EVALUATION OF THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN ORDER TO FACILITATE DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

E-DEMOCRATIZING THE PARLIAMENTS AND PARTIES OF EUROPE

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Executive Summary

This report is about the one of the latest changes in the '**technology of democracy**' and how it may impact on some of our core institutions of democratic representation: parliaments and parties. As in the past, whenever something new was injected into the processes of election and representation pundits have emerged to argue that the nature of democracy would be transformed. This is no less true for one of the latest potential changes in the 'technology of democracy', namely the introduction into the democratic realm of information and communication technologies (ICT).

This report evaluates whether the introduction and diffusion of ICT is having a significant impact upon the practice of democracy in the member and candidate states of the European Union. Two research strategies have been employed: The first is a comparative website analysis of parliamentary and political parties' websites. The second is a series of case studies and country reports which focus on e-democracy initiatives across the 26 polities we survey.

The results of our core empirical analysis indicate that there is considerable variation among both parliaments and parties as far as the development of their websites is concerned. Existing member states tend to have more developed websites and, overall, the quality of parliamentary websites tends to be slightly superior to that of party websites. Most surprisingly, familiarity and use of ICT – as well as higher levels of wealth - do not inexorably lead to better website development. Differences in party systems – its fragmentation, ideological orientation, levels of turnout, distribution of major and minor parties- also do not seem to have a significant impact on website development for parliaments or parties. The variations we have observed suggest that it is political actors' strategies rather than ICT development or other institutional variables that are driving parliaments and parties' website development.

To supplement the quantitative analysis various case studies and country reports have been produced offering further insights regarding both the variety of techniques that are the subject of experimentation by political actors and the particular aspects of democracy they wish to promote. E-access is by far the most dominant e-technique being pursed while e-consultation and e-forums are noticeably lagging. This latter finding is somewhat disappointing for e-democracy advocates although on the e-voting front some notable progress has been achieved.

In sum, the process we describe is dynamic and as yet incomplete. Furthermore its connection with democracy is, at this early stage, still ambivalent. It is our view that given the uncertainties surrounding its diffusion and potential impact, policy intervention whether by national or European authorities could risk failing to produce intended results. We do believe, however, that it is important to learn by monitoring these developments in the political usage of ICT's both for the emergence of potential distortions as well as best practices.

I. Introduction: Democracy and E-Democracy

Democracy has proven to be an extraordinarily resilient form of government. It has changed its scale from ethnically homogeneous city-states to multi-national mega-states; it has expanded in scope from providing defense and little else to providing welfare and much else; it has re-defined its participants from a small number of male, native-born, relatively elderly, non-slave citizens to a large number of male & female, native & naturalized, young & old citizens – and managed to abolish slavery along the way. And yet during this long (if erratic) trajectory, democracy has always been rooted in a limited number of consistent principles: equality of citizens, participation in common affairs, popular consent, freedom of expression, right of assembly and accountability of rulers. Anyone concerned about the problems of democracy in today's world can profitably turn to the Funeral Oration of Pericles for reflections on the importance of citizen equality, the writings of Aristoles, Polybius and Montesquieu for the virtues of mixed government, Machiavelli's Discorsi for the advantages (and risks) of mass participation, John Locke for the centrality of rights and property, Jean-Jacques Rousseau for the social contract and popular sovereignty, the Federalist Papers for wisdom on multiple layers of government (federalism) and multiple sources of cleavage (pluralism), Thomas Paine for the notion of the common man, John Stuart Mill for the importance of representative government, Mary Wollstonecraft for the rights of women, Immanuel Kant for thoughts on why democracies do not go to war with each other, Alexis de Tocqueville for the role of associations and freedom of the press – not to mention such other past contributors as Benjamin Constant, F.A. Hayek, Abraham Lincoln, Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca, Joseph Schumpeter and Max Weber.

What has been much less consistent over its long history is the "**technology of democracy**." The specific mechanisms that have translated its eternal principles into everyday practices of voting, representing, deciding, implementing, and complying by citizens and their rulers have changed greatly and, seemingly, irrevocably. At its founding, citizens walked to a central place, assembled there for a lengthy period to listen to the rhetoric of fellow citizens, tried to reach a consensus and/or occasionally voted by voice or small wooden balls in order to select their leaders or courses of action. In the ensuing years, the means whereby citizens were brought together and allowed to express their choices have changed so radically that

it is highly unlikely that an ancient Greek transported to the present would recognize as democratic any of the technologies that are routinely used to nominate candidates, campaign for election, vote for competing tickets, tally up the winners and announce the results to the general public. Probably, the most mystifying aspect of all these technological revolutions to him would be the extent to which so many of them involve the act of political representation, i.e. of selecting and then delegating to some person or organization the right to act in lieu of the individual citizen.

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This report is about the latest of such changes in the technology of democracy, namely, the introduction of electronic information and communications technology (ICT), and the ways in which it may be affecting the core institutions of representation: parliaments and parties. What we want to learn by a comprehensive and systematic comparison of the member and candidate states of the European Union is whether the introduction and diffusion of ICT is having a significant impact upon the practice of democracy, i.e. whether ICT is transforming Liberal-Democracy (L-D) into Electronic Democracy (E-D).

In the light of the above introduction, it would seem most appropriate to begin with the so-called "**null-hypothesis**." Precisely, because democracy has changed its mechanisms so much and so often without changing its central principles, our long term expectation should be that ICT will **not** fundamentally alter the nature of democracy. E-D, in other words, will remain L-D. At almost every occasion in the past when something new was injected into the processes of election and representation – mass circulation newspapers, radio and, then, television broadcasting, voting machines, national party conventions, proportional representation, public-funding for parties, nomination by primaries, closed-list ballots, voting by mail, permanent voter registration, *e così via* -- pundits emerged to declare that L-D would never again be the same. And they were (by-and-large) wrong, at least with regard to fundamental principles. It is almost as if – *pace* De Lampedusa – liberal democracy keeps changing in order to stay the same.

A second feature of previous speculation about changing technologies of democracy has often been ambivalence. The pundits may have all agreed that the impact was going to be substantial, but they usually disagreed about the direction of that substantial impact, i.e. on who would benefit or what policies would be different. With each new technology came contrasting assessments about whether it would

intrinsically favor incumbent or challenging politicians, left- or right-wing ideologies, major or minor parties, central or peripheral regions, rich or poor persons, ethno-linguistic majorities or minorities, entrenched or reformist policies, and so forth.

So, it seems prudent that our inquiry entertain from the beginning the "**ambivalence hypothesis**," namely, that ICT – if it does make a significant difference – could momentarily benefit one side of a cleavage pattern more than another, but which side that might be is not pre-determined and could even be very difficult to discern. It could also change with the passage of time. Whatever its initially differential impact may be, in the longer run, the disfavoured actors and political groups will either learn to use the new technology or invent newer ones to countervail its effect. In the case of ICT, this hypothesis seems especially plausible because the source of innovation is itself external to the political process. Many previous changes in the technology of democracy were internal to this process and, hence, represented the victory of one political force over another. Granted that winners may miscalculate and unintended consequences are not uncommon in politics, nevertheless, there was usually good reason to suspect beforehand who would benefit and what policy changes would ensue. ICT, as was previously the case with radio and television, stands out as particularly ambivalent in its potential impact since none of the protagonists have been uniquely driving its introduction. Rather, it is the sheer inventiveness of science, the profit-seeking motive of industry and the seemingly insatiable taste of consumers that is diffusing ICT, and it is politicians who are responding belatedly to these autonomous trends.

II. Goals, Definitions, Research Strategies and Hypotheses

The goal of this study is to provide an empirically grounded and theoretically focused analysis of developments in the area of e-democracy in the EU, its member states and the accession countries. But before any progress towards this goal can be made a working definition of e-democracy is in order. One notable feature of the literature on e-democracy is that there is no commonly shared understanding of what e-democracy means. For the purposes of this study the following working definition of e-Democracy has been developed:

> e-Democracy consists of all electronic means of communication that enable/empower citizens in their efforts to hold rulers/politicians accountable for their actions in the public realm. Depending on the aspect of democracy being promoted, e-democracy can employ different techniques: (1) for increasing the transparency of the political process; (2) for enhancing the direct involvement and participation of citizens; and, (3) improving the quality of opinion formation by opening new spaces of information and deliberation.

It is important to note that e-democracy is distinct from, but may overlap with the ICT techniques being used for making government operate more efficiently. The latter is commonly referred to as e-government. With these definitions and conceptual boundaries provisionally in place we can now describe the research strategy. To achieve its research goals this study has employed two distinct, but complementary, research strategies:

1) The first research strategy constitutes the empirical core of the study. It is essentially quantitative and amounts to a comparative analysis of the websites of legislatures and political parties. All legislatures (twelve bicameral and fourteen unicameral) of the EU and its 15 member states/10 accession countries were evaluated in a uniform and structured way. Furthermore, the websites of all political parties that obtained more than 3% of seats in Parliament[1] for the last national elections of the EU member/accession states and for the European Parliament elections were analysed. In sum, a total of 144 political parties' websites and 38

legislatures were analysed with a view to identifying patterns in the development of political parties' and legislatures' websites according to their e-democratic potential. The main goal was to design an instrument that not only counted features and assessed quality but also included an evaluation of interactivity. Indeed, it is precisely the latter feature –the increased scope for deliberative and participatory interactivity offered by ICTs - that has been one of the principal concerns of the literature on e-democracy. The major findings of the comparative website analysis are reported in Part III (for a detailed overview of the questionnaire and its design see the Methodological Annex).

2) The second research strategy is essentially qualitative and is based on a series of case studies and country reports. The aim of the case studies is to supplement the comparative analysis by focusing on various e-democracy initiatives by governments/public authorities and other actors, such as political parties. The cases have been selected across all levels of public authority, from the municipal through to the regional, national and supranational[2]. In addition, outcomes vary in terms of the relative success or failure of the various e-democratic initiatives pursued and the particular e-techniques used. The case studies are complemented by the country reports which were produced by our collaborators. In Part IV we present an overview of the findings from the qualitative analysis[3].

Both research strategies will enable us to test hypotheses that have been raised by the literature. Two initial working hypotheses have already been identified above – namely the 'null-hypothesis' (democracy will not be fundamentally altered) and the 'ambivalence hypothesis' (in the short term ICTs are likely to be exploited differently by political actors although this need not be the case over the long term). Nonetheless, the data collected for this study will also enable us to go beyond these general (and somewhat open-ended) hypotheses to probe other conjectures that appear in the literature. Below we identify some that are of special relevance for this study:

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[1] For bicameral systems we considered the seats obtained for the Lower House.
[2] The case studies focus on Partito Radicale (Italy); Issy-les-Moulineaux (France); e-democracy in Germany at the local level; Regional initiatives in Valencia (Spain); UK e-voting; EU Convention.
[3] For the case studies and country reports see Annex.

Technological diffusion and use: Is there a link between internet penetration and the online presence of both political parties and legislatures? In this report we will be able to test whether this is the case for European political parties' websites and whether internet penetration is a relevant variable for explaining any of the differences observed. The same holds true for parliamentary websites.

Level of democratisation: Is there a link between the level of democratisation and e-democratic website development in a country? This study will also examine whether levels of democratisation help explain differences in websites for legislatures and parties.

Institutions: Do institutional variables (parliamentary vs. presidential systems; federalist vs. unitary systems; unicameral vs. bicameral systems) explain differences observed in the study both for the online presence of political parties and legislatures?

Ideology: Do left/right party ideologies help to explain differences observed in the online presence of political parties? We ask whether this is the case for the 144 European political parties sampled.

Party Size: To what extent is there a difference between the online presence of small and big parties? Have smaller parties gained an equal or even superior online presence than big political parties and, by inference, does the internet provide for a more level playing field than traditional media?

III. Comparative Website Analysis

A) Parliaments in Europe on the Web

Thanks to our collaborators in the 15 member and 10 candidate states, we have been able to gather original and systematic data on how parliaments and parties in Europe have been making use of ICT as evidenced by the developmental characteristics of their websites. We have introduced four distinct (but possibly correlated) dimensions for describing such use: (1) information provision, (2) bilateral interactivity, (3) multilateral interactivity and (4) user-friendliness. While information provision and user-friendliness of websites are familiar terms, the remaining two dimensions require some further clarification. Bilateral and multilateral interactivity build on the fundamental distinction put forward by Andrea Römmele with regard to potential linkages using ICT between political parties and their members: "These linkages can take a bilateral form, such as email between the party and voter or member, or be multilateral, involving many actors in online chat rooms, bulletin boards or special question-and-answer sessions"[4]. We use this distinction in a similar way for both the analyses of the websites of legislatures and of political parties[5]. In the analysis below, the four dimensions have been collapsed into a single E-Legislature Index (E-LI).

This will be followed by a similar index for E-Parties (E-PI). We begin by ranking the websites of 25 national legislatures (plus the European Parliament) and we have done so by simply adding the individual scores on each of the four dimensions (information, bilateral interactivity, multilateral interactivity and user friendliness). This has been referred to above as the E-Legislature Index (ELI) and it provides a basic snapshot of the web presence in the legislatures of most European countries and that of the European Union. For those countries with bicameral systems, this first descriptive index is represented by the average of the scores for the lower and the upper chamber.

[4] Römmele, Andrea, 2003. "Political Parties, Party Communication and New Information and Communication Technologies", *Party Politics*, 9:1, p. 10.
[5] See the Methodological Annex for details.

