



2014 European Parliament Elections: Main issues and positions based on party manifestos

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Introduction and main findings

On 22-24 May 751 new members of the European Parliament will be elected. These elections will perhaps be the most important one in the history of Parliament, since the 'European project' has become more and more contested. Due to the economic crisis, which was triggered by the banking crisis in 2008 and the euro-crisis shortly after, there is a climate of uncertain economic recovery in which several EU member states are struggling with their national economy. The austerity programs, which are a consequence of bad economic performance in combination of too high national budget deficits and national public debt in view of the European norms, had a severe impact on the popular support for the European Union. The support for the EU has declined rapidly over the last past years and reached record lows in many of the EU member states. A second reason why these elections will be important is that the newly elected Parliament aims to nominate, for the first time, the new President of the European Commission. Whether Parliament will manage will become clear in the weeks after the elections.

In this research note we focus on the political parties (or groupings of parties), which participate in the 2014 elections. An important question is what are the issues that will be promoted by these different parties? What is their position on these issues? And are there important issues that can be regarded as the main issues that will play a role in these elections? This research note explores these questions by reporting on our findings based on a content analysis of the party manifestos of the political parties running for the 2014 elections. The note is structured as follows: we first briefly discuss the methodology used; next we report on the main results, both quantitatively and qualitatively. We present the scores found in our analysis for the different issues, which indicate the intensity with which some parties discuss certain issues. We also examined the various party manifestos by collecting statements on the issues and report on this in the text.

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The findings are:

- The main issues of these elections are concentrated in the area of social policy, environment, democracy, external policy and the internal market;
- On social policy left-wing parties emphasize the social rights of workers while more centrist parties underline the importance of combating discrimination;
- On the environment the Greens emphasize the importance of an sustainable, resource efficient energy supply, while the conservative parties propose energy securing by using more nuclear energy;
- On external policy, left-wing parties support further cooperation with Turkey, while liberal parties propose to combine diplomacy with 'hard power' when needed;
- On the internal market the divide left-wing parties underline the importance of maintaining a social Europe, while liberal parties underscore the importance of the free movement of goods and services, while emphasizing the importance of compliance with internal market legislation.

Coding procedure

As a first step in the coding procedure of the manifestos of political parties running for EP election, all manifestos were collected through a search of the websites of the parties. Second, on the basis of close reading of the manifestos keywords were identified. These keywords were categorized and general themes were identified. The themes identified on the basis of this inductive coding procedure were social policy; security; religion; education, research and culture; environment; digital agenda; bureaucratic burden; agriculture; democracy and the EU; external policy; economic crisis; internal market; and immigration, asylum and integration. The keywords were used to search the text of the party manifesto and resulted in distinctive profiles for each party. 11 party manifestos were coded with 180 keywords. The longest manifestos were from ALDE, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and the Greens. The shortest manifestos were from the EU democrats and the European Alliance for Freedom (see Table 1).

Table 1. Party manifestos coded

Party name	Number of words party manifestos
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	9169
Alliance of European conservatives and reformist	6644
EU democrats	542
European Alliance for Freedom	479

European Democratic Party	3711
European Free Alliance	3121
European People's Party	3149
Party of European Socialists	729
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	7555
The Greens	7382
Party of the European Left	3819

Results

The general themes that are referred to the most in the manifestos of political parties running for EP election are social policy, environment, democracy, external policy and the internal market. Each of these themes had in at least one party manifesto 100 references to keywords related with this theme.

The keywords for the social policy dimension receiving a lot of hits were health, discrimination, solidarity, equality, poverty, and women. Parties that scored high on the social policy dimension were ALDE, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the Greens and the Party of the European Left (see Figure 1). The main difference between these parties on the social policy theme is that left-wing parties refer in their manifesto to words such as poverty, equality, workers and women. More centrist parties are putting more emphasis on discrimination, cohesion and health. The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats states that there is a need to 'Make social issues central to the economic and monetary union, putting social rights and standards for all Europeans on equal terms with economic goals' and that 'the single market's economic freedoms should not be allowed to override fundamental social rights or undermine the power of regional and local authorities to provide public services'. In a similar vein, the Party of the European Left states that 'Budgets must be turned towards solidarity, aid to individuals and countries in difficulty. They should aim to reduce social, regional and gender inequalities'.

