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From Measuring Party Positions on European Integration to Comparing Party Proposals on EU Affairs: the Case of the 2011 Spanish General Election

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Abstract

"European integration" has been traditionally considered as a single issue. This paper seeks to make advances in the study of national party positions on European integration by disentangling this concept. First of all, it introduces a new classification for political proposals related to EU affairs. This consists of 29 categories organized into 3 groups: (i) the European integration process, (ii) institutions and actors, and (iii) EU public policies. This new classification system is then applied to examine the case of the 2011 Spanish general election. Proposals related to EU affairs present in the programs of all parties that obtained representation in the *Congreso de los Diputados* on this election are coded and compared. Data is employed from the *MRG-CMP-MARPOR* for all Spanish general elections since the adhesion of this country to the then European Community (EC), in 1986. The methodology is content analysis. The research questions addressed are: (i) To what extent are EU issues important to Spanish national parties since the entrance of Spain into the EC in the late 80´s?; (ii) How diverse were Spanish parties´ proposals concerning these matters in the 2011 general election?

FROM MEASURING PARTY POSITIONS ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION TO COMPARING PARTY PROPOSALS ON EU AFFAIRS: THE CASE OF THE 2011 SPANISH GENERAL ELECTION[1]

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This paper tries to make a modest contribution to the debate on the Europeanization (or the adaptation to the EU) of national party politics by: i) drawing up a new scheme to gather reliable and comparable data on national parties´ proposals about issues decided at the supranational level; and ii) applying this scheme to code 13 party manifestos of the 2011 Spanish general election in order to analyse the scope of that political offer.

Seminal studies on the Europeanization of national parties and party systems argued that this was limited.[2] Notwithstanding, P. Mair highlighted the cutback in the area of national party competition due to EU membership. Today, a much smaller number of issues are decided exclusively within each Member State in the EU. But, the *decrease in the area of national party competition* underlined by P. Mair is not a direct effect of European integration. This paper highlights that general elections are also about decisions taken at the supranational level, made, among others, by national governments as members of the European Council and the Council of the EU.

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[1] This paper is based on another prepared for the 7th ECPR General Conference, Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013. The author is very grateful for the input made by the reviewers of this Working Paper.

[2] See, for example: N. Ayllot, L. Morales and L. Ramiro, «Some things change, a lot stays the same», in T. Poguntke *et al.* eds. *The Europeanization of National Political Parties*, London: Routledge, 2007; R. Ladrech, «Europeanization and Political Parties: Towards a Framework for Analyis», *Party Politics*, Vol. 8, 2002, pp. 389-403; R. Ladrech, «Europeanization and national party organization. Limited but appropriate adaptation?», in T. Poguntke *et al.* eds. *The Europeanization of National Political Parties*, London: Routledge, 2007; P. Mair «The Limited Impct of Europe on National Party Systems», *West European Politics*, Vol. 23, pp. 27-51, 2000; P. Mair «Political Parties and Party Systems», in P. Graziano and M.P. Vink, eds. *Europeanization: new research agendas*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2007 ; L. Ramiro and L. Morales «European Integration and Spanish Parties: Elite Empowerment and Spanish Adaptation», in T. Poguntke *et al.* eds. *The Europeanization of National Political Parties*, London: Routledge, 2007; T. Raunio «Resisting Change: European Integration and National Party Systems», in R. Holzhacker and E. Albaek eds. *Democratic Governance and European Integration. Linking Societal and State Processes of Democracy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2007.

The classification presented and used in this study allows tracking the scope of national party competition on EU affairs. The scheme is a coding system for programmatic proposals on EU matters that disentangles party positions on "European integration", traditionally considered as a single issue, in order to allow rigorous and rich cross-party and cross-time comparisons. The new classification consists of 29 categories organized into 3 groups: (i) European integration process, (ii) institutions and actors, and (iii) EU public policies.

The research questions addressed in this paper are: (i) to what extent are EU issues important to Spanish national parties since the adhesion of this country to the European Community (EC) in 1986?; and (ii) how diverse were Spanish parties´ proposals concerning these matters in the 2011 general election?

Table 1: Vote share (%) and number of seats in the *Congreso de los Diputados* (after 2011 Spanish General Election)

Party	Vote share (%)	Number of seats
Partido Popular (PP)	45.24	186
Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)	29.13	110
Convergéncia i Unió (CiU)	4.24	16
Izquierda Unida (IU)	7.02	11
Amaiur	1.39	7
Partido Nacionalista Vasco/Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea (PNV/EAJ)	1.35	5
Unión Progreso y Democracia (UPyD)	4.76	5
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)	1.07	3
Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG)	0.77	2
Coalición Canaria (CC)	0.6	2
Compromís-Q	0.52	1
Foro Asturias (FAC)	0.41	1
Geroa Bai	0.18	1
Total	100	350

Source: Spanish Ministry of Home Affairs

The materials used are the programs of the parties that obtained representation in the *Congreso de los Diputados* during the 2011 Spanish general election. Table 1, which can be found above, shows all the parties that obtained representation in Congress in the 2011 elections, with their voting percentage and the number of seats obtained. Data from the *Manifesto Research Group - Comparative Manifestos Project - Manifesto Research on Political Representation* (hereinafter referred to as MRG-CMP-MARPOR) was also used. The methodology applied was content analysis.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section presents the new coding system for party proposals on EU affairs; the second contains the discussion on the relevance and scope of EU issues in Spanish general elections, with a special focus on the 2011 elections; the concluding remarks constitute the last section of the paper.

1. The new classification scheme for party proposals on the European integration process, the political system and EU public policies

The coding system for party proposals on EU affairs is complementary to the classification scheme of the MRG-CMP-MARPOR, whose vast and reliable database is worth noting, as what allows for such comprehensive comparison of ideological positions, political preferences and the electoral competition both across time and cross-culturally.[3] However, for the purpose of our study, the standard scheme of the MRG-CMP-MARPOR only provides measures of party positioning in favour of and against "European integration" considered as a single issue, but not substantial data on the proposals that political parties put forward on different EU matters.

