern Partnership and in excluding Turkey and financial or policy reform discussions. *Moderate coherence* was

observed in references to institutional reforms, where a clear majority engaged with the topic and *minimal coherence* in references to the Western Balkans, where positions were more dispersed. Overall, compared to 2019, the 2024 manifestos of EGP increased its coherence on enlargement policy, suggesting that the topic has become both more prominent and more unifying.

4.4. Changes in Positions and Coherence following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine

This subchapter analyzes how party positions and levels of coherence on EU enlargement evolved among PES, ALDE and EGP Europarties and their member parties between the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections. This comparison offers an overview of patterns of change over time. This comparison aims to show how parties have changed their positions, especially in light of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and whether these changes translated into increased coherence between Europarties and their member parties, as well as among member parties themselves.

Party positions

The overall picture of party positions suggests that while enlargement was already a topic of discussion in 2019 among these pro-European political parties, this engagement was rather surface-level without going too deep into detail or thinking ahead of the implications of this process (see Table 6). This is highlighted by the limited number of mentions of temporal scope and internal implications for the EU, suggesting that while parties were supportive of the idea, it was not an active policy avenue that they were pursuing and discussing in strategic terms. However, this picture changed drastically in 2024, when parties started discussing institutional, financial and policy reforms necessary to accommodate the process of enlargement, however, these discussions were still limited. From all the reforms, institutional reforms seem to be the most popular and this could be linked to parties already advocating for these changes for a long time and now instrumentalizing enlargement to push for these changes. Less attention was dedicated to policy and financial reforms, which points towards a still less practical view of the enlargement process, pointing out that parties do not see it happening in the near future. Therefore, these changes are not pushed as much as the institutional reforms.

At a more specific, Europarty level, PES showed the most visible change: from complete silence on enlargement in 2019 to a supportive position in 2024. ALDE broadened its

geographical scope to include the Eastern Partnership countries and incorporated institutional and financial reform needs that were absent in 2019. Similarly, EGP expanded discussion on the topic of enlargement, adding the Eastern Partnership, institutional reform need and security and geopolitical justification in 2024, which had been excluded in its 2019 manifesto.

On the member party level, the changes are even more pronounced. PES member parties moved from a fragmented position in 2019, where 55% did not mention enlargement at all, to 95.2% supporting it in 2024. Support for a gradual accession approach rose from 22.2% to 90%, and references to the Eastern Partnership increased from 11.1% to 70%. Mentions of institutional reforms increased from 22.2% to 65%, while financial and policy reforms, absent in 2019, were addressed by 15% each in 2024. Security justifications also became more prominent, rising from 66.7% to 85%. However, references to the Western Balkans and Turkey declined, from 77.8% to 60% and 44.4% to 15%, respectively. Similarly, ALDE member parties showed an increased alignment on enlargement: support grew from 50% in 2019 to 95.7% in 2024. Support for gradual accession rose from 64.3% to 81.8%. Mentions of the Eastern Partnership doubled (from 35.7% to 72.7%), while institutional reform references rose from 7.1% to 50%. Financial and policy reforms were introduced by 18.2% and 22.7% of parties, respectively, compared to zero in 2019. Security and geopolitical justification also gained more attention (from 50% to 77.3%). However, similar to PES, ALDE parties reduced mentions of the Western Balkans (from 57.1% to 54.5%) and Turkey (from 57.1% to 31.8%). Among EGP member parties, support for enlargement increased from 50% in 2019 to 92.3% in 2024. References to the Eastern Partnership doubled (from 40% to 91.7%), and mentions of institutional reform rose from 20% to 66.7%. Although mentions of financial and policy reforms were still minor (each addressed by 8.3% of parties), they represented a new addition compared to 2019. Security and geopolitical justifications also rose from 60% to 83.3%. Declines were noted in some areas: support for a gradual approach dropped slightly (from 100% to 91.7%), Western Balkans references declined (from 80% to 58.3%), and Turkey saw a decrease from 60% to 25%.

Altogether, an important finding is a bigger emphasis on the Eastern Partnership region, which may be linked to the context of the Russian war against Ukraine. This same event may have also contributed to the justification for enlargement becoming security and geopolitical considerations, which have increased across all parties in 2024.