Words often used to refer to the environmental dimension were sustainability, energy, emissions, and climate change. Parties that referred often to this dimension were ALDE, the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformist, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and the Greens (see Figure 2). All of these parties are emphasizing issues like emissions, sustainability and, especially, energy. Illustrative is the party manifesto of the Greens in which it is stated that 'we want to transform our European economy into a global champion of energy and resource efficiency, based on less energy-intensive technologies and renewable energies and on improving the way we manage, use, reuse, recycle, substitute and value resources'. The Alliance of European Conservatives and

Reformists chooses to emphasize a different environmental challenge, namely ‘the supply of safe, secure and affordable energy’. This party beliefs that ‘nuclear energy should form a key component of our long-term energy strategy, given its potential both low-carbon and security goals’.

Figure 1. Coding results social policy

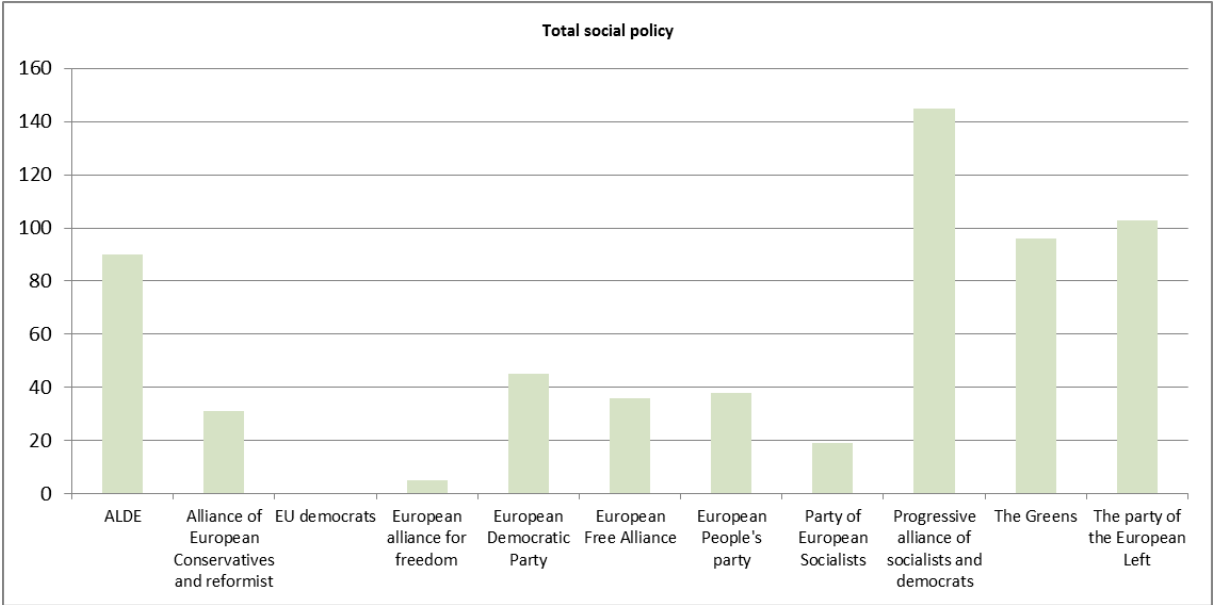
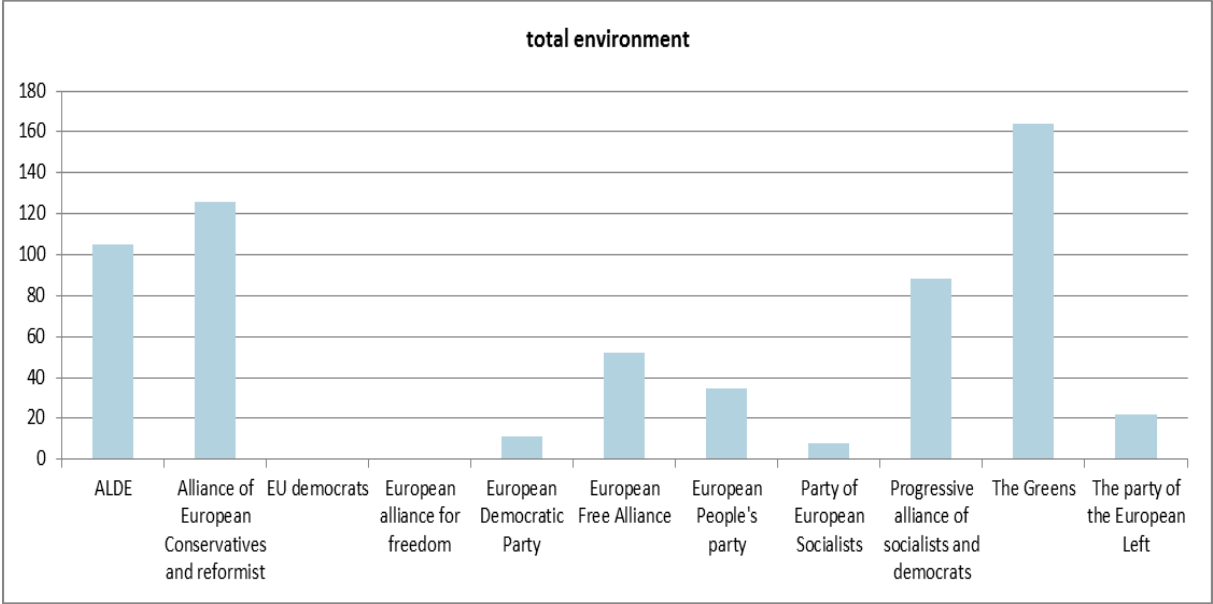