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[3] See: S. Alonso, A. Volkens and B. Gómez, *Análisis de contenido de textos políticos. Un enfoque cuantitativo*, Madrid: CIS, 2012; S. Alonso, B. Gómez and L. Cabeza, «Measuring Centre-Periphery Preferences: The Regional Manifestos Project», *Regional & Federal Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp 189-211, 2013; I. Budge *et al. Mapping Policy Preferences. Estimates for Parties, Electors and Governments 1945-1998*, Oxford: OUP, 2001; H.-D. Klingemann *et al. Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments in Eastern Europe, the European Union and the OECD, 1990-2003*, Oxford: OUP, 2006; A. Volkens, *Manifesto Coding Instructions* (2th ed. rev.), Discussion Paper DE III 02-201, Berlin: WZB, 2002; A. Volkens *et al. The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto project* (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Berlin: WZB, 2012.

Specifically, the MRG-CMP-MARPOR scheme for systematizing programmatic preferences concerning the political system, policy and politics distinguishes 56 categories. This categorises governmental performance into 7 areas: "External Relations", "Freedom and Democracy", "Political System", "Economy", "Welfare and Quality of Life", "Fabric of Society", and "Social Groups". Two of the 56 categories, included in area 1, "External Relations", are linked to the EU; they are: "European Community/European Union: positive" and "European Community/European Union: negative".[4]

When using both categories together, it is possible to calculate, not only the position combined with salience, but also the pure position with regard to the EU as expressed in the programs.[5] The position combined with salience is calculated by reducing the percentage of category 110 to the percentage of category 108. The pure position is achieved by dividing the result of the above subtraction from the sum of the percentages of categories 108 and 110.

Furthermore, our new classification scheme for coding party proposals concerning the EU increases the number of categories for the collection of data on these affairs. The data generated by using this tool serves for the comparative research of electoral competition in the EU, not only at the supranational but also at the national level; it can be analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, depending on the particular research question.

The elaboration of the new analytical device was essentially inductive, starting with a preliminary deductive classification scheme, which was designed by coding party proposals

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[4] These categories are defined in the following way. Category 108, "EC/EU: positive": "references favourable towards the European Union/Community in general". This can include: convenience of the adhesion of the country of the election program (or permanency as a member); convenience of an extension of the European Community/European Union; convenience of an increase in the competence of the Union and of the European Community; convenience of an extension of the competence of the European Parliament. Category 110: "EC/EU: negative": "negative references towards the European Community/European Union". This can include: opposition to certain European policies preferred by European authorities; opposition to the net EU budget contribution of the country of the election program.

[5] The combined with salience position theoretically moves between the values of -100 [when the reference/s opposing a matter (in our case, the EU) occupy the whole program being examined] and +100 (when the reference/s in their favour complete the program). Meanwhile, the scale of pure position ranges, also hypothetically, between the values of -1 y +1.

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for the 2011 Spanish elections. The three distinguished dimensions of the concept "European Union" are: The European integration process, political system, and EU public policies. Consequently, the classification scheme is further organized into three areas containing 29 categories in total. These categories are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Classification on Party Proposals on EU Affairs

Areas	Categories
Area 1: **INTEGRATION PROCESS**	101 Widening 102 Deepening 103 Democratization
Area 2: **INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS**	201 Multilevel Government 202 EU Institutions and Organs 203 Political Parties at European Level 204 Groups of Interest 205 Legitimacy
Area 3: **PUBLIC POLICIES**	301 Financial Programming and Budget 302 Internal Market and Competition 303 Trade 304 Economic and Monetary Affairs and Euro 305 Tax System 306 Social Affairs and Inclusion 307 Agriculture and Rural Development 308 Maritime Affairs and Fisheries 309 Environment 310 Regional Policy 311 Space of Freedom, Security and Justice 312 Foreign Policy and Neighbourhood Policy 313 Security and Defence Policy 314 International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response 315 Education and Youth 316 Research and Innovation 317 Digital Agenda 318 Energ 319 Transport 320 Industry 321 Other Policies or Cross-Cutting Issues of Public Policies

Source: prepared by the author

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Regarding the coding process, the unit of analysis was the "quasi-sentence" (i.e., a series of words that contain a sole argument), as in the MRG-CMP-MARPOR.[6] A set of regulations of the latter, which can be consulted at http://manifestoproject.wzb.eu.rules, was applied not only to the breakdown of texts into quasi-phrases, but also to their coding.[7]

Therefore, in order to assign each proposal to one of the 29 categories of the new classification, the rules of Volkens´ coding manual (2002) apply. The following two categories should be highlighted due to their particular usefulness at times of coding the programmatic proposals of the 2011 Spanish general election: 1) categories in the area of "Public policies" (objectives) have preference over those in the area of "Institutions and actors" (means); and 2) the most specific categories have priority over the most general ones (for example, in "Integration process", category 103 "Democratization" has preference over category 102 "Deepening").

2. Discussion

In this section the saliency of EU issues for Spanish parties, as well as the scope of their political proposals on EU matters are discussed.

2.1 Research question 1: To what extent are EU issues important to Spanish political parties?

A series of graphs can be found below showing the evolution of the position of Spanish parties on the EU since the country's adhesion to the European Community in 1986. Data from the MRG-CMP-MARPOR has been used, specifically the combined salience position ("position", and not "pure position") stated in the programs of the parties that obtained

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[6] A "quasi-sentence" is a phrase or part of a phrase (quasi-phrase) that expresses a sole general argument. It has to be used as a coding unit instead of the isolated word (or symbol) when the research is not only interested in the frequency of appearance of certain terms in the texts, but especially in the positions maintained by an agent with regard to a matter and its justification.