Table 6. Europarty and Member Party Positions on EU enlargement in 2019 and 2024

	PES						ALDE						EGP					
	2019		2024		2019		2024		2019		2024		2019		2024			
	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>	<i>Europarty</i>	<i>Member parties</i>		
<i>Overall stance</i>	Not mentioned	55% not mentioned, 40% support, 5% unclear	Support	95.2% support, 4.8% not mentioned	Support	50% supportive, 36.4% not mentioned, 9.1% unclear, 4.5% opposition	Support	95.7% support, 4.3% not mentioned	Support	50% support, 50% not mentioned	Support	92.3% support, 7.7% not mentioned						
<i>Temporal scope</i>	N/A ⁷	77.8% not mentioned, 22.2% gradual	Gradual	90% gradual, 10% not mentioned	Gradual	64.3% gradual, 35.7% not mentioned	Gradual	81.8% gradual, 9.1% immediate, 9.1% not mentioned	Gradual	100% gradual	Gradual	91.7% gradual, 8.3% not mentioned						
<i>Western Balkans</i>	N/A	77.8% not mentioned	Mentioned	60% mentioned	Mentioned	57.1% mentioned	Mentioned	54.5% mentioned	Mentioned	80% mentioned	Mentioned	58.3% mentioned						
<i>Eastern Partnership</i>	N/A	88.9% not mentioned	Mentioned	70% mentioned	Not mentioned	64.3% not mentioned	Mentioned	72.7% mentioned	Not mentioned	60% not mentioned	Mentioned	91.7% mentioned						
<i>Turkey</i>	N/A	55.6% not mentioned	Mentioned	85% not mentioned	Not mentioned	57.1% mentioned	Not mentioned	68.2% not mentioned	Not mentioned	60% mentioned	Not mentioned	75% not mentioned						
<i>Institutional reform</i>	N/A	77.8% not mentioned	Mentioned	65% mentioned	Not mentioned	92.9% not mentioned	Mentioned	50% mentioned	Not mentioned	20% mentioned	Mentioned	66.7% mentioned						
<i>Financial reform</i>	N/A	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	85% not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Mentioned	81.8% not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	91.7% not mentioned						
<i>Policy reform</i>	N/A	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	85% not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	77.3% not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	91.7% not mentioned						
<i>Security and geopolitical justification</i>	N/A	66.7% mentioned	Mentioned	85% mentioned	Mentioned	50% mentioned	Mentioned	77.3 mentioned	Not mentioned	60% mentioned	Mentioned	83.3% mentioned						

⁷ Europarty did not adopt a stance on the topic of enlargement, therefore the following categories cannot be assessed and compared for vertical dimension of coherence.

Coherence

First, it is important to establish that in 2019, Europarties and their member parties cannot be labeled as incoherent *per se* (see Table 7). Instead, they seemed to be coherent in engaging in limited discussions on this topic. While coherence had increased by 2024, there were still some inconsistencies. Incoherences seem to be less frequent for the fundamental categories, such as overall stance and temporal approach, for which both vertical and horizontal dimension is assessed as coherent, but rather for new discussion points in this context, such as EU internal reforms as well as changing geographical foci.

From a vertical perspective, the PES Europarty had no position on enlargement in 2019, which aligned with the prevailing position among its member parties. For ALDE, the exclusion of Turkey became coherent in 2024, as both the Europarty and the majority of its member parties no longer discussed the country compared to incoherent positions across party levels in 2019. However, the ALDE Europarty included references to institutional and financial reforms in 2024, which was not matched by a prevailing position among member parties, making these categories vertically incoherent compared to coherent exclusion of this topic in 2019. Security and geopolitical justifications, which were absent from ALDE's 2019 manifesto despite being raised by member parties, became coherent in 2024 when both levels addressed them. For the EGP, support for enlargement moved from incoherent in 2019, when member parties were split and the Europarty supported it, to coherent in 2024, when there was a clear majority among member parties supporting enlargement. Similarly, the exclusion of Turkey became coherent in 2024 as neither the Europarty nor a majority of member parties raised it. Security and geopolitical justification followed the same pattern, shifting from incoherent in 2019 to coherent in 2024.