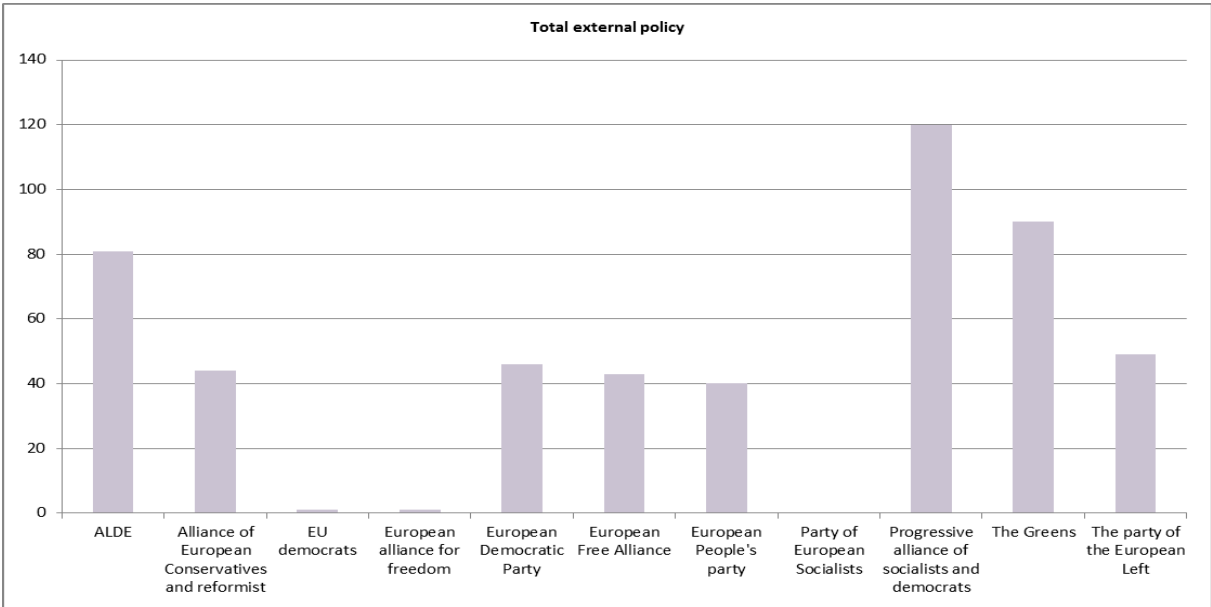
Figure 2. Coding results environmental policy