Table 1: E-legislature index (in %)

Country	E-legislature	Standard deviation	N
France	68.0	5.0	2
EU	67.0	-	1
Greece	65.0	-	1
Denmark	62.1	-	1
Sweden	58.5	-	1
Germany	58.0	21.0	2
United Kingdom	57.8	5.6	2
Finland	56.5	-	1
Lithuania	53.5	-	1
Italy	53.3	9.6	2
Czech Republic	51.0	1.9	2
Belgium	49.8	2.3	2
Portugal	46.3	-	1
Poland	46.0	10.9	2
Spain	45.9	13.4	2
Netherlands	42.8	7.0	2
Estonia	40.3	-	1
Latvia	39.2	-	1
Slovenia	38.9	5.6	2
Hungary	38.3	-	1
Austria	36.2	0.0	2
Ireland	35.8	0.0	2
Malta	34.3	-	1
Slovak Republic	34.2	-	1
Luxembourg	32.7	-	1
Cyprus	27.6	-	1
EU-15	51.3	11.0	15
AC-10	40.3	7.9	10
Mean	47.7	6.9	

Note: EU-15 is the average score among the 15 EU Member States legislatures' scores. AC-10 is the average score among the 10 Accession Countries legislatures' scores. An analysis of variance reveals that the difference between the EU-15 and AC-10 values are statistically significant (sig.>.05; eta = 0.49).

Table 1 presents the overall scores (expressed in percentage terms) of our analysis of the websites of the parliaments of the 25 member state/accession countries and the EU. It also includes averages for the current EU member states (EU-15); for the accession countries (AC-10); and, finally, an overall average.

We begin by looking at the overall average (47.7%) and find that four legislatures (those of France, the European Union, Greece and Denmark) form a distinctly impressive group with scores above 60%. In particular, the European Parliament's website scores well above all of the three averages (including the one composed by its own members) and it is the second best on the overall index. Of the

accession countries, only two (Lithuania and the Czech Republic) score higher than the overall average. Lithuania, however, also scores above the EU-15 average. At the bottom of the rankings, we find Cyprus and Luxembourg. Notably low scores are obtained by EU members, Luxembourg, Ireland and Austria, all three of which were well below not only the EU-15 average, but also the AC-10 average. Despite the lackluster performance of this trio, there is still a considerable difference between the average of the EU Member States (51.3%) and the average of the Accession Countries (40.3%), a difference that is also statistically significant. Unfortunately, we do not have time series data that could tell us whether the latter are catching up or falling further behind the latter, although anecdotal evidence suggests that these Eastern countries are converging with their Western brethren.

Of the 25 EU member and candidate states, twelve have bicameral legislatures. This is significantly higher than the worldwide proportion (35%) of polities with two chambers[6], but this tells us nothing *a priori* about their probable E-LI scores. We can now examine whether there is any discernable difference between unicameral and bicameral systems in terms of their web presence. Could it be that unicameral systems with a single web platform manage to provide a more effective communication mechanism than the more complex bicameral systems? Or could the inverse be the case with bicameral systems scoring higher because they compete with each other in quality? Table 1 shows that there are six bicameral systems above the average and six beneath it. It appears, therefore, that differences in the number of chambers do not affect overall scores. However, this observation needs to be refined on two counts. Firstly for bicameral systems, Table 1 presents the average score of the lower and upper chamber which may not capture significant differences between the two chambers. Secondly, several bicameral legislatures provide a common portal (such as the UK) to access the separate sites for each chamber and, in the case of Ireland and Austria, identical sites for both houses[7]. In order to sharpen the analysis, we present in Table 2 the averages for lower and upper chambers. Austria and Ireland have been excluded for the reason noted above. The UK, which

[6] Tsebelis, George & Biorn Erik Rasch, 1995. "Patterns of Bicameralism" in Herbert Döring (ed.) *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag & St. Martin's Press, p. 365.

[7] Since the data for the two chambers in Ireland and in Austria are identical, the standard deviation in their ELI scores reported in Table 1 is 0.

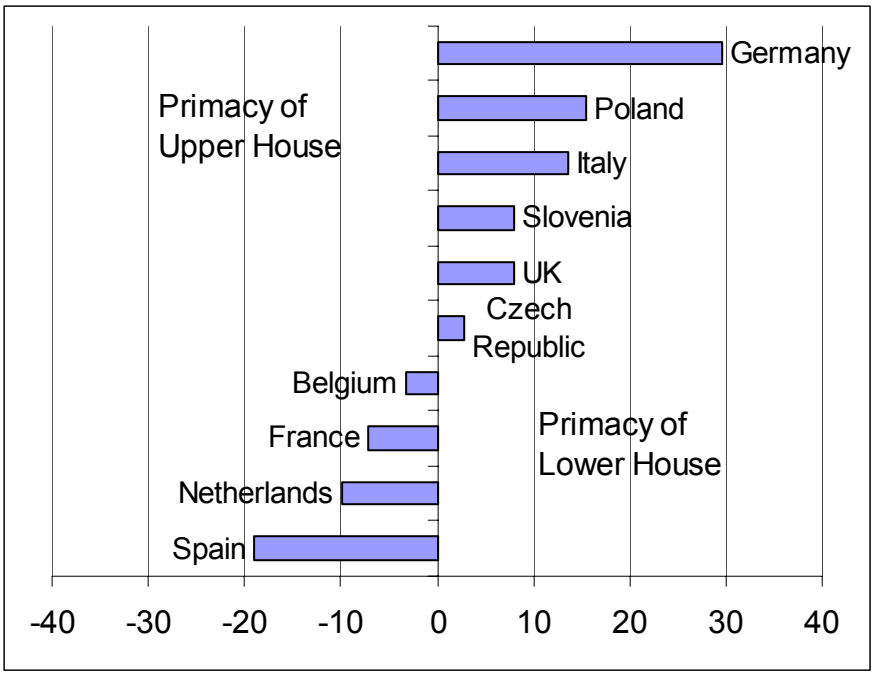
also shares a common access portal has, however, been included because differences between chambers still persist.

Table 2: Mean of E-Legislature Index by Chamber for 10 bicameral parliamentary systems (excluding Austria and Ireland)

Chamber	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Lower House	53.0	10	11.9
Upper House	49.3	10	10.2

Table 2 shows that - *on average* - Upper and Lower Houses only differ marginally and that this difference is not statistically significant. Nonetheless, there are some quite significant standard deviations. Figure 1 computes the differences between the houses for each country.

Figure 1: Differences between Lower and Upper Houses Website development



The data plotted in Figure 1 shows the difference between lower and upper houses with regard to their respective score on the E-LI. If a country has a negative value, its upper house has a more developed website than its lower house. Conversely, a positive value indicates that the lower house has the more developed website. For the cases of the Czech Republic and Belgium, both houses' websites have more or less similar levels of web development. In Germany, however, the

difference between the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat* is very pronounced: The score of the German *Bundestag* on the E-Legislature Index is almost 30% higher than that of the *Bundesrat*. To a lesser extent, the Polish, Italian, Slovenian and UK lower chambers are also more developed than their upper chambers. The inverse, however, is true for Spain, The Netherlands and France. For example, in the latter, the *Senat* has a higher E-LI score than the *Chambre des Deputés*. We cannot explain these differences by such institutional variables as federalist vs. unitary systems or parliamentary vs. presidential systems. Nor do we have the data to test whether it is legislative chambers with greater formal powers that have more developed websites. It seems to us more likely that the differences are due to varying organisational structures, strategies and resources of the respective parliamentary administrations. The score of the German *Bundestag*, when compared to the German *Bundesrat,* is especially noteworthy because it illustrates the interactivity potential of ICT. The lower house has opted for developing a more participatory web-forum which has significantly boosted its overall score.[8] At the time of the analysis, there were 280 registered users on the *Bundestag*'s web forum, some of whom were actively engaged in discussing issues. In the Spanish case, the *Senado* has also developed a participatory online forum that gives it a much higher score than the *Cortes.*[9] In the case of the UK, where a common portal[10] links the Parliament and the House of Lords, the difference between the scores is largely a result of the absence of any email interactivity for the upper chamber. These differences show that web strategies and developments for national Parliaments may not only vary across countries, but also, in bicameral systems, within them.

By simply taking the average between the two chambers, there is a danger of introducing a bias in the analysis of parliamentary websites. Table 3 therefore focuses exclusively on the lower chambers given that this is generally the more representative body and the one that is presumed to be closest to the citizen. As to

[8] See the Parliamentary new media e-democracy project at www.bundestag.de/gremien15/
[9] See the Foro de la comision de la informacion y del conocimiento at the Senado http://www.senado.es/
[10] See www.parliament.uk

the construction of the E-LI, a reliability analysis is, from a statistical point of view, satisfactory.[11]

Table 3: E-Legislature Index for all Unicameral Parliaments and Lower Houses

Country	E-legislature
Germany	72.8
EU	67.0
Greece	65.0
France	64.4
Denmark	62.1
United Kingdom	61.8
Italy	60.1
Sweden	58.5
Finland	56.5
Poland	53.7
Lithuania	53.5
Czech Republic	52.4
Belgium	48.1
Portugal	46.3
Slovenia	42.9
Estonia	40.3
Latvia	39.2
Hungary	38.3
Netherlands	37.9
Spain	36.4
Austria	36.2
Ireland	35.8
Malta	34.3
Slovak Republic	34.2
Luxembourg	32.7
Cyprus	27.6
EU15	51.6
AC10	41.6
Mean	48.4

Note: EU15 is the average score among the 15 EU Member States legislatures' scores. AC10 is the average score among the 10 Accession Countries legislatures' scores. An analysis of variance reveals that the difference between the EU15 and AC10 values is statistically significant (sig.>.05; eta = 0.40).

This revised index shows important shifts in the ranking of some countries. The most important is in Germany's E-LI score that now emerges at the top of the country rankings (72.8%). At the same time, we now have seven countries, instead of the four in Table 1, with scores above 60%. The European Parliament's website

[11] When testing the reliability of our e-legislature index for the 26 houses, we get a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78. We interpret this value as satisfactory, allowing us therefore to proceed with the overall index construction.

retains its second place ranking, while the relative position of Italy and the UK is significantly enhanced. Of the accession countries, Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic score above the overall average and also above the EU average. In fact, Poland now occupies first place among the accession countries. At the other end of the scale, five EU member states, instead of the earlier three (Luxembourg, Ireland, Austria) now score below the EU and the AC averages. The two additions to this bottom-ranking trio are Spain and The Netherlands, both of which have relatively underdeveloped websites for their lower chambers.

Having assessed the overall development of European legislatures' websites and their relative ranking, we are now in a position to push the analysis further. As we noted, the E-LI is a composite-additive index based on four dimensions that measure respectively: information provision, bilateral interactivity, multilateral interactivity and user friendliness. By breaking down the E-Legislature Index into each of its components, it becomes possible to gain further insights into the specific emphasis that is placed on each of the four dimensions by the respective parliaments as they develop their websites.

Figure 2 clearly shows that national parliaments and the European Parliament use their websites principally for providing information and offering access via email to their members (MPs) and personnel (administrators, webmasters). Both functions are important and we shall examine them below in greater detail.

Figure 2: Dimensions of Website Development by Legislatures in Europe

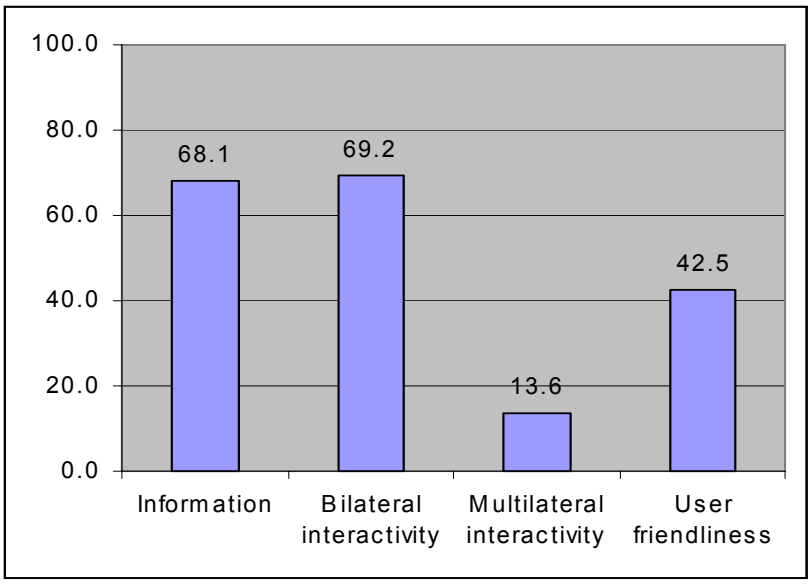


Table 4: E-Legislature Index broken down into its components country by country

Information		Bilateral interactivity		Multilateral interactivity		User-friendliness	
United Kingdom	89.9	European Union	100.0	Germany	72.7	France	81.3
Italy	89.4	Greece	100.0	Denmark	45.5	European Union	62.5
Germany	89.1	Belgium	85.7	European Union	27.3	Greece	62.5
Denmark	81.6	Czech Republic	85.7	France	27.3	United Kingdom	62.5
Greece	79.3	Finland	85.7	Poland	27.3	Finland	56.3
Poland	78.7	Germany	85.7	Finland	18.2	Italy	56.3
European Union	78.3	Italy	85.7	Greece	18.2	Sweden	56.3
France	77.8	Lithuania	85.7	Lithuania	18.2	Denmark	50.0
Sweden	73.7	Sweden	85.7	Malta	18.2	Estonia	50.0
Lithuania	72.4	United Kingdom	85.7	Sweden	18.2	Portugal	50.0
Spain	71.5	Denmark	71.4	Czech Republic	9.1	Czech Republic	43.8
Czech Republic	70.9	France	71.4	Italy	9.1	Germany	43.8
Hungary	69.5	Hungary	71.4	Luxembourg	9.1	Belgium	37.5
Belgium	69.3	Latvia	71.4	Netherlands	9.1	Latvia	37.5
Slovenia	67.7	Netherlands	71.4	Slovak Republic	9.1	Lithuania	37.5
Finland	66.0	Poland	71.4	Slovenia	9.1	Malta	37.5
Portugal	63.7	Portugal	71.4	United Kingdom	9.1	Poland	37.5
Netherlands	58.4	Austria	57.1	Austria	0.0	Slovenia	37.5
Austria	56.5	Estonia	57.1	Belgium	0.0	Austria	31.3
Ireland	54.7	Ireland	57.1	Cyprus	0.0	Cyprus	31.3
Luxembourg	54.0	Slovenia	57.1	Estonia	0.0	Ireland	31.3
Estonia	54.0	Luxembourg	42.9	Hungary	0.0	Slovak Republic	31.3
Slovak Republic	53.6	Slovak Republic	42.9	Ireland	0.0	Spain	31.3
Malta	53.0	Spain	42.9	Latvia	0.0	Luxembourg	25.0
Cyprus	50.4	Cyprus	28.6	Portugal	0.0	Hungary	12.5
Latvia	47.9	Malta	28.6	Spain	0.0	Netherlands	12.5
Mean	68.1	Mean	69.2	Mean	13.6	Mean	42.5

In Figure 2 and Table 4, the provision of **information** appears as one of the most important website activities by most European legislatures, although with a substantial degree of variation. Its average score is 68.1, exceeded only by a narrow margin by bilateral interactivity in Table 3. In fact, there seems to be a rough correlation between the two activities. Most of those countries scoring high on information provision also do relatively well on bilateral interactivity, e.g. the UK, Italy, Germany, Greece, Sweden, Lithuania, and the EU, but Belgium, Finland and France seem to have thought the latter more important than the former. Spain, however, ranks 11th in information provision, but 23rd in bilateral interactivity!