[7] The criteria for dividing the text into units of analysis is as follows: if there is a complete argument in a phrase, it is not divided; otherwise, it is divided into several quasi-phrases (every quasi-phrase must contain a complete argument).

parliamentary representation in at least two of the eight general elections held since then: in 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2011.

In order to draw up the first graph, the average "position" (combined with salience position) on the EU was calculated for parties that obtained representation at each election.

Graph 1: Evolution of Spanish parties´ aggregate position on the EU
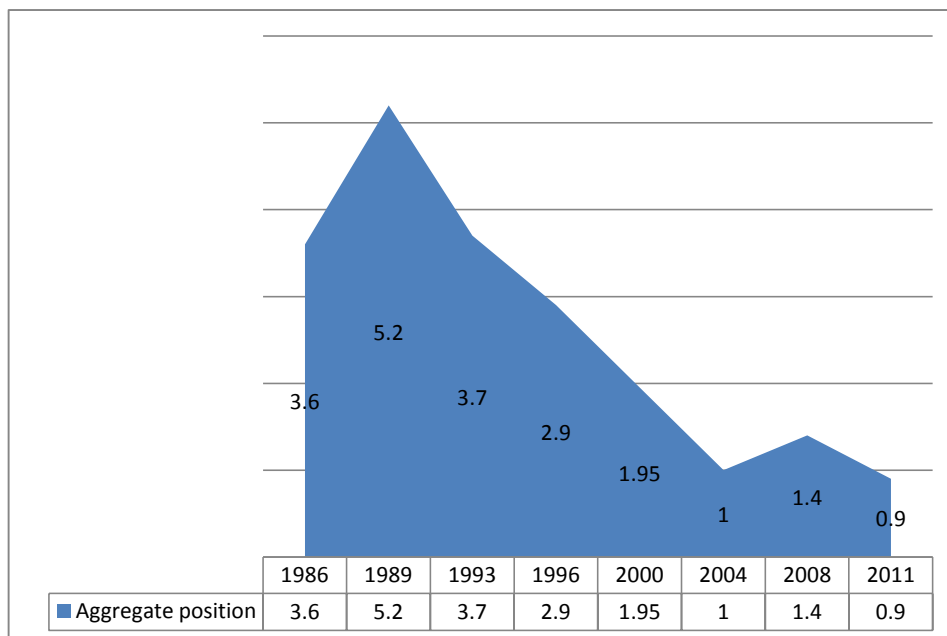
	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
■ Aggregate position	3.6	5.2	3.7	2.9	1.95	1	1.4	0.9

Source: prepared by the author, using data from the *Manifesto Project*, accessible from: https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/elections/206 [Budge *et al.* (2001), Klingemann *et al.* (2006) and *Volkens et al.* (2012)].

This first graph shows a clearly descending trend in the salience that Spanish political parties give to the EU, which contrast with the deepening of the European integration process over these years.

The second graph illustrates the evolution of each individually examined party's "position" on European affairs.

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Graph 2: Evolution of individual Spanish parties' position on the EU
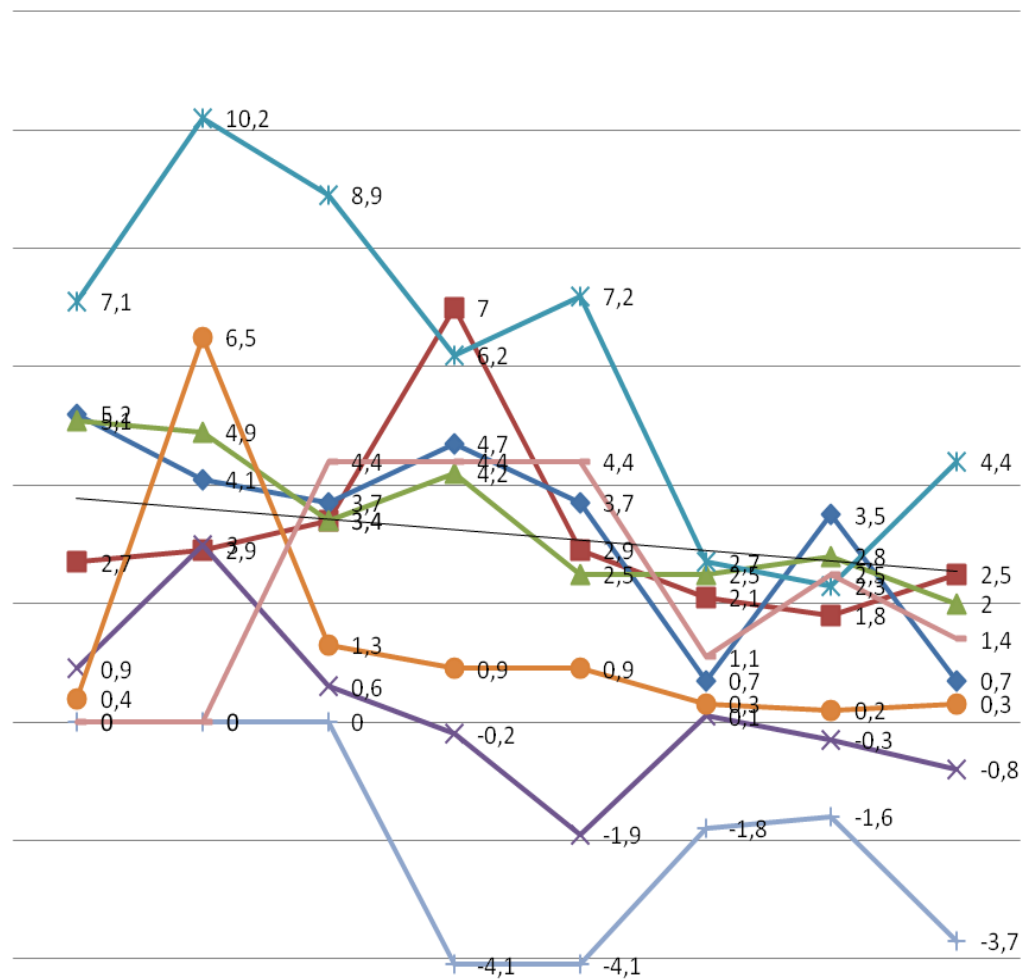
	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
PP	2,7	2,9	3,4	7	2,9	2,1	1,8	2,5
CiU	5,2	4,1	3,7	4,7	3,7	0,7	3,5	0,7
PSOE	5,1	4,9	3,4	4,2	2,5	2,5	2,8	2
IU	0,9	3	0,6	-0,2	-1,9	0,1	-0,3	-0,8
PNV	7,1	10,2	8,9	6,2	7,2	2,7	2,3	4,4
ERC	0,4	6,5	1,3	0,9	0,9	0,3	0,2	0,3
BNG				-4,1	-4,1	-1,8	-1,6	-3,7
CC			4,4	4,4	4,4	1,1	2,5	1,4