External policy keywords often used by political parties in their manifestos were global, human rights, external action service, peace, human rights, and humanitarian interventions (see Figure 3). The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats state that ‘We were strong supporters of the Commission's positive agenda on relations with Turkey, including enhanced co-operation on

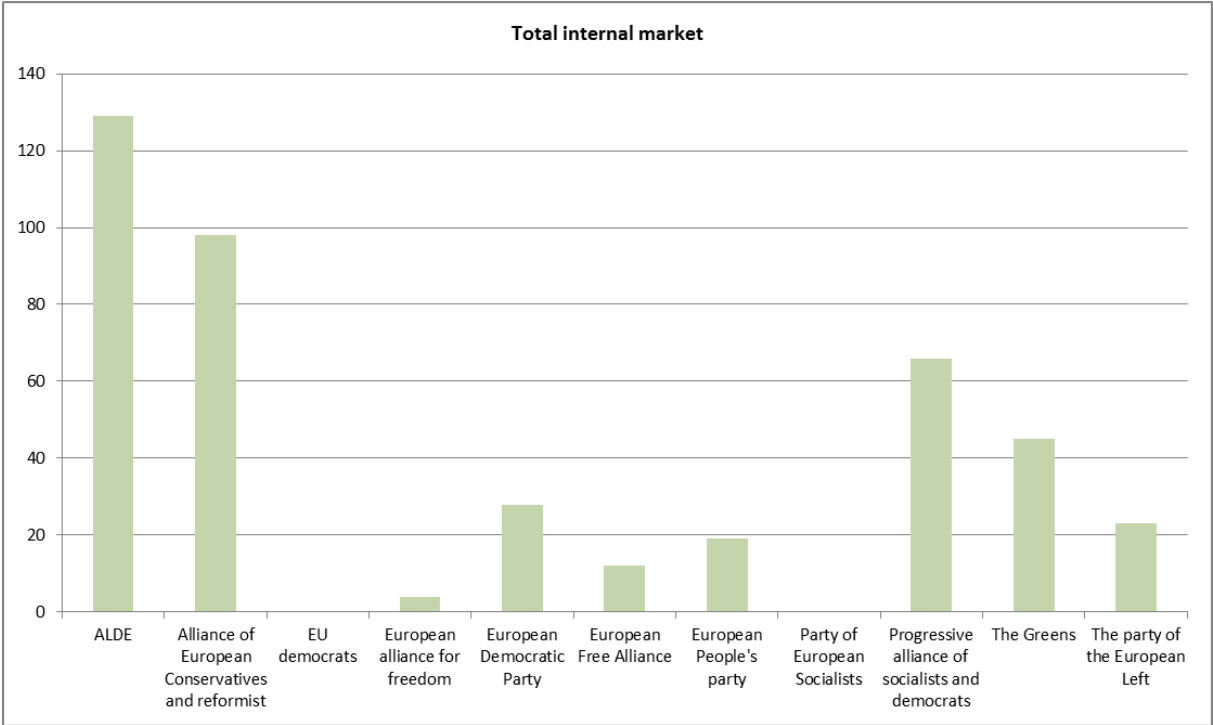
political reform, continuing work on aligning Turkish legislation more closely with the EU, maximising the benefits of our economic relations, closer dialogue on foreign policy in the light of the Arab Spring and efforts to facilitate visas’. The Greens emphasize in their manifesto that ‘It is one of our prime Green foreign policy concerns to make Europe once again a leading actor in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation’. ALDE would like to see that diplomacy is backed with ‘hard power peacekeeping missions when it comes to crisis management and conflict prevention’.