Table 7. Vertical and Horizontal Coherence Patterns in 2019 and 2024

		PES				ALDE				EGP			
		2019		2024		2019		2024		2019		2024	
		Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal
<i>Overall stance</i>		Coherent	Minimally coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Temporal scope</i>		N/A ⁸	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Western Balkans</i>		N/A	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Minimally coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Minimally coherent
<i>Eastern Partnership</i>		N/A	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Turkey</i>		N/A	Minimally coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Minimally coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Incoherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Institutional reform</i>		N/A	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent
<i>Financial reform</i>		N/A	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Policy reform</i>		N/A	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent
<i>Security and geopolitical justification</i>		N/A	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent	Incoherent	Coherent	Coherent	Moderately coherent	Incoherent	Moderately coherent	Coherent	Coherent

Geographical scope

EU Internal reform

⁸ Europarty did not adopt a stance on the topic of enlargement, therefore the following categories cannot be assessed and compared for vertical dimension of coherence.

From a horizontal point of view, among PES member parties, overall support for enlargement moved from minimal coherence in 2019 to clear coherence in 2024. Their views on the pace of accession also became more aligned, shifting from moderate to strong coherence. Mentions of the Eastern Partnership moved from coherence in exclusion in 2019 to moderate coherence in inclusion in 2024. The security and geopolitical justification category was strengthened from moderate coherence to clear alignment. In ALDE, member party coherence also improved. Overall support shifted from incoherent to coherent, and positions on gradual accession became more aligned. Mentions of Turkey moved from minimal coherence in 2019 to moderate coherence in its exclusion by 2024. References to institutional reform, however, lost coherence, moving from consistent exclusion in 2019 to a more fragmented pattern of inclusion of this topic. Policy reform remained moderately coherent in its general exclusion. Security and geopolitical justification became more widely shared but still only reached moderate coherence. For EGP, support for enlargement went from incoherent in 2019 to coherent in 2024. References to the Western Balkans became less consistent, dropping from coherent to minimal coherence. Discussion of Turkey, however, became more aligned, with coherence in its exclusion. Institutional reform gained attention, moving from coherent exclusion to moderate coherence in inclusion. Security and geopolitical justification also became more consistent across parties, rising from moderate to full coherence.

Overall, the data reveals interesting trends about positions and coherence on EU enlargement between 2019 and 2024 across all three Europarties and their member parties. Support for enlargement became more visible and structured in all three Europarties and parties became more coherent on this category on both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The exact same trend can also be observed for the temporal scope, with coherent positions across levels on a gradual approach towards enlargement. Similarly, geopolitical and security considerations have become prominent justification across levels, reaching a high level of both vertical and horizontal coherence across all parties with the exception of moderate horizontal coherence in ALDE in 2024, which is still an increase from incoherence in 2019 in the same party. Furthermore, references to the Eastern Partnership region rose substantially. These changes and rise in references are likely tied to the broader geopolitical changes following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

At the same time, some areas have received less attention. Mentions of the Western Balkans have declined slightly across all party families, which may reflect a shift in focus toward

Eastern Europe. Turkey has almost disappeared from the discussion, which is likely to be related to the stalled accession process and ongoing democratic backsliding in the country. Another important trend is the growing number of references to EU internal reforms, particularly institutional reforms. While these discussions are not yet dominant, their increased presence suggests that political actors are beginning to consider the structural consequences of future enlargement more seriously. The issue of enlargement itself has become more politically salient, more coherent and more grounded in the security and institutional realities of the European Union. These results demonstrate a general trend that while coherence levels in many categories remained stable, a notable number of categories experienced increased coherence in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. However, this trend was not only positive. For example, in PES, horizontal coherence on the Eastern Partnership slightly declined in 2024. Although references to the region increased and coherence reached a moderate level, it remained limited compared to other categories. In ALDE, coherence declined on institutional and financial reform in the vertical dimension: while the Europarty introduced these themes in 2024, they were not reflected as prevailing positions among member parties. Moreover, policy reform references increased among ALDE member parties, achieving only moderate coherence compared to full coherence in 2019. In EGP, vertical coherence increased across all categories in 2024, reaching full alignment. However, horizontal coherence decreased due to a drop in references to the Western Balkans and a growing but still limited inclusion of institutional reform, which disrupted previously coherent patterns of exclusion. These variations highlight that coherence is not a uniformly linear process and that increased salience can lead to both alignment and divergence depending on the category and Europarty.

4.5. Discussion

This subchapter interprets the empirical findings in light of theoretical expectations. The discussion is structured around each hypothesis and evaluates whether the data supports or challenges the expectations formulated in the theoretical framework. It also offers broader reflections on what these results suggest about party politics in the European Union.