Source: prepared by the author, using data from the Manifesto Project, accessible from: https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/elections/206
[Budge *et al.* (2001), Klingemann *et al.* (2006) and *Volkens et al.* (2012)].

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The results show, in the first place, how, in contrast to the continuous deepening of the European integration process and the increasing number of public decisions adopted at the EU supranational level (among others, by Prime Ministers and Ministers of national Governments), Spanish political parties pay less and less attention to European affairs in general election campaigns.
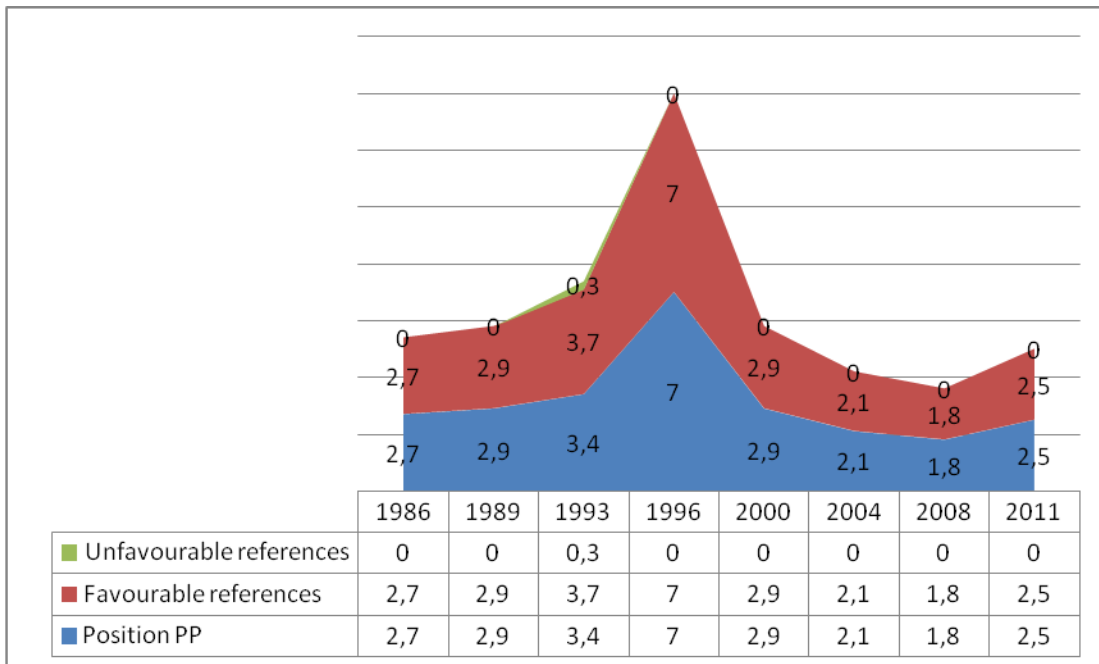
There is a clear descending pattern; Spanish parties' positions on the EU reach their maximum in the 1989 elections for PSOE, IU, PNV and ERC, in those of 1996 for PP and CiU and in 2000 for CC. Only one party, the BNG, demonstrates a different pattern: i) it is the only party with negative positioning in each of the elections that were studied; ii) their position on the EU improves in the 2004 and 2008 elections, but it worsens again in the 2011 elections.

The various parties' combined with salience position on the EU represented in the Spanish Parliament reached its maximum in the 1989 elections (5.2), and has not stopped descending since then until reaching 0.9 in the 2011 elections.