While the provision of information on a given website is, in theory, unlimited, we have sought to measure the variety rather than the volume of information available. Accordingly, this activity has been broken down into five components. We begin by focusing on the aggregate scores and find that the UK, Italy, Germany and Denmark all score above 80 and they are joined by Poland and the European Union whose scores are also well above the average. At the bottom end, we find Latvia and

Cyprus where they are joined by the low scoring EU trio of Luxembourg, Ireland and Austria.

Further insights concerning the type of information that is provided can be gained from the five-fold break down below (for details refer to the description in the annex): (1) General information on the Chamber (overview, news, panorama etc.);(2) Information on MPs (list of members, their political groups, the issues they stand for etc.); (3) Information on Parliamentary committees (list of committees, their members, proceedings etc.); (4) Information on legislation (ongoing legislation, passed legislation, legislation search facilities etc.); (5) Information on debates (schedule of debates, text access to debates, archives, etc.).

Figure 3: Dimensions of (Potential) Information Provision

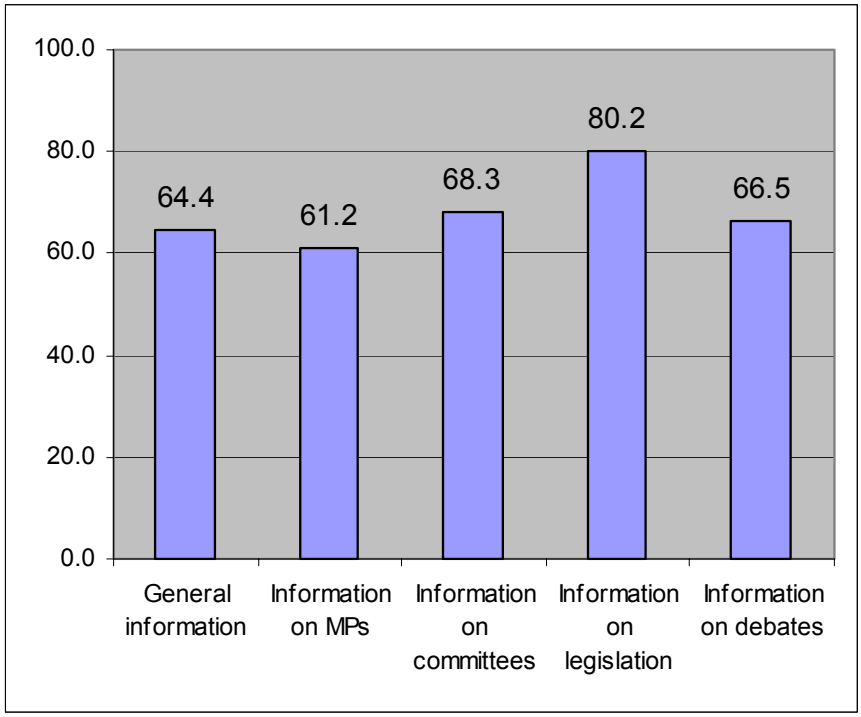


Figure 3 displays the average values for each sub-component of the provision of information. Better said, it displays the potential for that provision built into each of the respective websites, since at this point we have no data on frequency of usage. Information on legislation (80.2%) constitutes the most developed type of information provided by legislatures, followed by information on parliamentary committees (68.3%), debates (66.5%), general information (64.4%) and, lastly, information on individual MPs (61.2%). This last finding is somewhat surprising since it seems that parliamentary administrations tend to favour the dissemination of impersonal

information rather than allowing the legislatures' websites to serve as a platform for individual members to present themselves. At the same time, however, this finding should not be overstated given that the differences between the five dimensions' scores are not very large. This suggests that, as far as information is concerned the components involved seem to have converged on a relatively homogenous common standard of content.

Bilateral interactivity in Table 4 measures the extent to which users are provided with general contact information, as well as the email addresses of webmasters/content managers, members of parliament, Ombudsmen (or equivalent) and parliamentary staff dealing with general inquiries. This index also includes a measure of the proportion of MPs with an email address compared to their total number. Email addresses are relatively easy to put on a website, while the other dimensions tend to demand more resources both in terms of technology and staff. It is even possible to argue that the cost of responding to emails is merely transferred to the parliamentary representatives receiving them, thereby, lessening the load on website administrators. Finally, email addresses, unlike parliamentary debates or updates of legislative drafts, are generally more static and do not require constant data management or regular updating.

Table 4 shows that both the European Parliament and the Greek Parliament obtain the maximum score of 100% -- the only such scores in the entire survey. Another cluster of high-scorers consists of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The presence of the Czech Republic and Lithuania (85.7%) in this *tête de peleton* is especially noteworthy, since two of the accession states, Cyprus and Malta, score lowest with only 28.6% and several others, Estonia, Slovenia and Slovakia, also do poorly.

In this case, we have generated some very interesting (if still incomplete) data that does permit us to go beyond formal provision of the opportunity to interact with a test for actual inter-activity. For this test, our collaborators have sent out an e-mail to all MEPs and MPs in the member states and accession countries that have an e-mail address provided in the respective websites of the legislatures. The content of the message was identical in each country and translated by our collaborators into the corresponding national languages (for details on the text see the Methodological Appendix).

Table 5 shows the proportion of MPs and MEPs whose e-mail address is provided by their Parliaments' websites as well as the response rate of the test.

Table 5: Interactive test results for MPs (for bicameral systems the figures refer to theresponse rate of the Members of the Lower House)

Country	Response rate	n	% of MPs with email address	n	N MPs
Estonia	44.6	45	100.0	101	101
Denmark	42.3	71	93.9	168	179
Slovenia	42.2	38	100.0	90	90
Finland	40.0	80	100.0	200	200
Netherlands	30.2	13	57.3	43	75
Luxembourg	28.6	8	46.7	28	60
United Kingdom	27.7	133	73.0	481	659
Slovakia	26.7	40	100.0	150	150
Austria	26.6	42	86.3	158	183
Portugal	23.5	54	100.0	230	230
Lithuania	22.6	31	100.0	137	137
Latvia	16.0	13	81.0	81	100
Germany	14.4	87	100.0	603	603
France	11.9	67	97.9	565	577
Sweden	9.7	34	100.0	349	349
Spain	9.7	22	64.6	226	350
Greece	9.6	16	55.3	166	300
Hungary	9.3	36	100.0	386	386
Italy	7.1	45	100.0	630	630
EU	5.1	21	65.4	409	625
Poland	2.0	9	100.0	460	460
Mean	21.4	43.1	86.7	267	307

Here we discover some surprises. Some of the most impressive response rates came in countries that did not score highly in Table 4. Estonia and Slovenia that were just mentioned as laggards in formal bilateral inter-activity have among the highest responsiveness levels. The European Union and Greece that were the champions in Table 4 have among the lowest levels, along with others such as Italy and Lithuania. The old adage, “You can take a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink,” seems to apply to ICT and legislatures, at least with regard to bilateral interactivity.

The third most important dimension in Figure 2 and Table 4 measures the **user friendliness of legislative websites**. It shows the extent to which such websites propose "Frequently Asked Question" sections, have general and specific search facilities, site maps, content indexes, A-Z indexes, lengthy scrolls, text versions of the site. It also measures the proportion of deadlinks that one comes across when surfing the legislatures' websites. National parliaments and the EP, on average, do not seem to consider user friendliness a high priority. Compared to the potential top score, there is considerable room for improvement. A notable exception is the website of the French *Assemblée Nationale*. It received a score of 81.3%, almost double the overall average (42.5%) and nearly 20 percentage points above the European, Greek and UK Parliaments. However, in terms of responsiveness, the French lower house ranked quite low! This case suggests that user friendliness is no guarantee of user responsiveness. At the very bottom of the scale, we find Hungary and The Netherlands, both with a score of 12.5%.

The final component of our E-Legislature Index is **multilateral interactivity**. This is arguably the most important variable from the theoretical perspective of e-democracy since it alone is potentially capable of strengthening the deliberative aspects of citizen participation. Figure 2 and Table 4 both reveal that legislatures at the national and supra-national level attribute minimal attention to such a potentiality. Theory may be correct, but the practice is not. The overall average is extremely low (13.6%). There are nine legislatures (five EU Member States and four Accession Countries) that receive a score of 0[12]. In other words, they neither provide their citizens with an on-line forum, nor any other form of consultation or feedback procedures (other than the possibility of sending email). The clear outlier on this variable is the German *Bundestag* and, to a lesser extent, the Danish *Folketinget,* both of which provide opportunities for citizen participation in online forums. We remind our reader, however, that the use of ICT by legislative bodies is still in its infancy and changing relatively rapidly. Perhaps, what we are seeing in Figure 2 and Table 4 is a process of diffusion, both over time and from one country to another. It may take some prior experience with the "lesser" forms of e-democracy before national parliaments agree to take the greater risk of opening up their practices to multilateral interactivity. Also, the data on bilateral interactivity provides a useful

[12] These are Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Slovak Republic, Spain, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands.

warning that simply making a mechanism available does not mean that it will be used. It may also take a while before citizens, long accustomed to more traditional and mediated forms of interaction with their representatives in parliament, will become inclined to make direct use of ICT interactivity for this purpose.

B) Political Parties in Europe on the Web

The abstract theory of democracy, as well as its concrete practice, tells us little about whether parliaments or parties "should" play a leading role in the diffusion of new technologies. In the specific case of ICT, the former usually have impressive financial resources and staff members who are accustomed to using this technology on a daily basis for internal purposes and this familiarity could spillover into its application to relations with the general public. Parties are probably less well equipped internally with ICT, but they are locked into a externally competitive struggle for influence and votes that should induce them to respond quickly by adopting whatever technologies seem to give their opponents an advantage.

Let us now turn to the data that we have collected on the 144 political parties that have gained more than 3% of seats at the last general election in all the member and accession states, as well as the party groups that exist within the European Parliament. In addition to the four dimensions used for the construction or our E-LI, we have added a further two for our measurements of party websites. The first relates to networking possibilities provided for by political parties on their respective websites. The second additional dimension relates to political parties' mobilisation potential on the web[13].

Table 6 presents the results of the E-Party Index (E-PI) when the scores on all six dimensions are simply added together (and given equal weight) in order to produce a single aggregate indicator of the development of their respective websites.

[13] For details see the Methodological Annex.

Table 6: E-Party Index

Country	E-party	Standard deviation	N
Germany	62.3	5.4	5
Spain	52.8	6.8	3
Austria	52.4	12.5	4
Sweden	52.3	6.9	7
Czech Republic	50.5	3.6	5
Italy	49.9	11.6	6
United Kingdom	49.6	7.8	3
Greece	48.1	7.5	4
Poland	47.6	6.1	6
Netherlands	47.0	13.5	7
Belgium	46.0	8.7	10
Malta	45.9	3.9	2
Finland	45.9	7.8	7
Luxembourg	41.4	10.5	5
EU	40.7	21.4	6
France	39.9	4.1	3
Denmark	39.8	7.4	6
Hungary	35.8	14.5	4
Lithuania	34.9	7.1	5
Latvia	31.9	10.0	9
Portugal	30.6	20.4	4
Ireland	30.3	9.9	6
Slovak Rep.	30.1	7.5	8
Estonia	28.6	15.0	6
Slovenia	27.5	13.8	8
Cyprus	13.0	5.1	5
EU-15	45.8	12.1	80
AC-10	33.3	13.6	58
Mean/Total	41.3	9.6	144

Note: EU-15 is the average score among the 15 EU Member States legislatures' scores. AC-10 is the average score among the 10 Accession Countries legislatures' scores.