H1a: Europarty positions on EU enlargement reflect the prevailing position among member parties (vertical coherence)

The findings support this hypothesis only partially. In 2019, Europarty positions did not consistently reflect the prevailing views among their member parties. While the example of

PES supports this hypothesis, examples of both ALDE and EGP from 2019 show that Europarty positions did not always reflect the prevailing position among member parties. The ALDE Europarty did not match the prevailing position of its member parties on the geographical focus category, specifically when it came to discussions on Turkey and security-related justifications for enlargement. Furthermore, EGP did not reflect the prevailing position on the overall stance, Turkey, and security justification. This suggests that prevailing positions are not always a guarantee for them to be reflected on the European party level.

In 2024, however, vertical coherence had significantly improved across all three Europarties, which adopted the prevailing position among their member parties across almost all categories. The only party that did not adopt some prevailing position among its member parties was ALDE, which mentioned institutional and financial reforms in its Europarty manifesto, despite it not being a prevailing position among its member parties. This change can likely be linked to the geopolitical context, which served as a unifying factor. While this hypothesis is supported only partially in 2019, it holds much more strongly in 2024, suggesting that geopolitical shifts may increase the importance of certain policy areas and, consequently, result in a united front.

H1b: Europarties are more likely to adopt clear positions on EU enlargement when member party positions align (vertical coherence)

The findings offer limited support for this hypothesis. In 2019, the PES Europarty did not adopt a clear stance on enlargement, which coincided with fragmented member party positions. While this aligns with the expectation that a lack of internal alignment reduces the likelihood of a clear Europarty stance, as discussed in the analysis, this may also have been driven by other factors such as the limited length of the party manifesto (only 3.5 pages) or the low salience of the topic at the time. However, ALDE and EGP adopted clear positions in 2019 despite internal divisions. For instance, ALDE member parties were split on key categories such as temporal scope, references to the Western Balkans, and the use of security and geopolitical justifications. Nevertheless, the Europarty still put forward a clear stance on enlargement. A similar situation occurred within EGP, despite only half of its member parties supporting enlargement, the Europarty supported it in its 2019 manifesto, creating vertical incoherence. In 2024, the relationship between internal alignment and clear Europarty positions is more ambiguous. For instance, ALDE mentioned institutional reform and the Western Balkans at the Europarty level, even though only around 54.5% of its member parties did so. Similarly, EGP referred to the Western Balkans even though just 58.3% of its members mentioned this region. These

examples suggest that while alignment may facilitate clarity, Europarties may still adopt clear positions even without strong internal consensus.

H2: Member parties within the same Europarty adopt similar positions on EU enlargement (horizontal coherence)

The findings provide only limited support for this hypothesis, particularly in 2019. Horizontal coherence was relatively low across all three Europarties when assessed across the full range of categories. For example, within PES, member parties showed fragmentation not only on the overall stance on enlargement (with only 50% expressing support) but also on the temporal scope, where fewer than a quarter explicitly endorsed a gradual approach. Regional focus also varied widely: while 77.8% referred to the Western Balkans, only 11.1% mentioned the Eastern Partnership countries and 44.4% referred to Turkey, indicating little consistency in geographical emphasis. Similarly, institutional reform was mentioned by just 22.2% of PES parties, and neither financial nor policy reforms were addressed at all. ALDE and EGP member parties demonstrated similar patterns of fragmentation. In ALDE, member parties were split across nearly all categories, including the use of security justifications (50%) and references to Eastern Partnership countries (35.7%). EGP showed low coherence even in the categories where some consistency might have been expected: only half of the member parties supported enlargement, and while there was a consensus among the supportive parties on the gradual pace of accession, references to regional foci were inconsistent.

By 2024, however, levels of horizontal coherence increased across most categories. In all three Europarties, over 90% of member parties supported enlargement and a strong majority advocated for a gradual approach and referred to the Eastern Partnership countries. Security and geopolitical justification also emerged as a more unified framing tool, particularly in PES and EGP, where around 85% of parties referenced these. Despite these improvements, some categories remained fragmented. For instance, while institutional reform gained attention, coherence was only moderate in PES and ALDE, and still relatively low in EGP. Financial and policy reforms were discussed by only a small minority across all three Europarties. Overall, while horizontal coherence strengthened from 2019 to 2024, internal coherence across member parties remained uneven based on category. It should also be noted that categories such as security or institutional reform may not carry the same weight across all Europarties or national contexts. Therefore, coherence in these categories might have to do with issue salience, national party priorities or electoral strategies rather than agreements or disagreements. For example,

differences in security justifications could come from different threat perceptions across Eastern and Western member states, distance from Russia or from party ideologies that prioritize diplomacy.