Finally, a graph is provided (Graph 3 and 4 below) for each party with expectations for leading the Government of Spain, PP and PSOE, in which the combined with salience position is given, as well as the percentages of favourable and unfavourable references to European integration.
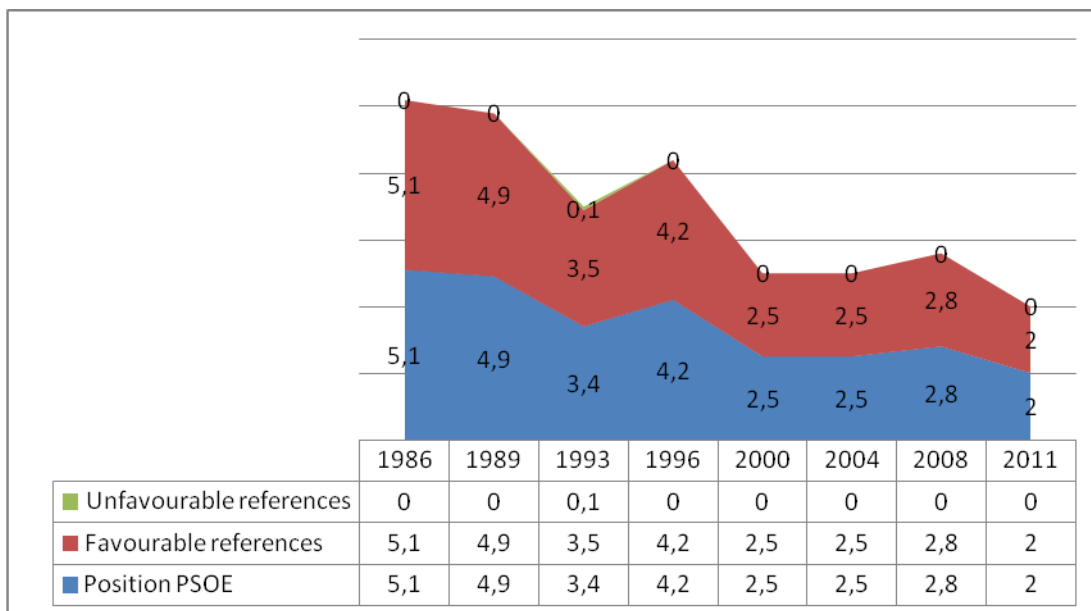
In both cases, there is no increase in unfavourable references towards the EU, but a loss of relevance of European affairs in the electoral competition.

Graph 3: Evolution of Partido Popular's position on the EU

	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
Unfavourable references	0	0	0,3	0	0	0	0	0
Favourable references	2,7	2,9	3,7	7	2,9	2,1	1,8	2,5
Position PP	2,7	2,9	3,4	7	2,9	2,1	1,8	2,5

Graph 4: Evolution of Partido Socialista's position on the EU

	1986	1989	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
Unfavourable references	0	0	0,1	0	0	0	0	0
Favourable references	5,1	4,9	3,5	4,2	2,5	2,5	2,8	2
Position PSOE	5,1	4,9	3,4	4,2	2,5	2,5	2,8	2

2.2. Research question 2: how diverse were parties´ proposals concerning EU affairs in the 2011 Spanish general election?

The coding of the election proposals using the new classification scheme allows the following: i) to identify priorities on EU affairs; and ii) to compare the party proposals by category, examining the hypothetical reduction of the electoral competition.

All programmatic proposals of parties that obtained representation in Congress in the 2011 general elections and which related to matters decided at EU supranational level were coded.[8] Coding the programmatic proposals "relating to matters decided at EU supranational level" means that those measures which concern adjusting political systems, politics and public policies to "Europe" at the domestic level (i.e., the proposals concerning the "vertical" and *top-down* dimension of the Europeanization of the member states, in the case of Spain) are excluded [9]. "Quasi-sentences" that do not contain a proposal, although they express a party position on a EU issue, were not analyzed in this section either. [10]

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[8] For more information about these proposals, including tables containing these proposals by order of appearance in relevant manifestos, contact the author at cristina.ares@usc.es

[9] Examples of paragraphs that contain electoral commitments that are not coded because they do not constitute "programmatical proposals related to matters decided at EU supranational level", notwithstanding, although they are related to the EU, they refer to decisions that are adopted at state level (i.e., they are adjustments that would be addressed using a vertical top-down approach on Europeanization; EU or supranational decisions would act as independent variables and the dependent variables would be the changes in the political system, the politics or national policies), in this case, of Spain: "We will boost measures that allow us to comply with the commitment, as stipulated in the European Union, of 20-20-20 in 2020" (PP Program: page 13); or "We will promote the increase of state support to student mobility programs, very specially the Erasmus program, in order to cover displacement and subsistence expenses of students at destination universities, in a dignified manner" or "To guarantee Catalonia with their own electoral circumscription at the European Parliament elections" (CiU Program); or "We demand a temporary development (of the Atlantic and Mediterranean Corridors) adjusted to the European forecasts and requirements" (PNV Program: page 21); or "To reinforce the unity of Spanish action in Europe, reforming the Joint Congress-Senate Commission for the EU" (UPyD Program: page 45).

[10] Examples of "quasi-sentences" that contain a position on a European matter, but not a proposal, and are therefore not coded include: "The redefinition of agricultural and fishing policies in the European Union provide us with a magnificent opportunity, more equitable socially speaking, because they are small agricultural developments, many of them in Natura Network areas, which benefit from a greener CAP, which recognizes the benefits that its preservation and custody contribute to the community" (PSOE Program: page 30); or "In the last few years, there are several different symptoms of collapse of the model, in the middle of an economic and political crisis that strikes the working class and implies a hollowing out of representative democracy by evidencing that key decisions are adopted by large fortunes, capable of destroying or refloating a currency, and European and world organisms that do not respond to any democratic legitimisation" (IU Program: page 25); or "European identity and governance do not oppose the Basque identity and governance. Quite the contrary" (PNV Program: page 31).

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All Spanish parties, except the BNG, are in favour of deepening European integration; the only reference opposing "more Europe" can be found on page 8 of the BNG program, where they propose Eurobonds with the following undertone "without implying additional transfers of sovereignty or competences to community institutions".

All nationalist and regionalist parties of Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country and Navarre (CiU, ERC, BNG, PNV and Geroa Bai) make similar proposals about category 201 "Multilevel Government". None of the other parties gives their position on these issues.

Information gathered during this study also shows that the position on the EU in the MRG-CMP-MARPOR could give rise to misinterpretations, as it does not differentiate references contrary to certain decisions on public policies about references opposing European integration. The most evident example that can be found is from the IU program, a party with a combined with salience position in these elections, as in the four earlier ones (since 1996), negative (-0.8 in 2011), and committed in their 20-N program to "go to a new European constitution process that constructs a social Europe" (page 82).