The E-PI provides a basic snapshot of the presence of political parties' websites by country. As we did previously with the E-LI, we have also calculated the average scores for EU-15; the ten accession countries (AC-10) and the whole 26 polities. Germany comes out at the top of the rankings with a score of 62.3%. This is almost 20% higher than the next four countries (Spain, Austria, Sweden and the Czech Republic) which all obtain scores above 50%. Moreover, Germany was also the highest scoring country on the E-Legislature Index. It is worth noting that the Czech Republic forms part of this upper tier, scoring well above all three averages as the highest placed accession country. It is also joined by Poland and Malta, both of which score above the EU average. At the bottom of the country rankings, we again

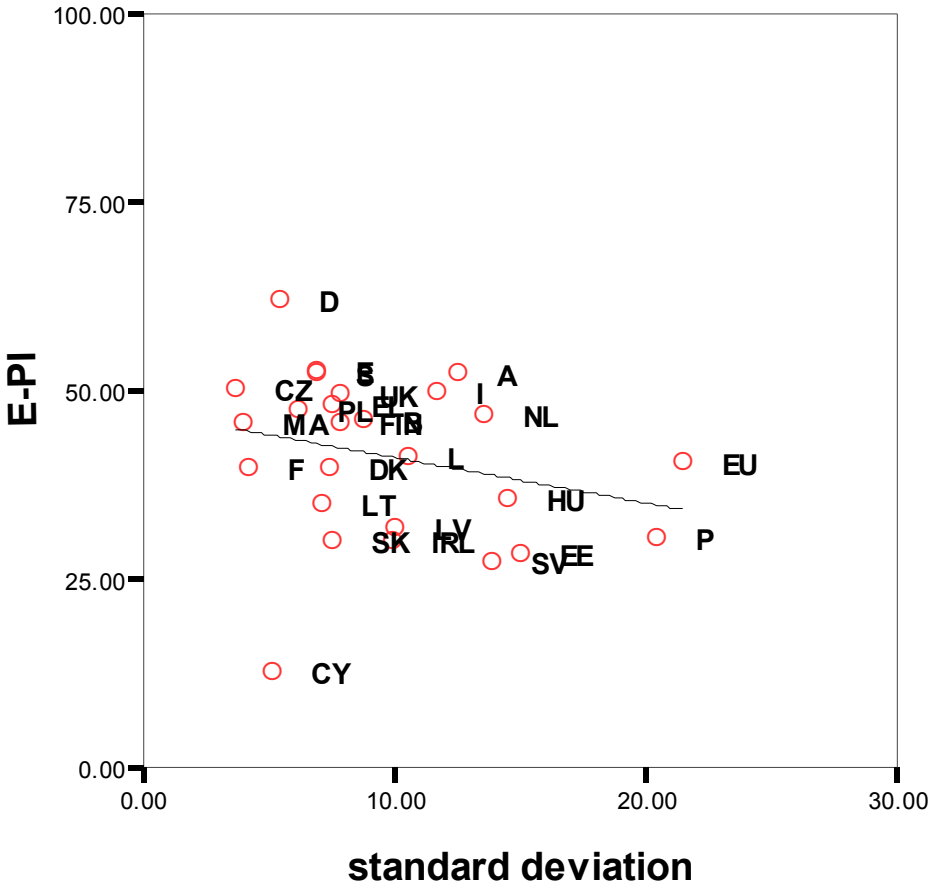
find Cyprus with a very low score of 13%, followed at a distance by Slovenia (27.5) and Estonia (28.6). Of the EU member countries in this lower tier, Ireland and Portugal score considerably below not only the overall average, but also the AC-10 average. The websites of the parties in the European Parliament also fare relatively badly and score below the EU-15 average – despite the fact that the EP itself had one of the highest E-LI scores.

Table 6 also plots the standard deviations and the number of parties for each polity. Here, we potentially have a test for the hypothesis discussed above, namely, that what we are observing with ICT is an evolutionary process driven by diffusion from early innovators to late adopters. The standard deviation indicates the extent to which the scores for political parties are converging within the national and supra-national contexts. The closer the standard deviation is to 0, the less individual e-party scores deviate from the national mean. Or, in other words, the lower the standard deviation the more homogeneous are parties with regard to their website development. Conversely, a large standard deviation indicates that parties within the national context diverge with regard to their E-PI scores. A first glance at Table 5 suggests that the level of website development that political parties attain is not independent from the respective standard deviation, i.e. the lower the E-PI score, the higher the standard deviation. In order to test this hypothesis more thoroughly, we produce a scatterplot diagram of the two variables.

Figure 4 shows a generally negative relationship between the two variables: the higher the E-Party Index, the lower the standard deviation. Statistically, this relationship is, however, not significant[14]. Nevertheless, the data do suggest that the more that particular parties develop their websites in a specific country, the more likely it is that competitors will do the same and the result tends to be a more even distribution of characteristics. If true, this would mean that, whatever political force – left or right, incumbent or challenger, major or minor – gains some initial advantage by innovating with ICT, this advantage will be ephemeral since its competitors will follow suite.

[14] Pearsons' r = -0.26, sig. $\leq$ 0.20, n = 26

Figure 4: Scatterplot of Political Parties' Website Development in Europe and Their Standard Deviations



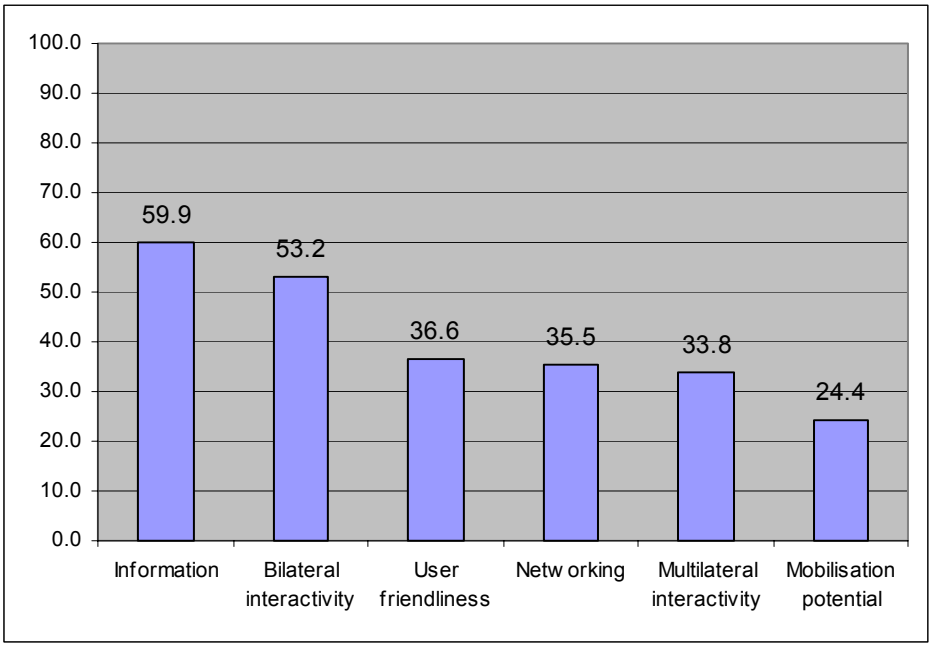
To probe this finding a bit more closely, we decided to take a closer look at the data. Since Cyprus clearly occupies an outlier position - both its E-PI party score and its standard deviation are very low – we excluded this case from the analysis. When we do this, the relationship between the two variables becomes much stronger and statistically significant[15]. This probably means that, due to a "bandwagon effect," once a certain threshold of website development level has been reached, the competitive effect kicks in and parties tend to imitate each other and converge toward a higher national average. Another example of “bandwagoning” seems to be

[15] Pearsons' r = -0.44, sig. ≤ 0.03, n = 25. Although one could argue that this negative relationship is dependent on the number of cases per country. However, a linear multiple regression analysis reveals that - while still excluding the case of Cyprus – the two variables are intrinsically and significantly linked.

language availability on party websites. Fifty-four per cent of the 144 political parties websites analysed are monolingual; twenty-two per cent are bilingual. A large majority of the former (90%) have English as their one additional language. By itself, this is hardly surprising -- given the predominance of the English language on the internet in general. What is astonishing, however, is the case of Sweden. While very few party websites (only 13 %) have three or even four additional languages, Swedish political parties – in a country of relative linguistic homogeneity – have a staggering average of 12.6 additional languages. Five out of seven of the Swedish political parties in the sample have included ten or more languages, while the lowest scoring party has six. These include such 'rare and exotic' languages as North and South Kurdish. There can be no explanation of this other than the "bandwagon effect" – unless Swedish parties are somehow compelled to behave like this by law.

As we did previously in the analysis of parliamentary websites, we have broken down the E-Party Index into its constituent parts. Again, our purpose is to assess the strategies national and European political parties choose when developing their websites. This time, however, we have six dimensions to analyze.

Figure 5: Dimensions of political parties' website development in Europe



The histograms in Figure 5 shows a familiar pattern, almost identically to that which we discovered with the four variables in the E-LI analysis. The most important features of ICT for national and European political parties are information provision

and bilateral interactivity, just as they were for national and the European parliament. Considerably less importance seems to be attached to the features of user friendliness, networking and multilateral interactivity dimensions. This striking similarity is rather unexpected from a theoretical point of view, since political parties as intermediaries between citizens and rulers “should” have made more of an effort at setting up networks and interacting on a multilateral basis.

Parties in some countries, however, did manage to achieve noteworthy scores, as demonstrated in Table 6. For multilateral interactivity, the five German parties and, from the accession countries, the two Maltese parties have the most developed online forums. At the opposite extreme, the three parties from the UK and the five from Cyprus do not offer any online participatory forums. With regard to the potential for mobilisation, the average is quite a bit lower (26%, as opposed to 37% for networking). The conclusion is inescapable (and disappointing) that national and European political parties tend to favour the provision of information, i.e. merely displaying their stance on issues or circulating a newsletter, rather than using their websites for the purposes of mobilization. This clearly differs from the United States where websites are used extensively and frequently as platforms for mobilising their followers and, especially, as a means for raising campaign funds. In Europe, a more traditional pattern prevails in which parties provide information more than they attempt to increase their organisational resources over the internet. This, however, does not apply across the board with the two largest countries, the UK and Germany, scoring well above the rest in mobilisation potential.

Table 7: E-Party Index Broken Down into its Six Component Variables

Information		Bilateral interactivity		User friendliness		Networking		Multilateral interactivity		Mobilisation potential	
Czech Republic	78.8	Austria	81.3	Poland	56.0	Greece	71.9	Malta	71.4	Germany	66.2
Greece	76.6	Belgium	77.5	Spain	52.4	Finland	58.9	Germany	68.6	United Kingdom	61.5
United Kingdom	75.0	Czech Republic	77.5	Italy	50.0	United Kingdom	58.3	Hungary	64.3	Netherlands	45.1
Germany	72.5	Sweden	75.0	Sweden	50.0	Austria	57.8	France	57.1	Sweden	42.9
Luxembourg	72.5	Finland	71.4	Germany	48.6	Spain	56.3	Czech Republic	51.4	Austria	38.5
Poland	71.9	Spain	70.8	Malta	46.4	Germany	50.6	Poland	47.6	France	38.5
Spain	70.8	Denmark	68.8	Luxembourg	44.3	Italy	50.0	Estonia	45.2	Italy	35.9
Italy	69.8	Greece	68.8	Czech Republic	41.4	Sweden	49.6	Netherlands	44.9	Spain	33.3
Belgium	68.1	Germany	67.5	Austria	41.1	Luxembourg	47.5	Austria	42.9	Czech Republic	26.2
France	66.7	Poland	64.6	Greece	41.1	Belgium	43.4	European Union	40.5	Greece	23.1
Sweden	66.1	Italy	62.5	United Kingdom	40.5	Netherlands	41.1	Latvia	39.7	Portugal	23.1
Lithuania	62.5	United Kingdom	62.5	Belgium	37.9	European Union	40.6	Slovenia	39.3	Denmark	23.1
Netherlands	62.5	Ireland	58.3	Finland	37.8	Denmark	38.5	Slovak Rep.	37.5	Malta	23.1
Finland	60.7	European Union	56.3	Denmark	36.9	Malta	34.4	Spain	33.3	Belgium	23.1
Denmark	57.3	Netherlands	53.6	Portugal	35.7	Hungary	32.8	Italy	31.0	Finland	22.0
European Union	54.2	Lithuania	50.0	Latvia	35.7	Lithuania	30.0	Sweden	30.6	Hungary	19.2
Austria	53.1	Malta	50.0	Netherlands	34.7	Czech Republic	27.5	Luxembourg	28.6	Poland	19.2
Ireland	53.1	Luxembourg	40.0	European Union	34.5	Poland	26.6	Belgium	25.7	European Union	17.9
Slovak Rep.	53.1	Portugal	34.4	Estonia	33.3	Portugal	26.6	Finland	24.5	Lithuania	16.9
Latvia	52.1	Estonia	33.3	Slovak Rep.	33.0	Slovak Rep.	20.3	Portugal	21.4	Ireland	16.7
Hungary	50.0	France	33.3	Lithuania	32.9	Latvia	18.1	Lithuania	17.1	Luxembourg	15.4
Malta	50.0	Latvia	33.3	France	26.2	France	17.7	Denmark	14.3	Latvia	12.8
Slovenia	48.4	Slovenia	28.1	Hungary	23.2	Ireland	17.7	Ireland	14.3	Slovak Rep.	11.5
Cyprus	42.5	Hungary	25.0	Slovenia	22.3	Slovenia	15.2	Greece	7.1	Slovenia	11.5
Portugal	42.2	Slovak Rep.	25.0	Ireland	21.4	Estonia	14.6	Cyprus	0.0	Estonia	6.4
Estonia	38.5	Cyprus	17.5	Cyprus	4.3	Cyprus	10.6	United Kingdom	0.0	Cyprus	3.1
Mean	60.3	Mean	53.3	Mean	37.0	Mean	36.8	Mean	34.6	Mean	26.0

Table 7 shows that inter-country variance is high for each of the six components in the E-PI, suggesting (but not proving) that strategies differ a great deal and that they may not be fixed. Our guess is that political parties at both the national and the EU levels do not know yet what to do with ICT and are trying a large number of combinations in order to find out. Take, for example, the party groups in the European Parliament. They are just under the mean in information provision and user friendliness, but slightly over it in bilateral interactivity and networking. In multilateral interactivity, they do quite well, but equally poorly in mobilisation potential. Malta is the bantamweight champion, scoring at or above the average in almost every component; Germany is by far the heavy weight champion, followed by the United Kingdom. But what about the Czech Republic in the middle weight category: strong on information (where it is the best in the sample), bilateral interactivity, user friendliness and multilateral interactivity, but only average in potential mobilisation and quite weak in networking.