H3: The increased importance of EU enlargement leads Europarties and their member parties to demonstrate greater coherence after 2022 (temporal change)

The findings offer partial support for this hypothesis. A clear increase in coherence of positions can be observed across all three Europarties and their member parties after 2022. While 2019 was marked by fragmentation and minimal coherence in both horizontal and vertical dimensions, by 2024, the topic of enlargement had become more central and more consistently addressed across party levels. The 2024 manifestos show that Europarties moved toward greater vertical and horizontal coherence, particularly on core issues like overall support for enlargement, framing enlargement as a gradual process and highlighting security and geopolitical justification. For example, vertical coherence increased as Europarties adopted positions that aligned with prevailing views among their member parties. Horizontal coherence also improved, with a majority of member parties within each Europarty supporting enlargement with similar justifications and geographic priorities. These shifts can plausibly be linked to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which reframed enlargement as a strategic issue. The heightened threat environment appears to have encouraged parties to state clearer positions on enlargement. However, this is only a part of the full picture, although parties became more coherent on general topics, new incoherences emerged on the geographical scope and internal reforms in the EU. This indicates that coherence is not a static concept, but it may evolve and change over time depending on contextual factors.

All in all, these findings contribute to broader theoretical debates on party politics. They show how geopolitical crises can enhance coherence and introduce new topics into discussions. This means that multilevel party systems are not stagnant. Instead, coherence is a dynamic process, and it might not always be a strategic goal for parties. Limited coherence could also reflect a Europarty's choice to accommodate different national contexts without imposing a wide consensus. This suggests that variation in coherence is not necessarily a sign of weakness but could rather be a sign of the flexible nature of transnational party politics. The next chapter offers concluding reflections on these findings and their implications for party alignment and future research on EU enlargement.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to assess the coherence of European political parties and their member parties on the topic of EU enlargement. Specifically, it aimed to explore how coherent party positions of Europarties and their member parties were on the topic of enlargement and how party positions and coherence patterns changed between the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections, in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

To answer these questions, this thesis used a theoretical framework of multilevel governance and Europeanization. This helped to conceptualize the structural and dynamic interactions between Europarties and their member parties, treating coherence as an indicator of alignment between these vertical and horizontal relationships. Methodologically, this thesis used a qualitative content analysis of 115 party manifestos issued by three Europarties: the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE) and the European Green Party (EGP) and their member parties during the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament elections. The analysis focused on five key categories related to enlargement: overall stance, temporal scope, geographical focus, internal reforms and security and geopolitical justification. These categories were used to assess two dimensions of coherence: vertical coherence, that is, alignment between Europarties and their member parties, and horizontal coherence, alignment among member parties within the same Europarty. The results reveal interesting trends and significant changes between the two elections.

The findings showed an overall trend towards increased coherence in party positions on EU enlargement between 2019 and 2024. However, this trend was not linear, and the starting point was not complete fragmentation across all parties and levels. In 2019, coherence already existed in several categories, especially in silence or cautious engagement with enlargement. What changed by 2024 was not just the level of coherence, but also the thematic expansion of party engagement with the issue, engaging in more discussions on all pre-defined categories. Overall stance on enlargement became more coherent across all three Europarties on both horizontal and vertical dimensions, with overwhelming support for enlargement. The same trend can be seen in the temporal approach towards enlargement, which became more consistent. In 2019, parties refrained from specifying the timeline of enlargement, but by 2024, a majority of manifestos supported a gradual and conditional approach to accession. The geographical focus showed mixed patterns, with mentions of the Western Balkans declining across all parties, although remaining a point of discussion. Meanwhile, references to the

Eastern Partnership grew and in some cases resulted in decreased coherence since mentions of this region changed from coherent silence to increased engagement, however, not reaching complete coherence in this category. Turkey slowly disappeared from discussions on enlargement, resulting in a coherent silence on this topic. Internal EU reforms, and particularly institutional reform, gained more attention. In 2019, the majority of parties across all Europarties did not engage with reform categories at all, or engaged minimally. By 2024, a growing number of parties linked enlargement to internal structural preparedness. Nevertheless, financial and policy reform discussions remained limited but increased compared to 2019. Security and geopolitical justification became more prominent. In 2019, these arguments were minimal and unevenly distributed across parties. By 2024, nearly all parties across PES, ALDE and EGP presented enlargement as a tool for peace and stability, resulting in high levels of coherence in both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The first research question asked: *How coherent are European political parties and their member parties on the topic of EU enlargement?*