Figure 3. Coding results external policy of the EU



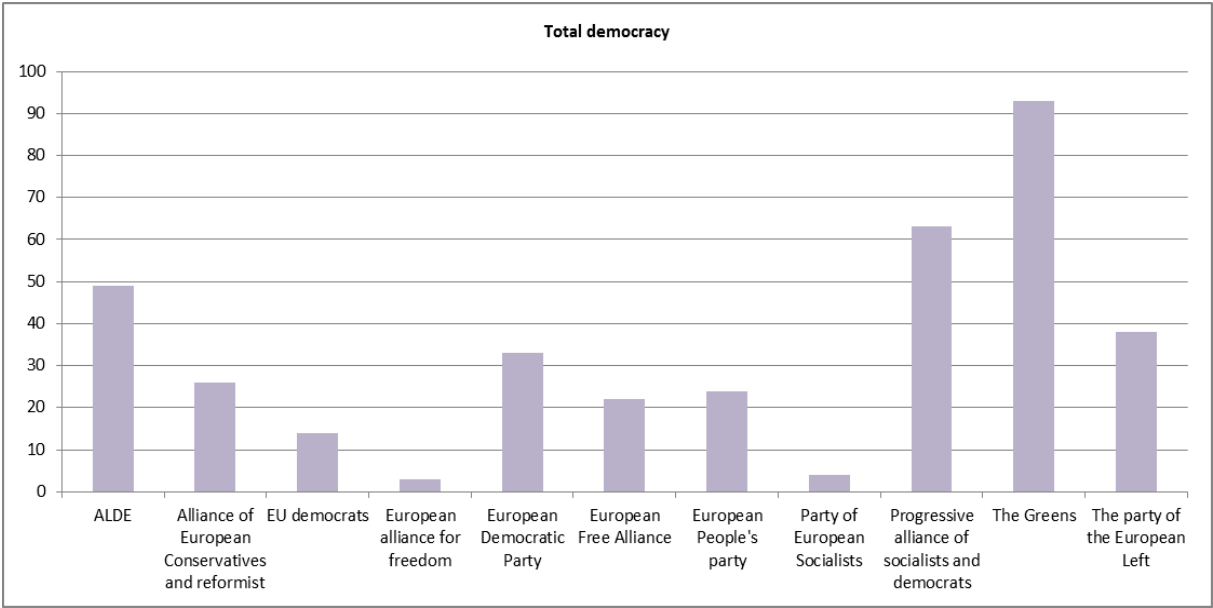
The internal market was referred to in manifestos by using words like single market, competition, consumers, goods, services, and trade (see Figure 4). ALDE considers that ‘The proper and uniform application of internal market legislation is an absolute priority. The internal market cannot operate effectively without rigorous enforcement of internal market legislation’. Moreover, ALDE considers that ‘Financial market supervision must be strengthened by establishing a single financial supervisor for micro- and macro-prudential supervision of large European cross-border financial institutions’. Also the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists voices strong support for the internal market, by emphasising the importance of the ‘free movement of goods and services, with clear and easily enforceable rules for free and fair competition, along with reduced administrative burdens for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises’. The Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) also states that ‘Creating a free market in financial services is a high priority to the ECR, whether to enable free movement of capital within the EU or to hold market operators to standards which investors and counter parties can trust’. The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats provides a different perspective on the internal market project than the ECR and is of the opinion that ‘the single market's economic freedoms should not be allowed to override fundamental social rights or undermine the power of regional and local authorities to provide public services’.