C) Correlating Variables and Explaining Variation in E-Democratic Potential

So far, we have been describing the potential utility embedded in the websites of parliaments and parties, based on the extensive dataset produced by our collaborators. Occasionally, we have been able to advance some tentative findings concerning the many unknown characteristics of how these institutions are adapting to ICT, but we have paid little to no attention to what causes (or, better, correlates with) the differences we have been observing. We know that the 26 parliaments and 144 parties do vary a great deal in website potential and we have found some consistent patterns, e.g. parliaments and parties in existing member states are better equipped than those in candidate states – although there is considerable overlap and reason to suspect that the Central and Eastern countries are catching up rapidly. We have also discovered that parliamentary use at the national and supra-national levels is more similar than that of parties, suggesting that partisan strategies with regard to E-Democracy are more in flux.

Now it is time to analyze the correlations of these distributions and, where possible, to infer the probable and significant existence of causal factors. The first and most obvious question is whether those countries whose parliaments score high on E-LI also do better on the E-PI scores. Needless to say, this will prove nothing

about the specifics of causality. Only detailed and time-dependent case studies will be able to tell us whether parliaments or parties innovated first in the development of their respective websites and whether such early developments served as "models" that the others subsequently imitated. Or, as we shall examine further in this section of the report, whether or not such external factors as economic development, wealth, size of country, use of ICT by the general public, and so forth are correlated with both parliamentary and partisan website potential, making whatever correlation that exists between them spurious, i.e. conjointly produced by a prior factor.

Our hypothesis is that the better developed the websites of national and European parliaments, the better developed will be the websites of their political parties – and *vice versa*.

Figure 6: Scatterplot of E-Legislature Index (E-LI)' and E-Party Index (E-PI): Website Development in Europe

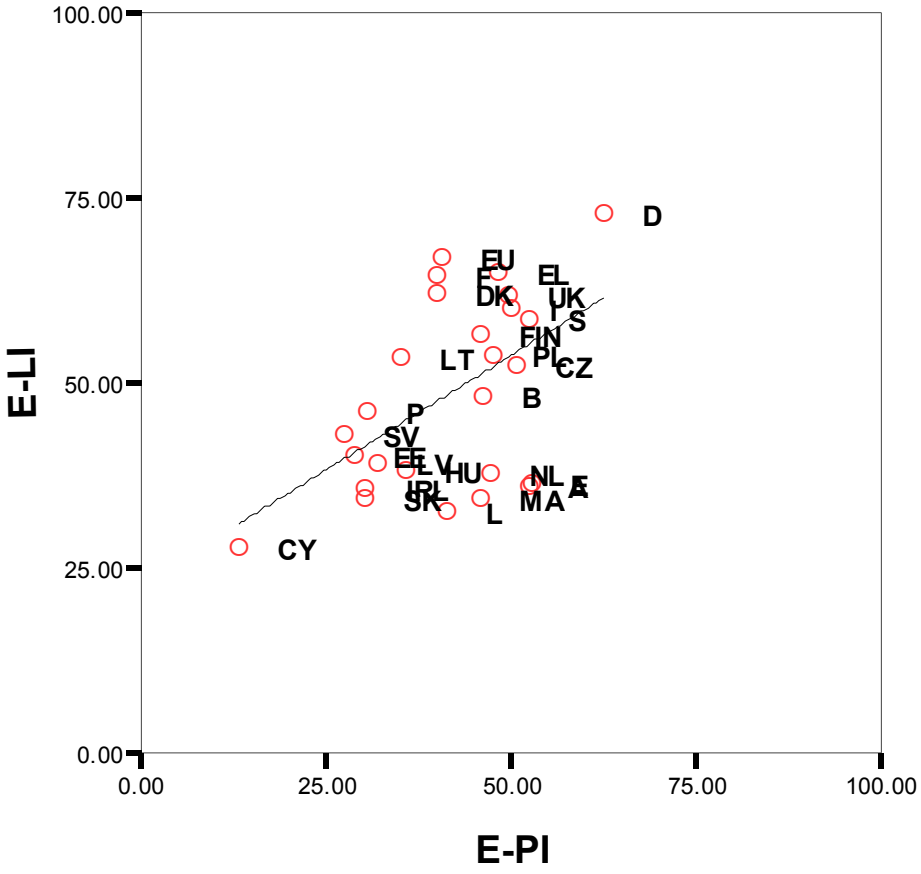


Figure 6 shows that our two compound indexes do co-vary. Knowing the score of one of them does significantly help to predict the score of the other. The higher a given

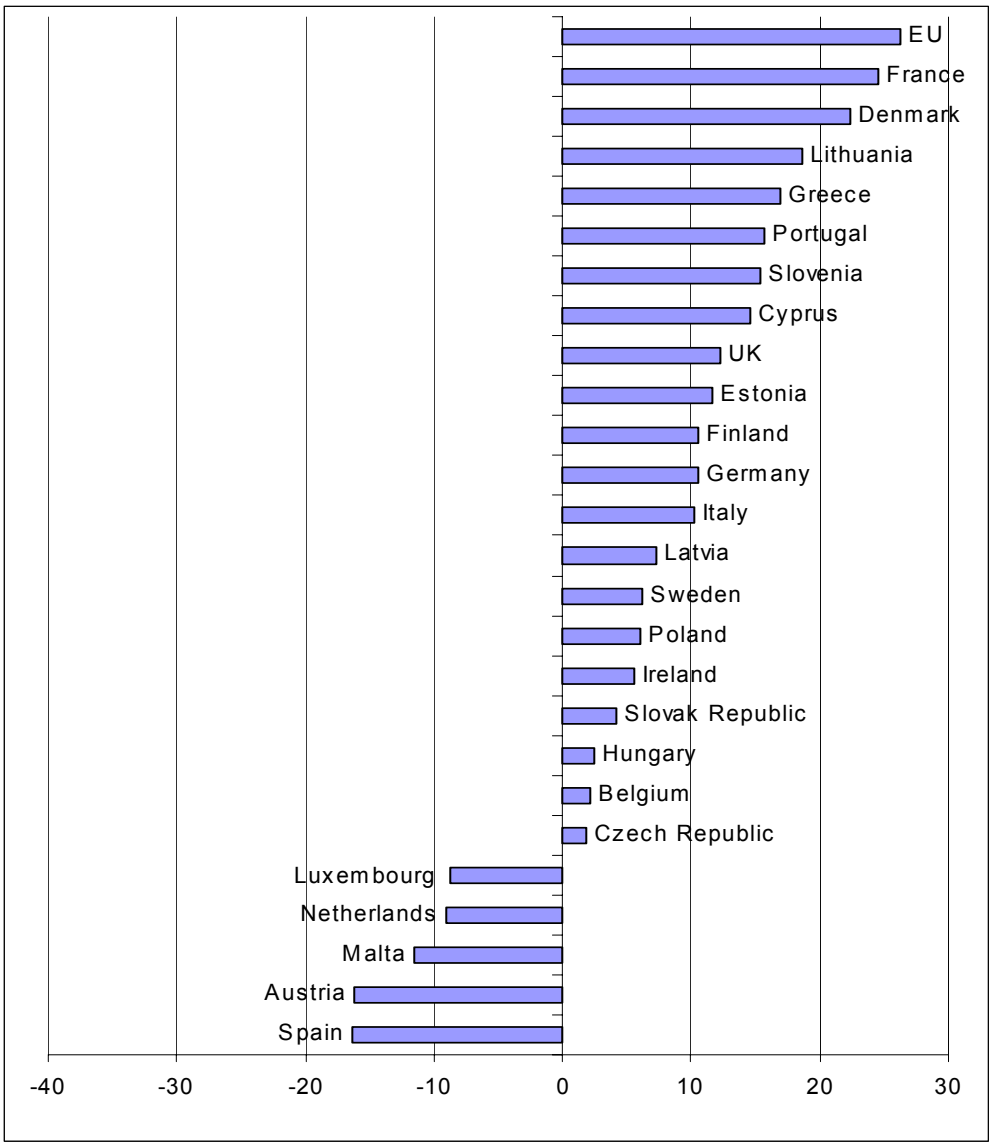
country is on the E-LI, the higher it is likely to be on the E-PI. The correlation coefficient is 0.52 and its statistical significance is ≤ 0.01. In other words, there is less than one chance in one hundred that the distribution in the scatterplot of Figure 6 could be randomly generated. Even if we exclude Cyprus, the negative outlier, the relation remains quite significant.[16] However, if we suppress the data on Germany, the positive outlier, the correlation coefficient is still positive, but it falls to 0.31 and its significance is considerably less than it was (≤ 0.15 vs. <0.01). We remain convinced that website development in the two institutions of representation are somehow positively linked, but we hesitate to suggest that they are causally related in the absence of historical case studies that could prove which of the two was the initiator of ICT use and what mechanisms of learning or imitation were involved. Moreover, the correlation is by no means perfect and some countries are more advanced in E-LI than E-PI – and *vice versa.*

In Figure 7 we have plotted these divergent paths. A positive value at the top of the chart indicates a stronger development of the parliamentary website. A negative value indicates that, on average, political party websites are more developed – compared to the national e-party average – and, inversely, a negative value indicating a more developed political party index. The dominant pattern is quite clear: Legislatures tend to have relatively more developed websites than parties. In twenty-one of the 26 cases, the E-LI had a larger residual value than the E-PI, with the European Parliament far ahead of the pack, followed by France and Denmark. It may just be a coincidence, but the EP is notorious for the weakness of "its" party system. France and Denmark have recently experienced considerable volatility in the electoral fortunes of existing parties and the mobilisation of new ones. However, Italy has had a veritable breakdown of its entire party system and its legislature is only marginally ahead in website development. Also, we hasten to note that in the cases of Latvia, Sweden, Poland, Ireland, Slovak Republic, Hungary, Belgium and the Czech Republic the "superiority" of parliament is only marginal (<10%). The inverse cases, where parties seem to be leading parliaments in E-Democracy potential, are Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Malta, Austria and Spain – all polities known for their relatively well-organised (and publicly well-funded) political parties. We repeat, however, that this significant correlation and pattern of residuals does not prove that

[16] Pearsons' r = 0.43, sig. ≤ 0.04, n = 25

the two developments are causally linked, even less that it is the parliament that brings about changes in its respective parties.

Figure 7: Residual Differences between E-LI and E-PI



As mentioned above, no matter how convincing the correlation may be between EL-I and E-PI, it may prove to be spurious, i.e. caused by some general social, economic or political characteristic that affects them both. The literature on the so-called “Cyber-Revolution” has proposed many candidates for the job. Wealth and economic development are the most obvious suspects. Size of the country involved

is another. One might also suspect that certain characteristics of the country's party politics might have an effect on website development[17].

Table 8: Bivariate Correlations between E-LI & E-PI and Socio-Economic & Political Variables

	E-LI			E-PI		
Independent variables	r	sig.	n	r	sig.	n
Socio-Economic:						
Population						
- including the EU	0.46	*	26	0.16	n.s.	26
- excluding the EU	0.61	**	25	0.56	*	25
GDP per capita in PPS	0.05	n.s.	25	0.32	n.s.	25
Political:						
Fragmentation of party system	-0.06	n.s.	26	-0.21	n.s.	26
Change in turnout between the last two general elections	-0.20	n.s.	26	-0.25	n.s.	26
Size of Party						
- 3 to 9.9% vs. >10% of seats	-	-	-	Eta=0.17	*	144
- 3 to 19.9% vs. >20% of seats	-	-	-	Eta=0.18	*	144
- 3 to 9.9% vs. >20% of seats	-	-	-	Eta=0.21	*	112
Ideological Orientation of Party	-	-	-	Eta=0.23	n.s.	144

* = significant at the 0.05 level; ** = significant at the 0.01 level; n.s. = not significant

Let us take at quick look at some of the most obvious suspects. As Table 8 demonstrates only one thing is strongly correlated, namely, the population of the country. The larger is the political unit (and that includes the mammoth EU), the more developed is its parliamentary website likely to be. If we exclude the EU outlier, the effect becomes even stronger. Presumably, this might be due to some threshold in the sheer size of the legislative staff or to some economy of scale in website development – although as we noted above a small parliament like Denmark's can have a remarkable website with lots of information, interactivity and user-friendliness. There does not, however, seem to be a complimentary effect upon party websites in large countries, unless we exclude the EU. Wealth and economic development, as measured by per capita GNP, has no significant correlation at all with either indicator. Member and candidate states may differ, as we have seen, but not along the line of cleavage between rich and poor countries. Even more surprising in Table 8 is the complete irrelevance of all of the variables intended to measure levels of political participation (electoral turnout), extent of partisan competition (party fragmentation)

[17] For a description of the independent variables used in the subsequent analyses see Methodological

and ideological orientation (left-right). Only size of party (major-minor) has a statistically significant impact on the E-PI. However, the difference between major and minor parties' E-PI is very small. Depending on the method used, the E-PI of major parties exceeds by no more than 6.5% the score of minor parties. Apart from this minor difference, this finding is quite important. It means that ICT in its early stage of introduction is not being differentially exploited by left-wing or right-wing parties and only marginally more so by major parties. It even does not seem to be affected by how close the margin of votes is between parties. This is a resounding confirmation of our "ambivalent" hypothesis – surprising only if one presumed that during the initiation of a new political technology some parties might have gained an early advantage and then lost it subsequently due to the bandwagon effect.