The analysis shows that coherence is not a static concept, but it rather changes and evolves over time depending on context and circumstances. While an event may contribute to increased coherence in one dimension, this same event may result in increased fragmentation due to bringing a new topic to the agenda that was not part of the discussion before. With this in mind, we cannot state definitely how coherent European political parties and their member parties are on the topic of engagement, but there is a positive trend pointing towards higher coherence. If this remains so in the future, it is up for debate; however, at this point in time, pro-European parties across all levels seem to agree on the fundamental question: should there be an enlargement of the European Union? Their answer is yes.

The second research question asked: *What changes can be identified in both positions and coherence considering the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022?*

The empirical findings support the idea that the 2022 invasion served as an event that changed party attitudes towards enlargement. Party manifestos in 2024 had not only more frequent but also more coherent discussions of enlargement. This was especially evident in the increased use of security justification and the increased focus on the Eastern Partnership as a region. While we cannot claim causality, the consistency of these patterns across all three Europarties

suggests that there seems to be a correlation between geopolitical events and position alignment.

This thesis contributes to the literature on European party politics in several ways. First, it offers an original framework for analyzing vertical and horizontal coherence in a comparative way across two time points. Second, it demonstrates that coherence is a dynamic feature of multilevel party systems and, rather than treating incoherence as a failure of the party system, the thesis shows how fragmentation or silence can be context-driven. Third, the research highlights how events like Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, can trigger increasing coherence and influence how parties discuss external policies like enlargement.

At the practical level, these findings offer valuable insights for EU institutions and national governments. An overview of patterns of coherence within and across Europarties can help predict the likelihood of support for enlargement. Where high coherence exists, policymakers may find more stable ground to build consensus. For national parties, the analysis suggests that participating in coherent party families at the European level may amplify their voice in setting the agenda. This could be especially important for parties from candidate countries or members that wish to push enlargement into the EU's agenda.

While this thesis offers a comparative analysis, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is restricted to election manifestos, which are authoritative documents issued by parties, but they do not capture all aspects of party positions. Parties may state one thing in their manifestos, however, internal dynamics and contextual factors may lead to completely different positions in practice. While manifestos are there to provide guidance to voters on the policy stances of parties, parties are not legally bound by them. Second, the exclusion of the European People's Party and Eurosceptic parties may have resulted in showing only one side of the coherence story. Therefore, the results that are found following this research cannot be generalized to the entire party system of the EU. Third, while the analysis may point to certain correlations with the 2022 invasion, it is limited in establishing causality and instead offers the author's interpretation of the findings that are put in the broader context.

Future research could expand the dataset to include additional parties and more electoral cycles. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of party coherence on a broader ideological spectrum, over time. Furthermore, it would be interesting to observe how coherence responds to significant changes or crises. In this regard, a compelling case could be exploring

other major policy areas, such as climate, migration, or defense, to see what dynamics emerge following the “green wave” movement in 2019, the migration crisis in 2015, or the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

All in all, this study provides an overview of the evolving nature of party politics in the European Union. It shows that Europarties are not static entities and are capable of adaptation in response to geopolitical developments. It also shows that transnational coherence, which was viewed as rare, is possible, especially when parties face the same external threats. In the case of EU enlargement, the growing alignment suggests that the issue has become more salient. As enlargement moves from a hypothetical case scenario, the coherence of party systems will likely become more important in this process.