As shown in graph 5 below, during this election, the most important EU issues for the parties that obtained seats in Congress were those related to economic and financial affairs, an occurrence which may have been predictable to some considering the crisis context.

Almost one of every three programmatic proposals (29%) concerns economic affairs including Tax System (categories 304 and 305); in the context of a new reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, 11% of the measures refer to Agriculture and Rural Development; and 10% and 9% to domestic and foreign policy respectively.

Graph 5: Most relevant EU affairs (2011 Spanish General Election
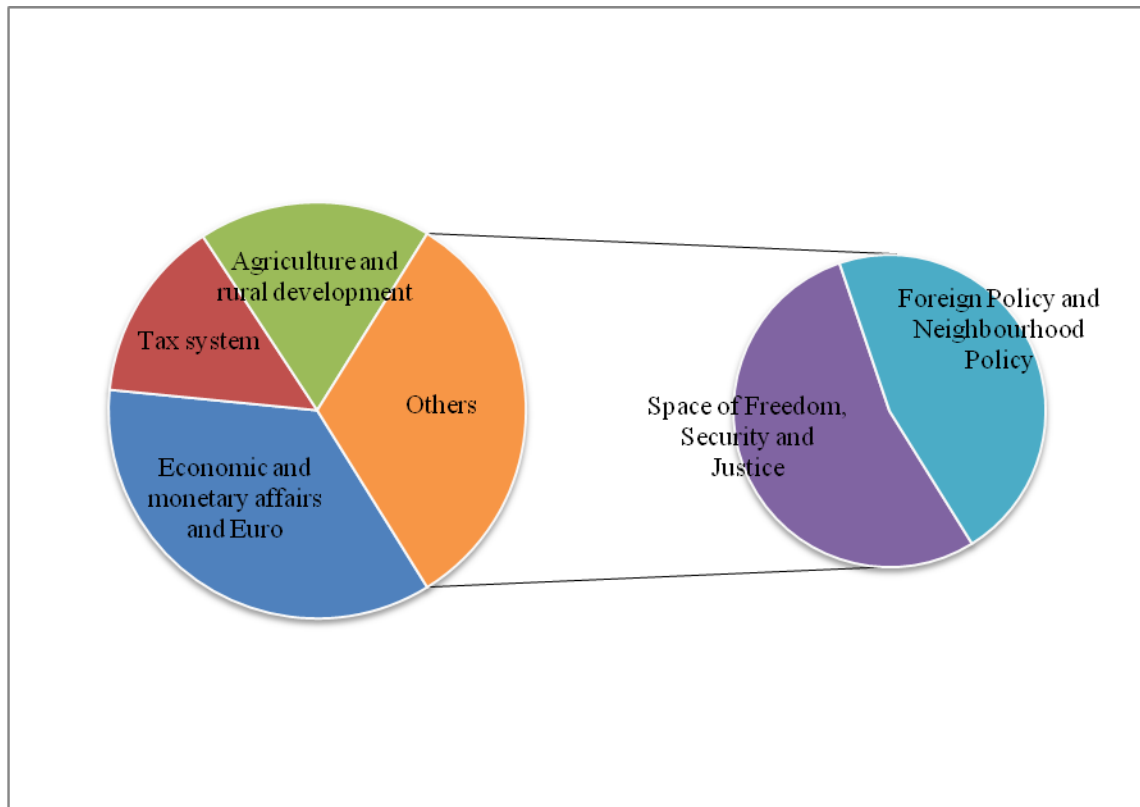
The coded programmatic proposals were also sorted based on the most salient EU issues[11]: i) Economic and Monetary Affairs and Euro; ii) Tax System; iii) Agriculture and Rural Development; iv) Foreign and Neighbourhood Policy; and v) Freedom, Security and Justice.

The narrowing of competition is clear. The proximity of the proposals of all parties is significant, not only with regard to the economy, but also to the rest of EU issues.

When concentrating on the comparison of the PP and the PSOE, the only undertone between their major proposals on the EU is the greater relevance that the PSOE gives to fiscal reforms and to a more active role of supranational institutions in the economic governance of the Eurozone. The following two graphs represent the importance of different EU affairs for the PP and the PSOE.

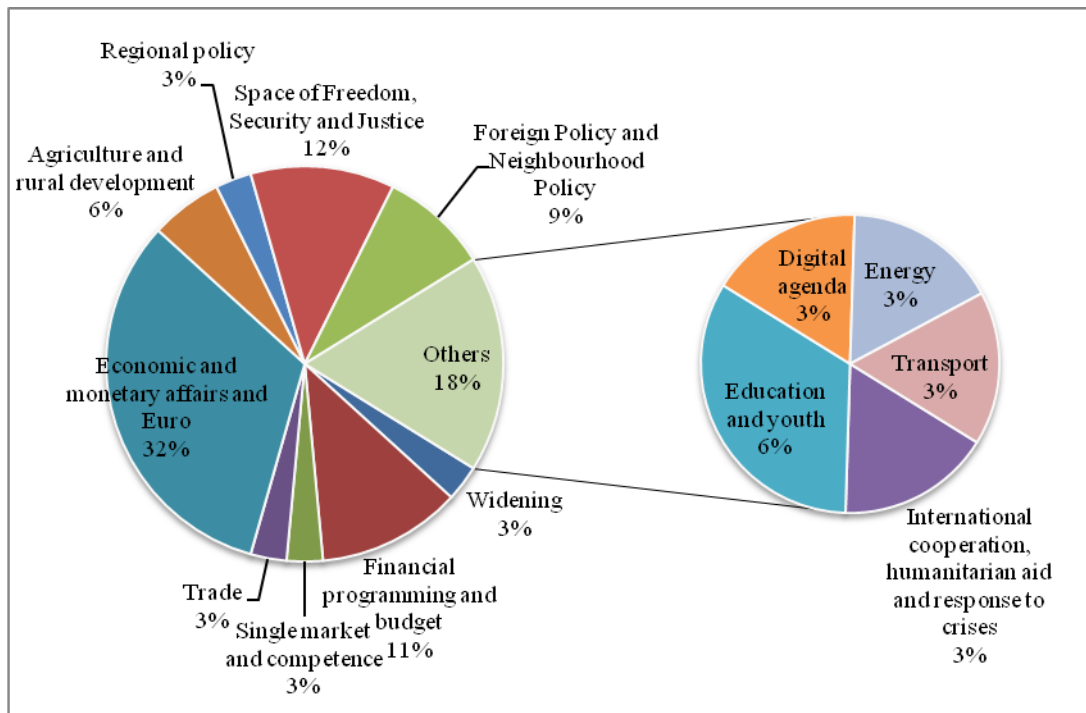[11] Tables contain this information can be obtained from the author at cristina.ares@usc.es