Having eliminated most (but not all) of the usual socio-economic-political "background" suspects, we can now turn to some "foreground" factors. The literature on the "Cyber-Revolution" tends to stress the comprehensive and intrusive nature of the process of introducing ICT. According to this vision, the diffusion of computers to home and office, the intensity of their use by a population that is becoming increasingly e-literate, and the filling of the so-called "digital divide" between generations and socio-economic categories will inexorably lead to E-democracy, and the development of websites for parliaments and parties is an obvious intervening step in this process. A noted-authority, Pippa Norris[18], has argued to the effect that "The strongest and most significant indicator of the presence of all parties online is the technological diffusion, measured by proportion of the population online".

Annex.

[18] Norris, Pippa, 2001. "Digital Parties: Civic Engagement and Online Democracy". Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Grenoble, France, p. 10.

Table 9: Bivariate Correlations between E-LI & E-PI and ICT Variables

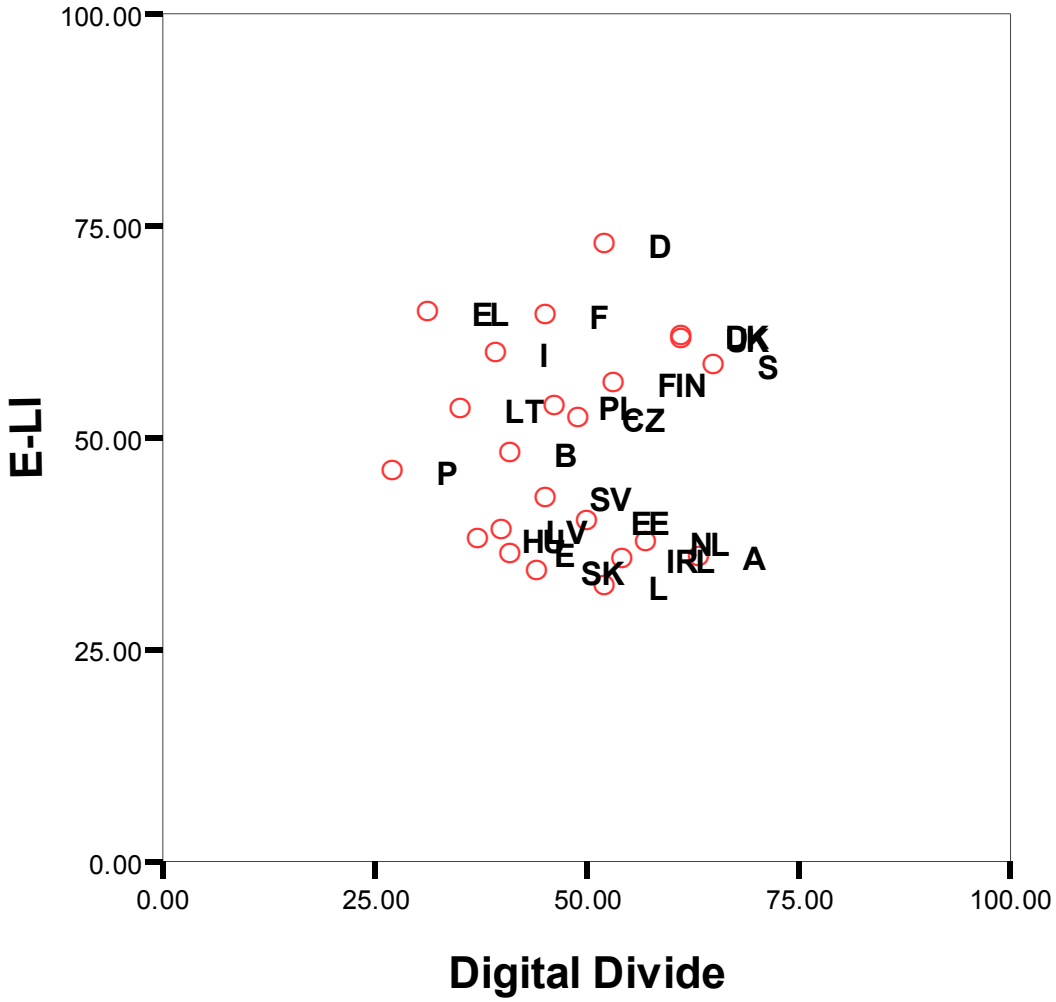
	E-LI			E-PI		
Independent variables	r	sig.	n	r	sig.	n
Proportion of internet users	0.15	n.s.	23	0.29	n.s.	23
Intensity of internet use	0.25	n.s.	23	0.25	n.s.	23
Index of e-literacy	0.15	n.s.	23	0.33	n.s.	23
Index of digital divide	0.04	n.s.	23	0.34	n.s.	23
Proportion of e-commerce Users among internet users	0.31	n.s.	23	0.38	n.s.	23

* = significant at the 0.05 level; ** = significant at the 0.01 level; n.s. = not significant

In Table 9, we have assembled a battery of "Cyber-Revolutionary" indicators and examined their bilateral correlations with our indicators for the quality – and not just presence - of the 26 parliamentary and 144 party websites. And we have found **nothing**! Not a single one of these often-used variables – proportion of internet users, intensity of internet use, extent of e-literacy, index of digital divide and proportional use of e-commerce – is capable of predicting either E-LI or P-LI. This constitutes another "non-finding" of potentially great importance. If sustained by other indicators and over an extended period, it implies that there is nothing inexorable or unavoidable about E-Democracy. Individual consumers can buy more ICT and use it more frequently and extensively – even create a "cyber-culture" – without necessarily compelling their representatives in parliament or candidates in elections to make use of the technology of cyber-democracy. Now, we admit that this is a process in its initial stages and that there may be good reasons why politicians do not yet know what to make of ICT; nevertheless, our data call into question one of the most prominent assertions of cyber-enthusiasts. E-Democracy, it would seem, will have to be chosen. It will not evolve as a side-product of other trends in technological innovation.

Why this relation seems so indeterminant can be seen more graphically in Figure 8. Here, we find the E-LI scores plotted against the European Commission's indicator of the extent to which the population is "digitally divided" between those who have and do not have access to computer technology. What we find is a completely random "ball" in the middle of the plot with countries that have advanced furthest across the divide, e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Austria, The Netherlands and Finland, not having parliamentary websites as developed as those in countries where the gap between computer "haves and have nots" is much wider, e.g. Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Luxembourg.

Figure 8: Scatterplot between E-LI Scores and the Index for the Digital Divide



The conclusion is inescapable: almost nothing goes. The interesting non-finding is the fact that the digital divide does not appear to have an impact whatsoever. ICT development does not seem to have any effect on e-legislature or e-party indexes. What matters more than ICT development or other institutional variables are the **strategies of political actors**.

In Table 10, we have examined another such "intra-cybernetic" connection – this one of central political importance – namely, that between E-Government (E-G) and E-Democracy. Is it the case that in those countries in which government services are more available online and used by their residents, the websites of parliaments and parties are more likely to be highly developed? The answer is a resounding (and

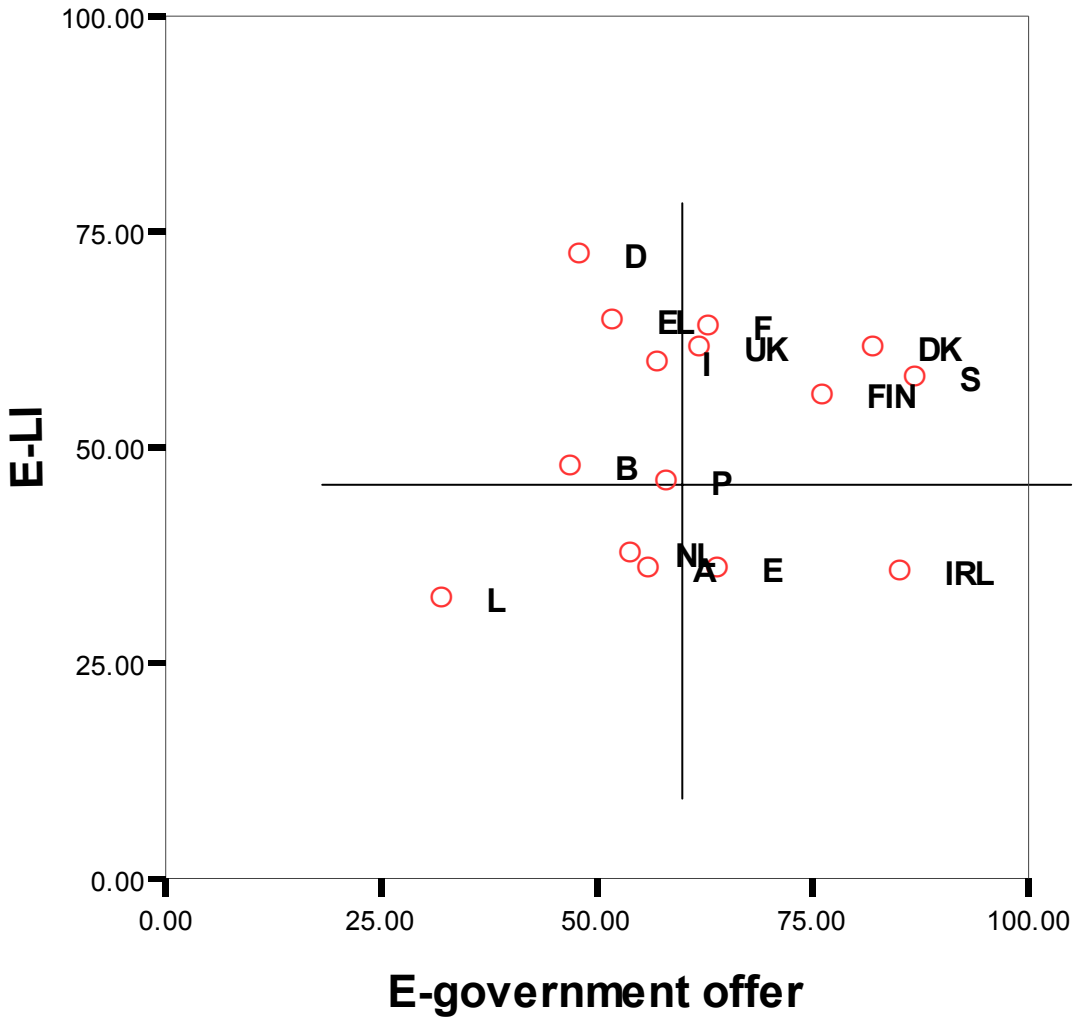
quite significant) no! It seems that the two are independent developments of the Cyber-revolution, at least, in Europe.

Table 10: Bivariate Correlations between E-LI & E-PI and E- Government Variables

	E-LI			E-PI		
Independent variables	r	sig.	n	r	sig.	n
Proportion of e-government users	0.19	n.s.	15	0.15	n.s.	15
Proportion of basic government services online	0.15	n.s.	15	-0.24	n.s.	15

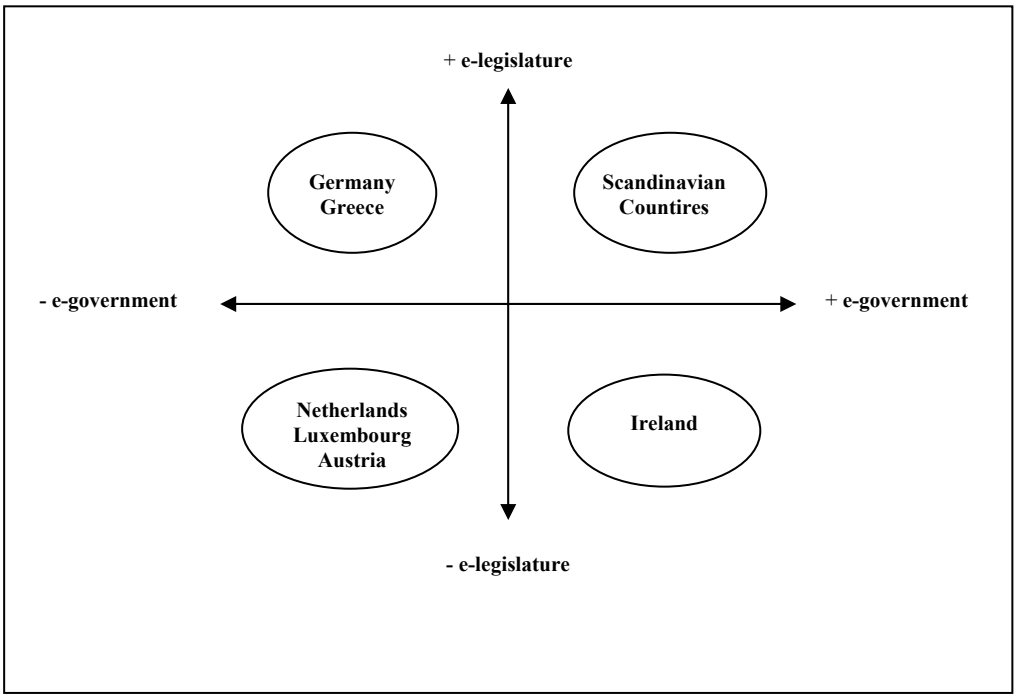
* = significant at the 0.05 level; ** = significant at the 0.01 level; n.s. = not significant

Figure 9: Scatterplot between E-Government Offer of Services and E-LI:EU-15 only



This rather counter-intuitive finding (but one which is quite consistent with our previous “non-finding” with regard to “cyber-variables" in general) allows us to generate a new typology of the ways in which European polities are adapting and adopting ICT in the political realm. By drawing approximate lines through the average scores on the two variables in Figure 9, E-government offer and E-LI, we can observe four distinct clusters among the 15 current member states. These are displayed in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Four Clusters of Response to E-Legislature and E-government



In the upper-right hand corner are the Scandinavian countries, relatively far ahead in both E-LI and E-G. Diametrically opposite, we find those who are lagging behind in both dimensions: The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Austria. Germany and Greece are among the leaders in E-LI, but not in E-G. Ireland stands alone in the lower-right hand corner with a relatively high E-G score and a relatively low E-LI score. The remaining polities tend to cluster around the centre, i.e. seem not yet to have defined their national strategies for exploiting politically the opportunities that ICT offers to them. Only detailed and focused case studies could help us explain this unexpected dispersion within Europe. Our aggregate variables of economic wealth, size, and cyber-characteristics have not been of much help, which leads us to suspect that these divergent (if perhaps temporary) outcomes are being driven by specific public

policies and political pressures in each of the countries. What these are and whether they will persist in generating such distinctive patterns remains to be discovered.