Figure 4. Coding results internal market



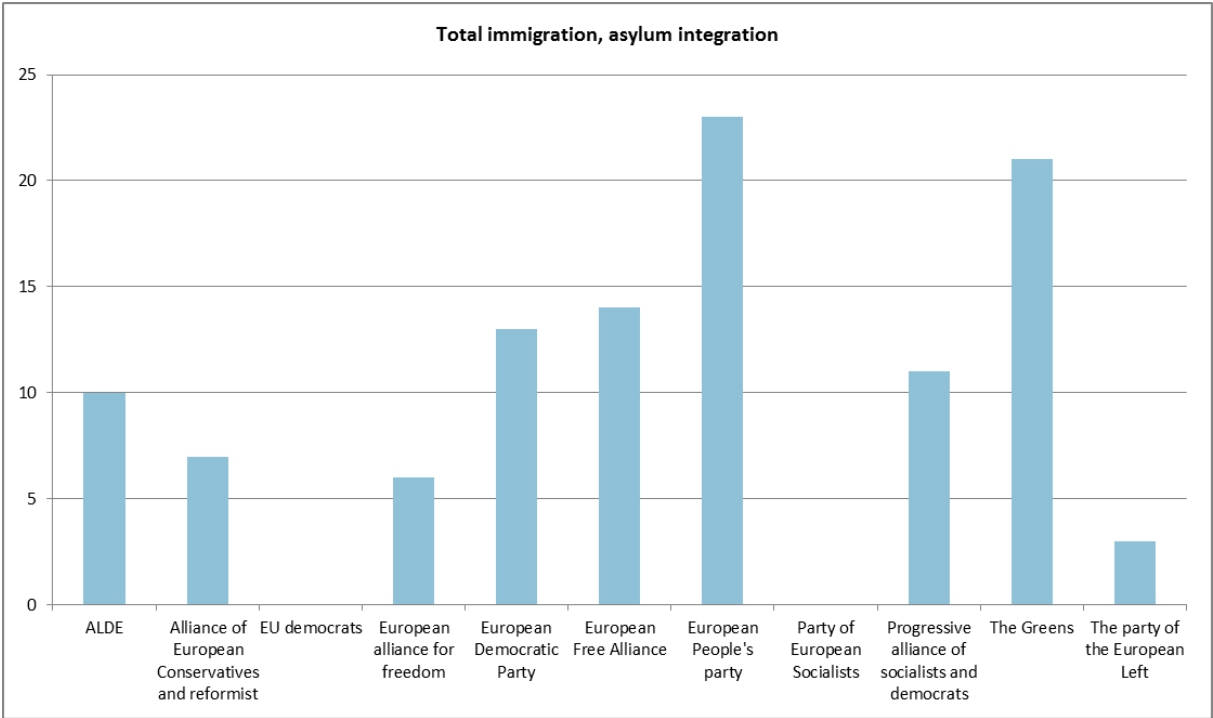
The democracy category consisted of keywords like transparency, citizens, and fundamental rights. Parties that used these words were ALDE, the European Democratic Party, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the Party of the European left, and the Greens (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Coding results democracy and the EU



Next to these key themes in the manifestos of the political parties, also some other important issues were often referred to. The European People’s Party puts most emphasis on religious issues of all party manifestos analyzed. Education, culture and research are a theme most often referred to by ALDE. Issues related with the internet, protection of personal data and online services are also most often referred to by ALDE, just as issues related with the bureaucratic burden of European integration. The Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists, ALDE, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and the Greens refer most often to the agricultural domain. The European People’s party (EPP) is the issue owner of the immigration, asylum and integration domain (see Figure 6). The EPP states that: ‘To empower all individual immigrants to enjoy their full rights, they should learn or be in command of the languages of the receiving countries, as well as the history and characteristics of their new environment, abide by the law and respect its cultural heritage and underlying values, and participate in their civic rights and duties’. The Greens have a different take on the immigration, integration and asylum issue: ‘We need greater efforts by the EU as well as member states and more coordination for “rescues at sea”, and we need legal and safe ways for entry, for example with humanitarian visas (...) We should, in our foreign relations as well as our trade and development policies, address the issues which force people to migrate’.