Graph 6: Programmatic Proposals on EU affairs *Partido Popular (PP)* – main categories (2011 Spanish General Election)
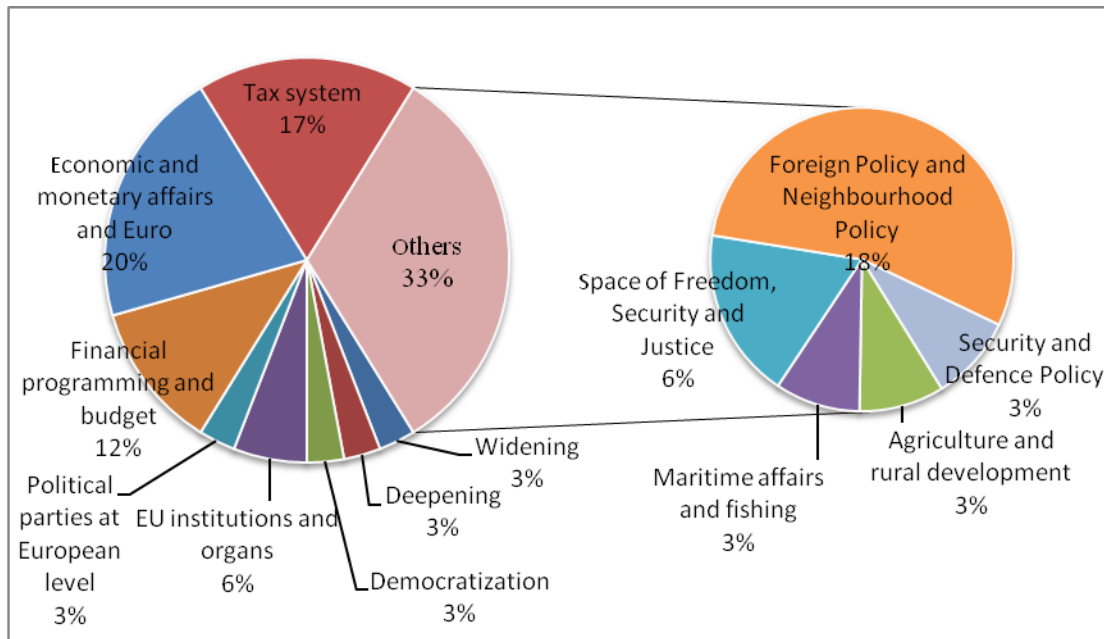
Source: Prepared by the author

Graph 7: Programmatic proposals on EU affairs Partido Socialista (PSOE)- main categories (2011 Spanish General Election)

Source: Prepared by the author

Next, we move to the introduction of EU issues into this election campaign by the two political forces with aspirations of leading the Government of Spain, *Partido Popular* (PP) and the *Partido Socialista* (PSOE), through communication channels other than manifestos, such as the televised face-to-face debate between their leaders and their personal accounts on *Twitter,* a social network.

Table 3 deals with the political information on European affairs introduced by the candidates of the PP and the PSOE, Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo P. Rubalcaba respectively, through the only televised debate, held on 7 November.

Table 3: Coded proposals introduced by M. Rajoy and A.P. Rubalcaba in the only televised debate (2011 Spanish General Election)

Agent	Category	Proposal/s
M. Rajoy	None	None
A. P. Rubalcaba	Economic and Monetary Affairs and Euro	- Delay the adjustment of the deficit in Spain for two years (until 2015) - Decrease interest rates by the European Central Bank - With EUR 70,000 million, the European Investment Bank has to undertake a huge investment plan, which would be like a European Marshall Plan for which SMEs can compete.

Source: Prepared by the author

This face-to-face debate was structured in three blocks: 1) economy and employment (20 minutes for each candidate); 2) social policy (15 minutes for each); 3) democratic quality, Spain's position worldwide and politics in general (10 minutes for each contender)[12], introduced by a general two-minute intervention by each candidate, concluded by closing

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[12] The minutes consumed by each rival were counted, including time spent interrupting the other candidate.

without any references to the rival party lasting three minutes for each candidate.

During the debate, the PP candidate insisted on one of his main campaign messages: the importance of "doing homework at home." He then pointed out the programmatic proposals of his party regarding the EU. The socialist candidate, on his turn, took advantage of the opportunity to inform about some economic measures, which are coded in table 9.

Finally, Table 4 gives the proposals outlined by the PP and the PSOE through the *Twitter* accounts of each candidate.