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Coding Rules

Name	Description
<i>Overall Stance on EU Enlargement</i>	
Support for Enlargement	Statements expressing a general or conditional positive view of EU enlargement. Applies even if the party has reservations about specific countries, as long as enlargement itself is supported as a concept.
Opposition to Enlargement	Statements that oppose or reject the concept or process of EU enlargement itself, regardless of country. This does not include opposition to individual candidates, only to enlargement in principle or as a policy.
Unclear position	Statements that present both pros and cons without offering a clear indication of whether the party supports or opposes enlargement.
Not mentioned	No reference to enlargement in the manifesto at all. If this code is applied, then the manifesto is not coded for any other categories.
<i>Temporal scope</i>	
Gradual	Statements that focus on a gradual approach to EU enlargement, indicating that enlargement should take place over time, with candidate countries gradually meeting accession criteria before becoming members. Such statements may also link enlargement to conditions such as internal EU reforms, stating that accession is a gradual and conditional process rather than an immediate political act.
Immediate	Statements focusing on immediate accession or fast-tracking the membership process without delays. This includes cases where immediate accession is advocated for specific countries (e.g., Ukraine), even if a gradual approach is preferred for others.
Not mentioned	No reference to the temporal aspect of the enlargement.
<i>Geographical Focus</i>	
Eastern Partnership	Mentions of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, or references to the Eastern Partnership region generally, in the context of EU enlargement.
Western Balkans	Mentions of Albania, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, or the region collectively in the context of EU enlargement.
Turkey	Mentions of Turkey in the context of EU enlargement.
<i>EU Internal Reform</i>	
Financial Reforms	Statements focusing on economic and financial consequences for the EU.
Policy Reforms	Statements focusing on changes to concrete EU policies (e.g. CAP).
Institutional Reforms	Statements focusing on institutional functioning, governance or decision-making processes and possible adjustments.
<i>Security and geopolitical justification</i>	
Mentioned	Statements that focus on the security or geopolitical interests related to enlargement.
Not mentioned	No reference to security and geopolitical justifications in the context of enlargement.

Appendix 2

List of Party Manifestos (2019 and 2024)

European Political Party	Member State	Party Name	Manifesto (2019) ⁹	Manifesto (2024) ¹⁰	Source (2024)
PES	EU	Party of European Socialists	<i>Available</i> ¹¹	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i> ¹²
PES	Austria	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs <i>Social Democratic Party of Austria</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Belgium	Parti Socialiste <i>Socialist Party Belgium</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i> ¹³
PES	Belgium	Vooruit ¹⁴ <i>Onward</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>
PES	Bulgaria	Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya <i>Bulgarian Socialist Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>
PES	Denmark	Socialdemokratiet <i>Danish Social Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>

⁹ All 2019 party manifestos were retrieved from the Euromanifesto Study Dataset, available at: https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7892

¹⁰ Most 2024 party manifestos were retrieved directly from the official websites of the respective political parties. In cases where manifestos were not publicly available online, specifically for the Belgian Socialist Party (PES), the Belgian Reformist Movement (ALDE), the Belgian Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), Belgian Onward (PES), the Estonian Centre Party (ALDE), the Bulgarian Socialist Party (PES), and the Swedish People's Party of Finland (ALDE), the documents were obtained via direct email communication with party representatives. Additionally, for Sweden, manifestos were accessed through the Swedish National Data Service's dataset of political party programs and election manifestos, available at: <https://snd.se/en/vivill>

¹¹ *Available*: Refers to the availability of the manifesto and its inclusion in the analysis.

¹² *Retrieved online*: Refers to party manifestos that were publicly accessible online at the time of research.

¹³ *Received via email*: Refers to party manifestos that were not publicly accessible online and were obtained by directly contacting party representatives or offices during the research process.

¹⁴ Previously known as Socialistische Partij Anders - *Socialist Party Different* (S.P.A)

PES	Estonia	Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond <i>Estonian Social Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Finland	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue <i>Social Democratic Party of Finland</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	France	Parti Socialiste <i>Socialist Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Germany	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands <i>Social Democratic Party of Germany</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Greece	PASOK – Kínima Allagís <i>Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Available¹⁵</i>	<i>Contacted via email, no response</i>
PES	Hungary	Demokratikus Koalíció <i>Democratic Coalition</i>	<i>Not Applicable¹⁶</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Ireland	Páirtí an Lucht Oibre <i>Labour Party Ireland</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Italy	Partito Democratico <i>Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Latvia	Sociāldemokrātiskā Partija Saskaņa <i>Social Democratic Party "Saskaņa"</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Lithuania	Lietuvos Socialdemokratu Partija <i>Lithuanian Social Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Contacted via email, no response</i>
PES	Luxembourg	Lëtzebuenger sozialistesesch Aarbechterpartei/Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Luxembourgeois <i>Socialist Workers' Party of Luxembourg</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Malta	Partit Laburista <i>Labour Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>

¹⁵ *Not Available*: Refers to cases where the manifesto could not be located online. If the manifesto was not publicly available, the party was contacted via email, however, no response was received.

¹⁶ *Not Applicable*: Refers to parties that were not represented in the respective European Parliament during the given term.