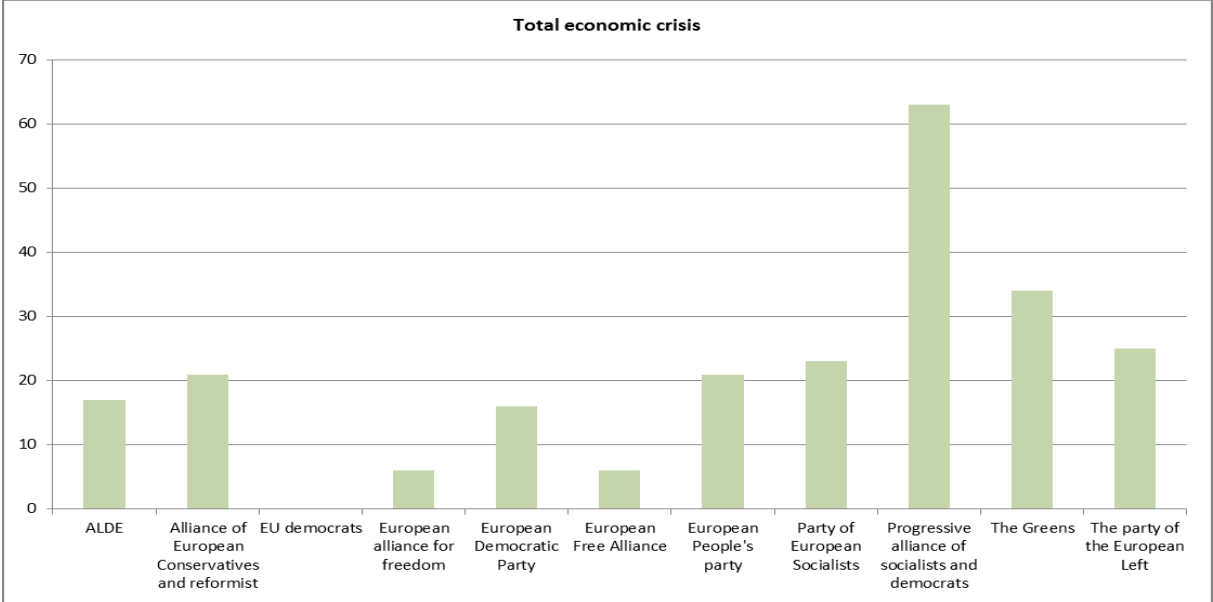
Figure 6. Coding results immigration, asylum and integration



The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats refers most of all parties to keywords related with the economic crisis (see Figure 7). This party states that ‘the sharpest lesson to learn from the Eurozone crisis is that sharing a currency without sharing economic and social goals leads to instability and goes against Europe's shared values. Our vision is for a stronger union that tackles the imbalances in the system’. The Party of the European Left proposes to create a ‘European public

bank of social and solidarity-based development. In contrast to the European Stability Fund, it would distribute funding for projects on the basis of social and environmental criteria’.

Figure 7. Coding results economic crisis



Some parties were not yet mentioned in the discussion of the coding results. The reason for this is that these parties have much shorter party manifestos than the other parties (see Table 1), or focus on only a few issues. The Party of the European Socialists has a short manifesto and pays most attention to the economic crisis and social policy. The European Free Alliance emphasizes the importance of national languages. The European Alliance for Freedom puts emphasize on immigration, asylum and integration and the economic crisis. The EU democrats focus on improving the democratic legitimacy of the EU. See for a full overview of all coding results Figure 8 and 9.

