

Annex to the Political Evaluation of the common campaign 2014 European elections - for information

Evaluation of the GREEN PRIMARY 2014

At the EGP Autumn Council 2013 in Brussels, the EGP launched the first pan-European open online primary (“Green Primary”). It was explicitly run as an experiment to be evaluated post festum. In the context of EGPs’ personalisation strategy, the main idea behind the Primary was to choose two Green leading candidates for the European Elections in an innovative and participatory way. With the Primary and the European Green *Spitzenkandidaten* or *Leading Candidates*, the EGP contributed, together with other European party families, to a new chapter in European democracy: the selection of the European Commission President on the basis of the outcome of the European Elections – not as a result of a backroom deal between national governments. Moreover, the Primary was supposed to serve as a pre-campaign to the common campaign and the Member Parties’ efforts for the election. For good reasons, the voting phase of the Primary was scheduled for a period of over two months (10/11/2013 – 28/01/2014): it allowed Member Parties enough time to mobilise in their countries and for the media and public to understand and cover the new process - as primaries are not part of the usual conduct of parties. After a two-step nomination process, four Green politicians stood as Primary candidates and received these numbers of votes: Ska Keller (11,791), José Bové (11,726), Rebecca Harms (8,170), Monica Frassoni (5,851). In total, 22,676 people participated in the Primary. Participants came from every EU member state. After an initial peak at launch, participation was slow until the last 14 days.

Over the course of the Primary the EGP received a high amount of media coverage. The EGP monitored media reports in 17 countries. Certainly, the quality of the coverage varied, but the bulk was positive, for instance reports on ZDF, in Le Monde and Libération, TVE and Rai. A rather negative framing appeared in some reports in German media. Besides the media, civil society organisations also became interested in the Primary. Berlin-based think tank *politik-digital* called the Primary a “role-model for transnational E-democracy”; the European Youth Forum praised the Primary as an effective way to engage young people; Professor Simon Hix, Director of VoteWatch, also welcomed the Primary.¹

After the Primary, Member Parties reported that they faced difficulties in mobilising participants, which is reflected in the low participation rate. However, in many countries the Primary created positive public attention, which would not have been possible without it. Member Parties were satisfied with what followed on from the Primary: the performance of Ska and José as the EGP’s *Spitzenkandidaten*. In summary, with the Primary the EGP has been a frontrunner in terms of a pan-European and participatory selection process; in giving Green minded citizens in Europe a say; in facilitating European debate; in allowing young people aged 16 or older to participate; and in emancipating the role of European political parties.

Decision-making process

- **Committee Meeting, December 2012:** First discussion on the Primary idea. The EGP committee is favorable towards looking into it.
- **Party Leaders Meeting, March 2013:** Lots of support for the Primary idea, but also some criticism and reluctance.

¹ “The project Green Primary” (in DE): <http://politik-digital.de/europawahlkampf-2-0-das-projekt-green-primary>;
Study on Youth Absenteeism: http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/02/YFJ-LYV_StudyOnYouthAbsenteeism_WEB.pdf;
Tweet by Simon Hix: <https://twitter.com/simonjihix/status/422299908323180544>

- **EGP Spring Council 2013, 10-12 May in Madrid:** In the adopted “Annex A to the EGP Activities Plan 2013” the Council requested the EGP Committee to prepare the organisation of the election of two leading candidates by means of an open online primary.² A vast majority voted in favour of the Primary.
- **Party Leaders Meeting, 3 September 2013 in Brussels:** The EGP Committee presented a draft resolution on the Primary for the Autumn Council and discussed it with Party Leaders. There was broad support for the draft resolution. The EGP’s technical partner, Scytl, presented a proposal for the Primary online voting platform.
- **EGP Autumn Council, 8-10 November 2013 in Brussels:** The Council adopted the Primary resolution (78 in favour, 0 against, 7 abstentions), which approves the Primary process and specifies the rules, requirements and procedures of the Primary.³

Between these official meetings, the EGP informed and involved Member Parties in the development of the Primary rules and procedure through the Campaign Working Group (meetings on 29/30 June and 29 September), visits to Member Parties congresses and through phone conferences and EGP newsletters.