Table 4: Coded proposals published in the twitter accounts of M. Rajoy and A.P. Rubalcaba (2011 Spanish General Election)

Agent	Category	Proposal/s
M. Rajoy	Agriculture and Rural Development	- Reject the CAP reform proposal (14 October)
A.P. Rubalcaba	Agriculture and Rural Development	- Defend a restrictive CAP (10 October) - Reject the CAP reform (14 and 25 October, 16 November)
A.P. Rubalcaba	Economic and Monetary Affairs and Euro	- Reduce interest rates from the European Central Bank (ECB) (11 October; 7, 9 and 15 November) - Eurobonds (11 October; 15 and 17 November) - Common economic policy (13 October) - Strengthen the ECB (26 October) - Bank recapitalization (28 October) - Delay the deficit adjustment till 2015 (7 November) - European Marshall Plan (7, 9 and 14 November)

Source: prepared by the author

As we are interested in the introduction of EU issues into the campaign through this social network, when examining the messages posted on Twitter, or *tweets,* the replies to other

network users are not taken into account. If this were done, a significant amount of redundant information would be collected, thereby repeating the data that was already obtained when analyzing the content of the PP and the PSOE programs, as the campaign teams respond to the *tweets* by reproducing content directly from the election program. We examined *tweets* up to 18 November, the day the 20-N campaign closed, inclusive.[13]

Other information obtained from examining M. Rajoy's *Twitter* account, which is of interest for the purposes of this research, includes: i) on 29 October, this political message was published: "I do not want to be in Europe in the gang of blunderbusses, I want Spain to be with the best"; ii) in the same sense, regarding the face-to-face debate with Rubalcaba, he posted this message on Twitter: "Spain is the 4th country in the Eurozone and must have a more important role than it has now"; and iii) on 14 November, a link was made available for the article published in the *Política Exterior* magazine "*Mi visión de Europa y España en el mundo*" [My vision of Europe and Spain in the world].

In the same way, on the account of the PSOE candidate, A. P. Rubalcaba, the following information is of benefit: i) the message that the solution to the crisis is in Europe [on 9 October he wrote: "We claim unity to Europe to be stronger, to generate employment, we must all join together at all levels." For the candidate's visit to Strasbourg, on 25 October, this message was posted on his *Twitter* account*: "*Today Rubalcaba visits the European Parliament in Strasbourg and will be meeting the progressive alliance of socialists and democrats" or "Europe can continue summoning a meeting to self organize herself for another one or we can advance decisively, confronting the problems"; on 9 November he wrote: "If we have learned something in the EU about this crisis it is that either we all come out of it together or we are going to have a very bad time"]; and ii) these concerns defending the management of the previous socialist government, of which the candidate was an outstanding member: "The Minister of Development, José Blanco, has managed to include five Spanish corridors in the Trans-European Transport network" (19 October)/"It is evident that the intervention of the Spanish government in 2010 took us out of the tense

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[13] On 26 November 2011, the day this information was collected and recorded, the PP candidate had 143,616 followers on this social network, and the socialist candidate, 83,604.

financial limelight (Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Italy)" (14 November).

Rajoy does not make even one single proposal on EU decisions in the televised debate, and only takes advantage of the *Twitter* network to remind the opposition of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which was being negotiated at that time in Brussels.

Besides also expressing an identical disagreement with the CAP reform through *Twitter*, Rubalcaba used the face-to-face debate and this social network to publicly discuss some of his party's proposals, particularly the possibility of negotiating a two-year delay for adjusting the deficit and the major role that both the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank play in stimulating the economy, thereby classifying both proposals under the category entitled "Economic and Monetary Affairs and Euro".

A greater supply of political information about the EU by the PP might have been counter-productive when considering only their election interests; however, it is surprising that the socialist candidate did not force introducing EU matters into the electoral competition, taking into account that he started the campaign with an enormous disadvantage and he would have tried to limit the effect of the economic mismanagement by the previous government, (of which he had been a part), in the election result.[14]

3. Concluding remarks

This paper shows how Spanish political parties avoided introducing political information about the European integration process, the political system and EU public policies in the 2011 general election.

In fact, when analyzing the data on all general elections held in Spain since the adhesion of this country to the former European Community in 1986, there is a consistent pattern in

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[14] Those interested in the analysis of the 2011 Spanish elections, beyond matters concerning the EU, can consult: Martín and Urquizu-Sancho (2012) and Sánchez-Cuenca and Dinas (2012). For more about the electoral competition in Spain, please consult: Anduiza *et al*. (2010), Cordero and Martín (2011), Martínez i Coma (2008).

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paying less and less attention to EU issues in party manifestos. This contrasts significantly with the increasing number of decisions adopted at the supranational level with the participation of the Prime Minister and its Ministers, who are chosen indirectly at general elections and controlled by national parliaments.

Furthermore, the paper shed light on how the two political forces that aspire to lead the Spanish Government, the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE), restricted positioning, proposals and political messages concerning the EU in communication channels such as the *Twitter* accounts of their candidates, M. Rajoy and A.P. Rubalcaba, and at the only televised debate between them.

By analyzing the programs of all parties obtaining representation in the *Congreso de los Diputados* for the 2011 election, a classification scheme for positions related to EU affairs was drawn up, which is useful in identifying priorities and comparing political proposals. This coding system serves to collect political information on these issues that can be used for comparative purposes, using quantitative or qualitative techniques.

When observing the programmatic proposals on this election, coded with the new scheme, the narrowing of electoral competition in Spain is clear. This is not due solely to the transfer of competences to EU institutions, but also due to the behaviour of national parties, which offer a few similar proposals on European matters, not only regarding the economy but also on domestic or foreign policy, or on the future of Europe.

It is worth noting that the shortage of positioning, proposals and relevant political messages on the European integration process, the institutions and actors, and EU public policies limits citizens´ capacity of influence and control on public decisions adopted in Brussels and Strasbourg. From our viewpoint, the responsibility for improving EU democratic legitimacy depends solely on national parties, through building informed positions and offering proposals and political messages on EU affairs that allow citizens to exercise influence and control on EU public decisions through voting at national elections, among other forms of participation.

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