Figure 8. Overview of coding results, by party

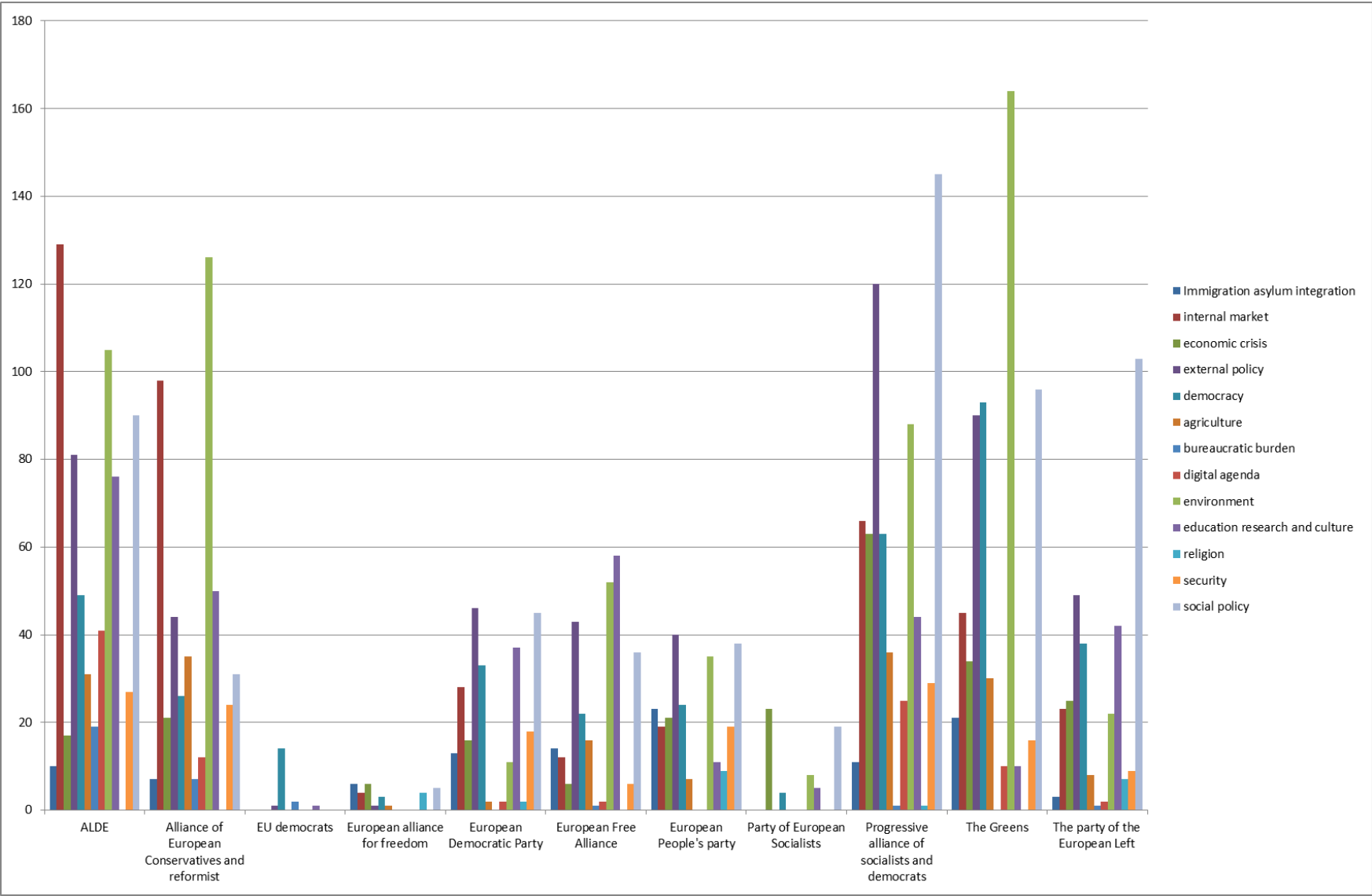


Figure 9. Overview of coding results, by issue