The process

As a first step in preparing the Primary, the EGP Committee started the search for a company that could provide the necessary technical solution. After consultations with Member Parties that had organised similar projects in the past and with organisations that specialised in the field of e-Democracy, the Swedish firm CloudConnected, the Belgian company Elegio and Barcelona-based Scytl made it onto the shortlist. The ultimate choice of Scytl was based on their experience with multinational electronic elections and their longstanding expertise on encryption and data security. In Summer 2013, Scytl started to develop the Primary platform in all 24 official EU languages and Catalan, in close cooperation with the EGP office and the creative agency KKLD (which created the visual identity of the Primary campaign on the basis of the common campaign to come). The EGP hired Dr. Alexis Xenakis to perform a technical audit of the voting platform and the whole Primary process, and the white-hacker Christian Horchert to perform a security audit of the platform. Dr. Xenakis had no objections on how the Primary was eventually implemented; Horchert judged the platform as relatively “robust” against external attacks. The voting process was formally monitored by a notary.

On 4 September 2013, the EGP sent out a “Call for Candidates to the Green Primary” to EGP Member Parties. As agreed at the Council in Madrid, interested Green politicians had to fulfil two criteria to be admitted as a candidate: Firstly, they needed to be nominated by a EU Member Party or FYEG (by 20 October 2013). Secondly, they needed to collect the support of at least four and a maximum of eight EGP Member Parties from the EU (by 4 November 2013). Six Green personalities were nominated – four of them managed to collect the necessary support, one withdrew and one failed to collect the minimum support. The Autumn Council in Brussels, 8-10 November 2013, presented the four candidates (José Bové, Monica Frassoni, Rebecca Harms and Ska Keller) to the public and the Primary was officially launched in the presence of international media. With the Primary started, the EGP and Member Parties launched a public mobilisation campaign, which was based on visuals and offline and online tools developed in cooperation with the agencies KKLD and JF&C. The flexible campaign material was provided in a toolbox, and much of it was translated by the EGP. Over 100,000 items were directly distributed to Member Parties’ headquarters and regional offices. The online campaign included a dedicated website, social media tools and chats, and hangouts with the contenders. Moreover, the four candidates made a huge effort to run their own campaign with personalised material. During the voting phase, candidates also undertook travelling to (or joining online) ten

² <http://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/imce/Adopted%20Annex%20A%20to%20Activities%20Plan%202013%20-%20Preparations%20EU2014%20Common%20Campaign.pdf>

³ <http://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Resolution%20as%20adopted%20on%20the%20Green%20Primary.pdf>

debates in nine countries (in Athens, Cologne, Gothenburg, Madrid, Berlin, Prague, Rome, London, Paris, and Brussels), which were organised by the local parties and the EGP. On 28 January 2014 voting was closed; the EGP presented the result and the winners in a press conference on the following day. All in all, the candidates, a large number of Member Parties and the EGP and its partners made a great effort to run this Primary campaign.

Plans and outcomes

As laid down in the EGP Activities Plan 2013, the main motivation for organising the Primary was to run a pre-campaign to promote the candidates and create awareness for the European elections and to raise the Greens' profile before the official start of the campaign. It was the assessment of the Committee that a Green Primary would be the most effective way to gather attention and momentum for our electoral campaign. Essentially, it was meant to put the Member Parties in a better starting position for the campaign by creating publicity and increasing campaigning capacities through the collection of email addresses of Green-minded voters. The Primary was also meant to offer an answer to the growing gap between EU institutions and citizens, as it aimed to offer citizens a direct say on the European level and make a step towards a European political space by organising debates across Europe and personalising European politics. In short, the message was "You Decide Europe".

The Council requested the EGP Committee to organise a primary process that "guarantees the credibility and safety of the system used, on the basis of all information available, the accountability and transparency of the system and the process, the privacy and security of the data of the participants, and the anonymity of the votes cast."⁴ In the first phase of the primary process – the nomination and support of candidates – the EGP maintained a website for Member Parties with live updates on the support that the different nominees gained. The Committee installed an Electoral Board - composed of three representatives of Member Parties and three members of the Committee – which supervised the whole voting process, and opened and closed the ballot box with personal electronic keys under the presence of a notary. During the voting phase, the EGP repeatedly informed Member Parties about participation levels in their countries. After the vote was closed, the EGP published the result of each contender and overall European participation.