PES	Netherlands	Partij Van De Arbeid <i>Dutch Labour Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Poland	Nowa Lewica <i>New Left</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i> ¹⁷	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Portugal	Partido Socialista <i>Socialist Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Romania	Partidul Social Democrat <i>Social Democratic Party</i>	<i>Not Available</i> ¹⁸	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Contacted via email, no response</i>
PES	Slovakia	SMER – Sociálna demokracia <i>Direction – Social Democracy</i>	<i>Not Available</i> ¹⁹	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
PES	Slovenia	Socialni Demokrati <i>Social Democrats</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Spain	Partido Socialista Obrero Español <i>Spanish Socialist Workers' Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
PES	Sweden	Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti <i>Swedish Social Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	EU	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Austria	NEOS Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum <i>NEOS The New Austria and Liberal Forum</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Belgium	Mouvement Réformateur <i>Reformist Movement</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>
ALDE	Belgium	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten <i>Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>

¹⁷ Party was formed in 2021 as a merger of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Spring, although the plans for the merger began in 2019.

¹⁸ Due to availability issues, the Euromanifesto Study 2019 dataset included a speech instead of a manifesto for the 2019 election. Since this research specifically focuses on party manifestos, it was excluded from the analysis (Reinl & Braun, 2023, p. 15).

¹⁹ Due to availability issues, the Euromanifesto Study 2019 dataset included an interview instead of a manifesto for the 2019 election. Since this research specifically focuses on party manifestos, it was excluded from the analysis (Reinl & Braun, 2023, p. 15)

ALDE	Bulgaria	Dvizhenie za Prava i Swobodi <i>Movement for Rights and Freedoms</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Czechia	ANO 2011 <i>Yes 2011</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
ALDE	Denmark	Radikale Venstre ²⁰ <i>Danish Social Liberal Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Denmark	Venstre Danmarks Liberale Parti <i>Left, Denmark's Liberal Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Estonia	Eesti Keskerakond <i>Estonian Centre Party</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Estonia	Eesti Reformierakond <i>Estonian Reform Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>
ALDE	Finland	Suomen Keskusta <i>Centre Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Finland	Svenska Folkpartiet <i>Swedish People's Party of Finland</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Received via email</i>
ALDE	France	Union des Démocrates et Indépendants <i>Union of Democrats and Independents</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Germany	Freie Demokratische Partei <i>Free Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Hungary	Momentum Mozgalom <i>Momentum Movement</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
ALDE	Ireland	Fianna Fail <i>Soldiers of Destiny</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Latvia	Latvijas Attīstībai <i>For Latvia's Development</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Lithuania	Laisvės Partija <i>Freedom Party</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>

²⁰ Previously known as Det Radikale Venstre.

ALDE	Lithuania	Liberalų Sąjūdis <i>Liberals' Movement</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Luxembourg	Demokratesch Partei/Parti démocratique <i>Democratic Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Netherlands	Democraten 66 <i>Democrats 66</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Netherlands	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie <i>People's Party for Freedom and Democracy</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Portugal	Iniciativa Liberal <i>Liberal Initiative</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Romania	Uniunea Salvați România <i>Save Romania Union</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Contacted via email, no response</i>
ALDE	Slovakia	Progresívne Slovensko <i>Progressive Slovakia</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Spain	Ciudadanos <i>Citizens</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
ALDE	Sweden	Centerpartiet <i>Centre Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
ALDE	Sweden	Liberalerna <i>Liberals</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	EU	European Green Party	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Austria	Die Grünen - Die Grüne Alternative <i>The Greens – The Green Alternative</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Belgium	Ecologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales (ECOLO) <i>Confederate Ecologists for the organisation of original struggles</i>	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Belgium	Groen <i>Green</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Denmark	Socialistisk Folkeparti	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>

		<i>Green Left</i>			
EGP	Finland	Vihreät - De Gröna <i>Green League</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	France	Les Écologistes - Europe Ecologie Les Verts <i>The Ecologists - Europe Ecology The Greens</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Germany	Bündnis90/Die Grünen <i>Alliance 90/The Greens</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Ireland	Comhaontas Glas <i>Irish Green Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
EGP	Italy	Europa Verde – Verdi <i>Green Europe</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Latvia	Progresīvie <i>The Progressives</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Lithuania	Demokratų sąjunga „Vardan Lietuvos“ <i>Union of Democrats "For Lithuania"</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Luxembourg	déi gréng <i>The Greens</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Netherlands	GroenLinks <i>Green Left</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>
EGP	Sweden	Miljöpartiet de gröna <i>Green Party</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>Retrieved online</i>

Source: Author's own compilation