IV Qualitative Aspects

Our principal aim in this section is to supplement the *quantitative* results of the comparative website analysis by presenting a brief survey of the *qualitative* terrain explored by our collaborators. The e-democratic terrain is uneven and, as revealed by the country reports, conspicuously barren in some patches. To further complicate matters it seems to be enveloped by a conceptual mist that obscures its contours, most vividly with regard to the boundary between e-government and e-democracy. This much is to be expected given the embryonic stage at which we find ourselves. In this section we focus on the contours of the e-democratic terrain surveyed by our collaborators. Copious amounts of data have been collected and assembled, six in-depth case studies and 26 country reports amounting to over 350 pages of text, all of which provide us with a rich qualitative data base to further explore the findings presented in Part III. To aid us in the exploration we return to the working definition of e-democracy provided in Part II:

> e-Democracy consists of all electronic means of communication that enable/empower citizens in their efforts to hold rulers/politicians accountable for their actions in the public realm. Depending on the aspect of democracy being promoted, e-democracy can employ different techniques: (1) for increasing the transparency of the political process; (2) for enhancing the direct involvement and participation of citizens; and, (3) improving the quality of opinion formation by opening new spaces of information and deliberation.

As stated in Part II there is a somewhat hazy boundary between the e-democratic terrain and that of e-government. The two may be linked (although the clusters of countries identified in Part III show that this need not be the case), furthermore, they may even share similar techniques. Nonetheless, they are conceptually distinct. E-government refers to the use of information and communication technologies for making government operate more efficiently. The working definition above is, amongst other things, our attempt at making this conceptual distinction clearer. The country reports reveal that the e-government/e-democracy distinction is blurred and that this may be so for some very good reasons. This last point warrants further explication. It is summed up most succinctly in the Lithuanian report where the

government plans to use the principles (and technology) of e-government as a gateway to e-democracy. This point is expanded by the UK report which documents how the large and expanding e-government infrastructure provides a potentially rewarding technological platform for further e-democratic experimentation. In the UK the commitment to e-government has been substantial and the same can be said for most of the accession states. Here we come across some interesting findings with the country reports revealing a prioritisation of e-government initiatives, especially in the cases of Estonia, Latvia, Lithaunia, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia. Although this is not always explicitly stated in the country reports, part of the (indirect) push behind the flurry of e-government initiatives can be traced to a very conscious effort, on the part of the European Commission, to promote the technology and especially the infrastructure of e-government in the accession countries. The push to bring public administrations closer to the citizen using ICT's forms an integral component of the eEurope + Action Plan[19]. The Action Plan argues that "electronic public administration can make a major contribution to accelerating the transition to the knowledge-based economy in the Candidate Countries by stimulating access to and use of basic on-line government services"[20]. Although the eEurope + Action Plan was prepared by the candidate countries themselves the "assistance of the European Commission" is noted in the title. It is essentially a carbon copy of the e-Europe Action Plan (note the missing plus sign) for the EU-15. The plus sign (presumably) draws attention to the extra or specific needs of the candidate countries. In sum, this brings to the fore the proactive push by the Commission to encourage member states and the accession countries to advance the roll out of online government services. The so-called "open method of co-ordination" with its emphasis on learning through monitoring was the preferred means by which to bring about this policy goal. Although it is not possible to infer that the Commission has been the principal driver of initiatives in the domain of e-government it has obliged national governments to focus on a common issue and, perhaps even more importantly, exposed their performance to peer review and public scrutiny. The country reports reflect this prioritisation of e-government which may ultimately, as the Lithuanian and UK reports suggest, offer a gateway to e-democracy.

[19] See the European Commission's 2001 eEurope + Action Plan available at http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/international/regulatory/eeuropeplus/doc/eEurope_june2001.pdf

[20] see ibid pp20

We now return to our working definition of e-democracy and attempt to identify and provide some real case examples of the techniques of e-democracy and how these are being used to varying results in the European countries we survey. The matrix below conceptually organises five e-techniques we survey according to the particular aspects of democracy they are intending to promote.

Figure 11: Matrix of e-techniques and aspects of democracy promoted

		ASPECTS OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTED		
		Increasing Transparency	**Increasing participation**	**Increasing deliberation**
E-TECHNIQUES	**e-access**	**X**		
	e-consultation		**X**	
	e-petition		**X**	
	e-voting		**X**	
	e-forums			**X**

(1) e-Techniques for increasing transparency

In this section we focus on e-access, which is broadly defined as the use of the internet to improve electronic access to official documents and to political information. The hope of e-democracy advocates is that improved facilities to access official documents and political information will enhance the transparency of the political process and the quality of opinion formation leading to a greater political involvement of citizens.

Our case studies and country reports find that, not surprisingly, e-access seems to be the predominant e-technique for most political actors (Parliaments, political parties, NGOs and intermediary organisations, candidate's website etc.) and at all the levels (local, national, European). This confirms the findings of the

comparative website analysis which found that information provision tends to feature as the most important priority for both parliaments and political parties. The accession countries do not seem to be an exception to this rule and offer some interesting examples of e-access. At the local level Slovakia has developed the ISOMI (information systems of town and municipalities) that aims to link each town and municipality, co-ordinating webpage structures and content. The emphasis is clearly on e-access with limited e-consultation initiatives like that of the town of Bratislava[21]. What is perhaps most revealing from the case studies are the variety of forms that e-access can acquire. Indeed, e-access may not even incorporate political information. This is the case for the websites of Greek local authorities that tend to focus disproportionately on offering information about local history, culture, geography and for promoting tourist sites. We cannot generalise from this specific example since Greece is heavily dependent on its tourist industry. The Italian country report too reveals that political information may not be a top priority. Although the site of the current Prime Minister was well structured and contained plenty of information, further analysis suggests that over time there has been a diminishing provision of political information.

Another important distinction is that political information can also be of a *partisan* or a *plural* nature. The former tends to be the dominant type of information provided by political parties' websites. But, as the case study on Partito Radicale shows, exceptions do exist. Partito Radicale provides an extensive amount of institutional, non mediated and plural information. The question has been raised whether we can expect other parties to follow such an example. This is unlikely since parties do not necessarily have the political incentives to provide a plurality of information to their sympathisers. This is reiterated by the Irish country report which argues that political parties seem to use their website presence as a complementary broadcast opportunity.

Although political parties may not provide a plural/civic information space some country reports suggest that such spaces can be found via other political actors such as NGO's and other intermediary organisations, including the media. In The Netherlands an NGO website[22] offers a comparative presentation of political party programs arranged according to topic, candidate or party and based on

[21] See www.bratislava.sk.
[22] See www.allesoverdeverkiezingen.nl

demographics such as age, sex and residence of the candidate. A more elaborate information site[23] was developed in Germany for the national election of 2002. The latter not only allowed prominent politicians the opportunity to make their views known but also offered the possibility to contact them and provided political discussion forums.

The Dutch and Finnish country reports identified a particularly interesting form of e-democratic experimentation – a tool which matches website visitor's preferences with the stated political stance of candidates or political parties. This is an interactive technique whereby website visitors answer a series of multiple-choice questions on current affairs issues which are subsequently compared with the information provided by the candidates and political parties. The e-technique identifies the candidates and parties that are closest and furthest from the visitor's political preferences. Such a system has been developed with great success in The Netherlands for the parliamentary elections held in January 2003. For further information on the *StemWijzer*[24], which was consulted over two million times see The Netherlands country report. A similar tool has been used in Finland during the election of 2003[25]. Again, participation was high with several hundred thousand hits during electoral campaigns.

(2) e-Techniques for increasing participation

In this section we focus on three e-techniques: e-consultation, e-petition and e-voting.

We begin with E-consultation which refers to the use of the internet to disseminate to the wider public, experts and interest groups developments in a policy field and invite them to respond. The e-democratic hope behind the promotion of e-consultation techniques is to encourage the general public, interest groups and experts to participate in the decision-making process.

The country reports provide some interesting examples of e-consultation experimentation at different levels and by different actors. At the local level e-consultation experiments have been implemented in various Slovenian municipalities. In France the cities of Issy-les-Moulineaux (see the case study for

[23] See www.politik-digital.de/
[24] See www.stemwijzer.nl
[25] A similar initiative is currently developed in Switzerland for the October 2003 Federal elections. See www.smartvote.ch/

further details), Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy and Brest have provided such e-techniques, as has the city of Esslingen in Germany. At the regional level e-consultation has been developed by the regional government of La Rioja (AGORA) in Spain and at the national level there is the example of "Today I Decide" in Estonia. Finally, at the EU level, e-consultation techniques have been adopted for the EU Convention on the Future of Europe. The Convention had a duty to "involve all citizens" as called for by the December 2001 Laeken Declaration. The latter also called for "initiatives to develop a European public area" with the internet as potentially a key factor. In many respects the Convention was an ideal test-case for e-democracy: it combined an opportunity for strong public focus on a high-profile debate and Europe's special need for transparent, transnational, and multilingual connections with citizens. Notably, during most of the Convention process watchers had few other sources of information than the internet. Nonetheless, the forum element (the Futurum website) was not a convincing hub of discussion and the EU Convention President's web-chat was a rare example of interactivity.

The country reports show that e-consultation can take a variety of technological formats (forums, invitation to send e-mails, chat with political leader) and that they can focus on very different topics: from questions related to urban planning to e-consultation on prospective bills ("Today I decide" in Estonia) or on ongoing debates during the Municipal Council meetings (see the case study on Issy-les-Moulineaux). Concerning outcomes, however, the general trend seems to be towards relatively low levels of participation. Moreover, it has been observed that participation is generally dominated by males and opinion leaders (see Issy-les-Moulineaux case study and the German country report on Esslingen).

Different reasons have been put forward for explaining low levels of participation. One common reason is that many citizens feel that their participation will not have any impact on the final decision itself. For example a participant in the Futurum website (on the EU Convention) asked "who reads what we write?". Nonetheless in cases such as Issy-les-Moulineaux, where local representatives respond comprehensively and with attention to detail, participation still tends to be low and elitist.

A second potentially useful participatory e-democratic technique is the so-called e-petition. This tool uses the internet to enable citizens to initiate a petition on a public issue, invite others to signal their support and finally submit their petition.

Various initiatives have been identified by the country reports and case studies. Partito Radicale[26] has offered its website visitors the possibility to not only sign petitions online but to also leave personal comments. Moreover, it has also promoted international level petitions by linking up with the Transnational Radical Party. In the UK it is possible to send an e-petition directly to the Prime Minister. 10 Downing Street (the Prime Minister's website) accepts and responds online to e-petitions. Organisers are invited to set up a website, to explain the purpose of the petition and to collect signatures electronically. The website contained 14 e-petitions[27] on a variety of topics ranging from the closure of a local school[28] (360 signatures), opposition to a bill on live music[29] (83440 signatures) to an anti-Iraq war e-petition[30] (14479 signatures). While the UK offers a top-down approach the Portuguese country report singles out a relatively successful bottom-up e-petition. The Portuguese GUIA/PASIG (Portuguese Accessibility Special Interest Group), an association promoting the rights of disabled peopled, was able to develop an effective awareness campaign using ICTs. This social movement used online tools to develop mailing lists and online discussion groups to mobilise support. It culminated in the first Portuguese e-petition and legislators have subsequently revised the rules and regulations on popular petitions to accept signatures collected and validated electronically. Other bottom-up e-petitions by civil society organisations were noted in the Slovak country report. The group "Internet for all"[31] began a protest campaign against the increase of internet access prices and "Changenet"[32], another civil society group, initiates e-petitions on issues involving civil society. Although the examples cited above offer some innovative experiments with e-petition, there is no reason to believe – as noted by the Irish report - that e-petitions will become popular in countries which do not have a tradition of such political practices.

The last participatory e-democratic techniques we focus on is one that has probably achieved the greatest degree of media exposure, e-voting. For many countries to offer e-voting is an item of significant controversy and this is especially the case for the United States. Furthermore there is still considerable ambiguity with

[26] See the case study on Partito Radicale
[27] Website visited on 1/10/03 see http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page297.asp
[28] Petition against the proposed closure of Aycliffe Village Primary School, Submitted on 18 July 2003
[29] Licensing bill effects on live music, submitted on 25 June 2003
[30] No to war on Iraq, Submitted on 11 March 2003
[31] See www.bystro.sk

regard to the precise meaning of the term e-voting. Two e-voting models that markedly differ, in terms of their security implications and the convenience they offer, can be identified. The first model represents less of a departure from existing electoral practices and simply replaces existing paper ballots with a machine that records votes locally then transfers those votes via the internet to election headquarters. The e-democratic implications of model 1 are minor. In the second model voters are offered the possibility of voting from any terminal or computer connected to the internet to cast their vote. The e-democratic implications of model 2 are significant. Both models are the subject of the case study on the Spanish Region of Valencia, with a particular emphasis on the former. We can further distinguish between two types of e-voting:

1) In the first, citizens are offered the possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted. We refer to this as an *e-referendum* and depending on the national rules, the outcome may be binding or non-binding and initiated by citizens and/or government. An example of this is the binding e-referendum that took place in January 2003 in the commune of Anières (Canton of Geneva, Switzerland). Turnout was unusually high at over 65 per cent, with almost half of the actual votes cast via the internet[33].