Data security was a major concern for the EGP throughout the whole process. The unsuccessful hacking attempt of the white-hacker gave trust in the system before the Primary kicked-off. The data of voters was stored during the process on servers in Barcelona and backups were regularly taken by Scytl. Right after the opening of the ballot box, the personal data of the voters were deleted from the database and the backups, which was certified by a notary. Only the names, email addresses and postcodes of those voters who consented to receive the newsletter of the Greens of their country were transferred through a secure link to the respective Member Parties. In total, 9,014 voters (39,75% of all participants) subscribed to newsletters.

Public attention certainly increased during the Primary on the side of the EGP and those Member Parties which organised a Primary debate. The debates attracted 1,500 visitors plus almost 2,000 live stream viewers (in total 4,721 tweets were counted during the debates). All contenders gained additional media exposure and increased their visibility among Greens and the wider public in different countries through the debates and their own media and campaign efforts. Some Member Parties started to mobilise for the Primary later than others. In the end EGP campaign material was used by 24 out of 33 EU Member Parties. One Member Party, the Austrian Greens, explicitly decided not to join the Primary. They informed the EGP about that decision in October.

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<http://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/news/files/Resolution%20as%20adopted%20on%20the%20Green%20Primary.pdf>

The online campaign can be evaluated as a great success: EGP's Facebook likes increased from 10.000 to 40.000, the hashtag #GreenPrimary was used almost 15.000 times. Moreover, the online chats with the contenders reached an audience of between 4,000 and 10,000 per chat and the hangouts were watched by up to 850 people each. Indeed, the cooperation during the Primary between the EGP office and the executive level of the Member Parties laid the foundations for the common campaign: a functioning network and regular communication and coordination mechanisms were put in place, which facilitated an efficient cooperation during the common campaign.

The pre-campaign had high additional value for the organisation of the election campaign to come. The budget of the pre-campaign, including a specification of the costs specifically related to the Green Primary, is included in the annex of this document.

The leading candidates in the electoral campaign

As the two winners of the Primary, Ska and José were tasked to be the European Green campaign leaders. They participated in events of 17 member parties during the common campaign. Ska alone travelled almost 19,000 kilometres and visited 42 cities in 15 countries in just two months. The Member Parties highly appreciated the support of the Green *Spitzenkandidaten* of their national campaigns. Ska and José participated in Presidential (TV) Debates organised by euronews/Maastricht University (Ska), euranet (Ska), Florence University (José) and Eurovision (Ska). Both played a very positive role in these debates and the media honored the different stances and fresh performance they brought to these debates.⁵ In general, the two leading candidates gained a great amount of media coverage: Ska and/or José were mentioned during the campaign in over 4,000 media reports from across Europe. The overall experience with the Green *Spitzenkandidaten* can be evaluated as very positive.

Difficulties and how they were tackled

With the Primary, the EGP entered new territory and became pioneers in the field of EU-wide political online participation. Who should run such an experiment if not us? Being pioneers is never easy and difficulties had to be faced on the way – many of them could be solved, others remained a challenge until the end.

In June 2013 the EGP produced the first information material on the Primary and used occasions like the Green Summer Universities, national and regional Party Congresses and other meetings of grassroots activists to spread information on different levels within and beyond the Member Parties. These meetings were additional informal opportunities to the official EGP meetings to discuss the principal and technical aspects of the primary process, but we have to recognise that overall we did not succeed in mobilising the grassroots Green as much as we would have wanted and as much as it would have been necessary to achieve higher participation.

Technical problems still arose after the launch of the Primary, notably with SMS deliveries to a few countries. This problem was solved after consulting with the contracted company. However, the voting process demanded more than just a click from participants, as the agreed voting solution was a balance between security and accessibility. This is why some participants still found it difficult to understand the procedure right away, especially because of the two ways (email and SMS) in which the credentials for the platform were sent. For these people, the EGP set up a help desk, which provided multilingual support through phone and email. We did not experience a security breach of the system, but improvements could be made on accessibility, as the necessity of certain digital skills and the usage of a mobile phone turned out

⁵ Example of coverage on Eurovision Presidential Debate: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27430515>

to be problematic for some people, in particular older generations.

Some of our activists opposed the Primary on the basis of a very principal argument against electronic voting. This criticism was particularly pertinent in countries like Austria, the Netherlands and Germany. EGP delegates still decided to hold the Primary. We will have to revisit these arguments if and when we come back to these issues in the future.

Major difficulties arose in the mobilisation campaign, as too much explanation was needed to make the Primary relevant for a wider public, for example what was at stake in the Primary, the differences between the contenders, and the eligibility of Green sympathisers to vote and not only Green members. Furthermore, geographical representation in the field of contenders had an impact on mobilisation in parts of the EU. While the participation in the home countries of the contenders (France, Germany, Italy) was comparatively high, participation was low in most Eastern and Nordic countries. A more balanced geographical representation could have led to a higher participation in these regions, as the background of the contenders was one of the main drivers for media coverage and public attention.

The participation can be described as follows:

Less than 100 participants: Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia,

Less than 500 participants: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Sweden

Less than 1,500 participants: Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, UK

Less than 3,000 participants: Belgium, Spain

Above 5,000 participants: France, Germany

The greatest problem was probably that at the time of the Primary, the European Elections had not entered a broader public debate yet – let alone the new *Spitzenkandidaten* process. The latter became only familiar to a wider public with the Presidential debates that were broadcasted in late April and May. In parts of the EU the *Spitzenkandidaten* remained fairly unknown even until Election Day.

Towards the 2019 European Elections

The discussion on the Primary evaluation should be driven by the question: what must, can and should be done better and differently for the European Elections 2019? In that regard, before the planning of the 2019 process starts, a couple of key issues should be resolved: Is primary a good thing or should the EGP return to selecting the *Spitzenkandidaten* at the EGP council? Is electronic voting acceptable or should the EGP resort to another approach and what kind of process would be feasible for the EGP and Member Parties? Should voting be restricted to party members or be more open? How could either of these ways be put on a solid basis? How can Member Party involvement be guaranteed not only in decision-making but also in implementation? Should the EGP have two or only one *Spitzenkandidaten*? How does it look from the budget side? How much direction and coordination is needed from the EGP to enable Member Parties to execute a common campaign in their country? And on a broader level: How can Greens contribute further to a better and more democratic *Spitzenkandidaten* process in European Elections?

Regardless of the questions that we have to deal with, we evaluate the Primary as a worthwhile experiment. The EGP thanks everyone who made this possible, in particular the candidates.

EU ELECTION CAMPAIGN BUDGET:

Pre-campaign expenditures



(1) PRIMARY SPECIFIC COSTS

	Rev. Budget 2013/2014 adopted by the Committee 29 March 2014	Forecast total expenses (rounded)
Primary Process		
Agency fee as contracted	158.000	162.500
Extra requests to the agency	4.259	4.500
SMS costs	8.000	4.100
Legal advice	13.309	13.450
Security audits	14.727	19.000
TOTAL	198.295	203.550

(2) OTHER PRE-CAMPAIGN COSTS

	Rev. Budget 2013/2014 adopted by the Committee 29 March 2014	forecast total expenses (rounded)
Staff expenses		
Staff salaries	81.000	81.000
Volunteers expenses (pro rata in 2014)	18.000	4.200
Meetings		
Primary debates	57.877	54.000
Design and Campaign materials including material for the Primary Pre-Campaign materials and design	55.886	56.000
Publicity / Website interface		
Design and implementation	28.350	40.500
Adjustment during primary	2.777	2.800
Translations/adaptions	25.000	20.000
TOTAL	268.890	258.500

We believe that it would not be adequate to count all pre-campaign costs as related to the Green Primary because we would have had to spend these non-specific pre-campaign costs even if we would not have had organized the Green Primary. We think this allocation of costs to the pre-campaign to be a fair estimate.

Expenditure for staff salaries: Roughly 80.000 EUR of the salaries of the campaign team in the EGP office can be allocated to the pre-campaign, paid between May 2013 and February 2014. This amount equals 61% of the total campaign staff salaries.