2) The second type can be referred to as an *e-election*. It relates to the use of the internet for casting a ballot that is transmitted to electoral officials via the Internet. It may also include supplementary mechanisms for the online registration of voters. The aim of its promoters is to facilitate greater participation in the electoral process by enhancing voter convenience. In the case of e-elections within parties, e.g. for primaries or for electing party leaders, the vote is transmitted via the internet to party officials.

Apart from the Geneva experience our case studies and country reports do not report any major e-referendum initiatives[34], although, given the proliferation of e-election pilots there is no *a priori* reason to expect that these will not become more prevalent in polities where referendums are feature of the political landscape. Our case studies and country reports do, however, reveal important e-election initiatives. No e-enabled general/national election has yet taken place although much e-

[32] See www.changenet.sk
[33] See www.ge.ch
[34] The Latvian report notes, however, that e-referendums are an item on the agenda although no concrete initiative has yet been taken.

democratic experimentation has occurred at the local level. With regard to the former the UK e-envoy envisages a general election after 2006[35] while Estonian plans to hold an e-enabled national election in 2003 have been postponed. The Estonian country report details how this initiative was pursued by a political elite in the absence of political discussion by the media, or academia, and how it was postponed, most likely, because a coalition partner (the Rural Party) feared an erosion of its vote. Concerning the local level the case study on the e-voting pilots in the UK documents how legislative modifications[36] paved the way for e-voting experimentation, which has put the UK in the e-election pole position. However, from a democratic theory perspective a much more promising e-election initiative has been implemented by the Partito Radicale, with its emphasis on the deliberative dimension (online forums) and the extended plurality of online information provided via its website[37].

(3) e-Techniques for promoting new spaces of deliberation

In this section we focus on the development of e-forums. This latter e-technique provides citizens with an online tool that allows them to exchange and share respective political opinions among themselves. The aspiration of e-democracy advocates is that e-forums will enhance the process of citizen's opinion formation through their deliberative engagement.

We saw in the Part III of the report that e-forums were not widely used by European political parties and Parliaments. An overview of the country reports and case studies suggests that with the exception of media sites, e-forums tend not to be widely developed by national, regional or local authorities nor are they widely used by NGOs. With regard to media and other intermediary organisations the accession countries provide some interesting examples. In Slovenia the Union of Engineers (ZSIS) has a developed an online forum for its members while the Slovenian E-Forum (SEF) has developed a communication portal that allows for online participation, e-petition and e-forums concerning environmental issues. Poland's NGO's as well as certain religious groups, have also been experimenting with the interactivity opportunities offered by the internet. However, it is the Polish media sites

[35] See the case study on the e-voting pilots in the UK
[36] The Representation of the People Act 2000
[37] For further information see the Partito Radical case study

that are the most advanced and have the necessary resources to develop online interactivity. The major Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*[38], in particular, has lively discussion forums which are moderated. A similar trend occurs in Hungary where one of the biggest players in the Hungarian media sector has an online news portal[39] that regularly provides discussion forums and interviews with politicians in real time and has circa 150,000 users. It appears that minor media players lack the resources, economic and human, to offer such interactivity. Some Hungarian environmental NGO's are also using the internet to mobilise, offer lively forums and provide access to newsletters.

It seems that public authorities are lagging behind in the development of online forums. There are, however, some notable exceptions. The Netherlands country report provides an example of a local level initiative, the Hoogeven Digital city[40]. It offers three forms of online discussion: the *digital consultation hour* during which a local government representative answers questions posed by local residents related to a particular policy issue. The *digital debate* which was organised as part of the 2002 municipal election campaign. In addition it has a 24-hour *online discussion platform* that resembles conventional internet-based discussion lists. At the regional level in Spain various initiatives have been implemented by a coalition of left and green parties offering the possibility to debate regional issues ("I tu que opinas"). Another example of a regional initiative is the county government in Northern Denmark that has organised a website[41] for the regional elections in 2001, with a focus on creating forums where young people are invited to interact with politicians. The project was quite successful both from the point of view of the quantity and quality of participation.

Generally, however, it has been observed that online forums tend to be rather low in terms of participation and quality. Suggestions have been put forward in some of the country reports on how to deal with this problem. The German country report suggests that in order to promote higher participation in political forums a greater media exposure (especially TV and newspapers) is required while the Danish country report suggests that the quality of the debate can be enhanced through a limited moderation and by clearly structuring debates with a small number of pre-defined

[38] www.rzeczpospolita.pl
[39] www.origo.hu
[40] See www.hoogeveen.nl
[41] See www.nordpol.dk

debate topics. Finally, the case study of Partito Radicale indicates that the high participation of its forum is rooted in its participatory political culture.

* * *

This qualitative foray into the e-democratic terrain has revealed some notable findings regarding the variety of e-techniques that are being implemented by political actors and the particular aspects of democracy they aim to promote. Much of the experimentation has been undertaken by public authorities at the local/regional levels and, concerning the all important e-forum dimension, by intermediary organisations with significant resources. Of the e-techniques being experimented with, e-access is undoubtedly the most widespread. This much is to be expected given its potential role as a precursor to further e-democratic experimentation. The danger, however, of a *vitrine* phenomenon whereby websites are merely used for displaying political stances on issues or circulating newsletters is ever present. With regard to e-consultation and e-forums, apart from a few notable examples, results have been rather disappointing. At the same time e-voting pilot projects are certainly becoming a more common feature of the European political landscape although, for the time being, the jury is still out on its benefits. One important point must be noted, the e-techniques we have presented above **are not in any way mutually exclusive**. On the contrary, one can imagine - and our survey suggests - that overlapping and mutually reinforcing e-democratic combinations are possible.

V. Instead of Conclusions

A study of this nature cannot arrive at conclusions – at least, not in the sense of scientifically established "truths." The subject matter it deals with is simply evolving too fast. Even if our collaborators were diligent, accurate and conscientious in their collection of data (and we believe that they were), the data that they collected some months ago is probably already out of date. The correlations that we have observed (or, better, **not** observed) within and across each unit may not be stable, due to powerful forces of diffusion from one unit to another. We have intervened in the early stages of a process of fundamental change in the technology of democracy and it is much too early to predict how far it is going or how much it will transform the ways in which parliaments and parties operate. Moreover, the time limits imposed upon us mean that we are still far from exploiting all the data that are available to us – something we hope to do in an eventual book-length manuscript in the near future.

All these caveats aside, we have produced some findings. They may prove to be ephemeral, but we are convinced that they are important. And they are unique, in the sense that both the volume of data we have compiled and the variety of methods we have applied to analyze them has not and can not be duplicated anywhere. For the moment and until refuted by subsequent research, we believe that the following observations are valid summaries of the relation between ICT and the development of parliamentary and party websites. Putatively speaking, they are also significant for the evolving relation between ICT and E-Democracy:

There is considerable variation in the use of ICT by both parliaments and parties at the national and supra-national level. We take this as an indirect indicator of uncertainty and experimentation by those involved with regard to the efficacy/efficiency of the multiple applications of ICT to politics. No one yet knows what works best and there is not yet a standard "model" – European or American – for others to copy.

Existing Member states of the European Union have more highly developed parliamentary and party websites than do candidate states. Nevertheless, there is a considerable overlap in this regard and anecdotal evidence suggests that the latter are catching up very fast to the former.

The quality of website development for parliaments and parties are strongly correlated at the national level. We presume that this is most likely due to differences in the quality of ICT expertise (and, perhaps, to the political clout of hardware and software producers) in each country, but have no proof of this.

The quality of parliamentary websites tends to be slightly superior to that of party websites. We interpret this to be due to superior financial resources and to greater staff familiarity with ICT, rather than to a diffusion mechanism whereby parliaments are "teaching" parties how to make use of ICT.

Large countries (with larger and, presumably, more resourceful) parliaments tend to have more developed websites and, by inference, to be further along the route to eventual E-Democracy. This is not true, however, of their political parties. These do no better than those in smaller countries.

Higher levels of wealth and economic development do not automatically produce better websites either for parliaments or for parties. Our interpretation of this finding is that all European countries have crossed the threshold of sufficient development (and sufficient expertise in ICT) and are, therefore, more or less equally capable of experimenting with E-Democracy.

The nature of the party system – its fragmentation, ideological orientation, level of electoral turnout and, to a lesser degree the distribution of major and minor parties – does not seem to have a significant effect upon parliamentary or party website development and, by inference, on the potential for E-Democracy. This is definitely a counter-intuitive finding considering the emphasis placed on these variables when it comes to other aspects of the technology of democracy where innovations by one party tend to force imitation by others. Perhaps, this is an indirect indication that ICT use is still in its infancy and has yet to demonstrate its comparative advantage.

The level of ICT use and access in the general public does not seem to have a corresponding impact upon its use by parliaments or parties, at least not in their development of websites. This may be the most surprising finding of all, since the literature insists that ICT is at the core of a comprehensive Cyber-revolution that is invading and transforming all aspects of our economic, social and political existence. Our interpretation is that movement in the direction of E-Democracy is very much dependent upon political strategy and public policy. It is in other words a discretionary, not an imperative matter. Politicians have to understand what are its advantages and disadvantages and they must decide whether or not to accept its risks. Otherwise, they will ignore or oppose it and continue with their legislative or partisan business as usual.

Our initial "null-hypothesis," namely, that the introduction of ICT would not radically transform the nature of liberal democracy seems, so far, to be confirmed. There is nothing in our correlations that suggests that those units further advanced in their website development have entered into large-scale and irrevocable changes in the way that they practice liberal democracy at either the national or the supra-national level. However, the code word is "so far." We have caught this process at a relatively early stage and it would definitely be premature to assess its eventual impact on the basis of what we have discovered. No one (certainly, not the authors of this report) believes that the impact of ICT will end with the proliferation of better designed websites!

Our "ambivalence" hypothesis, namely, that ICT would not necessarily benefit one party or political force over another, has also stood up rather well. The absence of any correlation between various characteristics of the political process and the level of website development by either parliaments or parties adds some compellingness to our initial argument. However, this finding seems to us to be counter-intuitive since we might have expected some "first-mover" advantages to accrue to those parties – whether major or minor, whether of the Left or the Right – that adopted ICT before the others. Probably, the reason for this is that, having a more developed website, may not yet generate a significant enough advantage over one's political opponents. If and when it does, our assumption would be that this technology of democracy will be imitated by late-comers and the advantage will

eventually be nullified. We accept the laconic conclusion of Joseph S. Nye Jr., a leading American expert on E-Democracy, "One can imagine both a better and a worse political world resulting from the impact of the third information revolution."[42]

Finally, we have anticipated a few critical reactions to our findings. They do not so much invalidate them as qualify their import. Our reader should consider them as "potentially extenuating factors."

Our E-LI and E-PI indicators may not be completely valid indicators of website development by parliaments or parties or both. This is a perennial problem with the social sciences. One is almost always measuring properties of something that is a "theoretical construct" and never measuring the construct itself. There may indeed be other characteristics of websites that might be more significant, even specific to these peculiar political institutions. If so, we have neither found them nor measured them.

Website development may not be as significant a measure of relative progress toward E-Democracy as we have asserted. Since we do not yet know what E-Democracy will be, we cannot know what will precede and lead to it. It is conceivable that a polity (especially at the local level) may move quite dramatically toward, say, E-Voting in elections or referendums without any prior website development at all by its parliament and parties. We doubt this, but could be proven wrong – somewhere.

The analysis of website development pays almost exclusive attention to the supply of ICT-provided information and interactive potentiality and tends to ignore the demand for it. In our one effort to combine the two, i.e. when we tested for the interactivity of parliamentary websites, we came up with a paradox: some of those with the most information, highest user-friendliness and greatest potential for interactivity generated the lowest level of response. This is definitely an aspect of the evolving use of ICT for political purposes that deserves more empirical attention and we hope to provide it in our eventual book manuscript.

[42] "Information Technology and Democratic Governance," in Elaine C. Kamarack & Joseph S. Nye, Jr (eds.), Governance.Com: Democracy in the Information Age (Washington, DC: Brooking Institution Press, 2002), p. 11.

VI Recommendations

We have no recommendations with regard to the promotion or regulation of the use of ICT by parliaments and parties. This is a process that is dynamic and incomplete, and whose connection with eventual e-democracy is, as yet, unclear. Policy intervention whether by national or European authorities could risk not only failing to produce intended results, but also produce unintended and possibly unwanted ones. Our hunch is that, once it is clearly demonstrated that the use of ICT in general and the development of better websites in particular are politically advantageous, this will diffuse itself throughout the respective polities at all levels of aggregation. Competition for votes or for influence will generate a tendency toward saturation in the use of these practices and this outcome should be self-policing. Probably at different rates and times, we infer that these innovations in website development will extend to other technologies of e-democracy.

Our only recommendation is that this report in its entirety be circulated as widely as possible among politicians in parliaments and parties at all levels of Europe's "multi-level system of governance." Thanks to its appendices, every parliament and party will be able to assess its relative position with regard to E-LI and E-PI, and draw their own conclusions about possible improvements. Thanks to its analyses, both politicians and citizens can be reasonably assured that the diffusion of ICT and its use for political purposes in websites has not yet produced major distortions in the conditions under which parties compete for support and parliaments seek legitimacy. We do believe, however, that it is important to monitor these developments for the emergence of potential distortions and suggest that the European Parliament appoint a working group of academics to periodically review its data and results. In a similar vein the European Commission should consider incorporating an e-democracy focus to its future eEurope Action Plans.

* * *

We have taken a long journey into previously un-explored political territory. At best, we have identified some of its emerging characteristics, but there is still a lot more to learn about the magnitude and impact of applying new information and

communications technologies to the well-established (but malleable) institutions of liberal democracy. We may eventually arrive at something that could be recognised as electronic democracy, but we are still a long way from it. Moreover, we Europeans do not seem to be following the same trails – especially with regard to the combination of e-government and e-democracy. Whether these different paths to the future will prove to be convergent (as we are inclined to believe) or divergent remains to be discovered.

Geneva & Florence, October 8 2003