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Democracy promotion in post-countries towards congruence between historical and political patterns in EU

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Abstract

This article examines the initiatives of European Union in the field of the democracy promotion from a historical and political perspective. The analysis covers: the theoretical framework and the dilemmas of the European governance; the EU democracy promotion strategies in post-communist countries; the debates over the liberal reforms and the national interest. Moreover, we have to note that EU has developed a “fairly hierarchical” political system. In the light of the 2009 European Parliament, particular attention has been devoted to the discussions for improving the European democracy. Due to the staging of the democratic process, the Union is a project in evolution that clearly has not reached its final framework.

Keywords: democracy, European Union, democratic deficit, political conditionality

Theoretical perspectives

For much of the past twenty years analysts and academics have debated whether the European Union suffers from a “crisis of identity” combined with a “democratic deficit”. Critics contend that the structure and functionality of the European institutions, in particular the visible weakness of the European Parliament and the lack of enthusiasm and support for the European project among the European citizens¹ have always been present at the European level. In the light of the 2009 European Parliament, particular attention has also been devoted to the discussions for improving the European democracy. Due to the staging of the democratic process, “the Union is a project in evolution that clearly has not reached its *finalité* or *telos* yet”². Furthermore, in this paper I explore the attractiveness of EU membership and institutional preconditions attached to the political process of accession. After having examined the implications of the reform of the institutional framework, the study explores the EU democracy promotion using the recent theories and concepts regarding the effectiveness of the European political accession process.

In recent years the comparative studies on the European democracy promotion process approached a two-level game. Moreover, William Phelan argues European politics is undertaken by national governments who strategize at the national and international levels³. Consequently, the recent literature on EU democracy promotion concurs on a number of different variables regarding the impact of EU accession conditions.

Above all, in this perspective, the studies design the relevance of EU’s initiatives focused on the domestic condition of democratization. Second, as a consequence, in the democratization process, we have the studies take into account the internal obstacles in the

¹ For more contributions on how citizens now view European institutions and whether the various evaluations influence their enthusiasm with the way the quality democracy works in European Union, see Jeffrey A. Karp, Susan A. Banducci, Shaun Bowler, *To Know It Is To Love It? Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union* in “Comparative Political Studies”, Vol. 36, No. 2, April 2003, p. 273.

² For more details about the institutional preconditions for improving the European democracy and the analysis of the major improvements at the national level, particularly in parliament’s scrutiny and government’s engagements in the European affairs, see Ben Crum, *Staging European Union Democracy*. Discussion Paper prepared for the “Round Table On A Sustainable Project For Europe”, EPIN (European Policy Institute Network), Working Paper No. 10/December 2003, p. 1. The full report is available for free download (http://www.epin.org/pdf/EP_Crum.pdf).

³ For one of the most notable contributions, see William Phelan, *Does the European Union Strengthen the State? Democracy, Executive Power and International Cooperation*, Working Paper No. 95, Center for European Studies, Harvard University, p. 2. The full report is available for free download (<http://www.ces.fas.harvard.edu/publications/docs/pdfs/Phelan95.pdf>).

transition process. They demonstrate that “with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in January 2007, the Fifth Enlargement of the EU has come to a close. Whereas the Western Balkans and Turkey continue to have a membership perspective, the EU has devised the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) for the remaining countries of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean as an alternative to accession”⁴.

From liberal reforms to national interest

Most current debate about the European democratic deficit equates democracy promotion with national political conditionality and liberal political norms. Jan Zielonka addresses a different aspect of this problem: “Cynics often describe the recent history of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of moving from one union to another. The former is of course the Soviet Union and the latter the European (EU). This seems quite unfair because the latter is a symbol of liberty and democracy while the former was about one-party rule if not oppression”⁵. In using historical conditionality, the author sets the adoption of the European Union democratic rules and practices as conditions that the former communist countries have to fulfill in order to receive the European integration. Moreover, Zielonka’s study shows that the EU political system is “fairly hierarchical” and it still proves to be a strong factor in the process of democratization. Moreover, the system is “shared and dispersed among various governmental centers”⁶.

Adrian Vatter and Julian Bernauer argue there are different ways of looking at these aspects. In the light of Lijphart’s comparative study on the patterns of democracy in 36 countries, the study applies a theoretically broader version to the European countries⁷. On the other hand, however, this research focus addresses the conditional question of how direct democracy is incorporated into Lijphart’s model democracy⁸. By contrast, Vatter and Bernauer discuss the results of the analysis including a series of alternative definitions and model applications. On the basis of this reasoning, the study develops an innovative contribution in comparative political research including forms and models of direct democracy “as a full-fledged institutional variable in the analysis of patterns of democracy in European countries”⁹.

⁴ For major contributions, see Frank Schimmelfenning, Hanno Scoltz, *EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighborhood: Political Conditionality, Economic Development, and the Transnational Exchange* (National Centre of Competence in Research, Sociological Institute, University of Zurich, Working Paper No. 9). The full report is available for free download (<http://www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch/nccr/publications/workingpaper/pdf/WP9.pdf>)

⁵ Jan Zielonka, *The Quality of Democracy after Joining the European Union* in “East European Politics and Societies”, Vol. 21, No. 1/2007, p. 162.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

⁷ Adrian Vatter, Julian Bernauer, *The Missing Dimension of Democracy: Institutional Patterns in 25 EU Member States between 1997 and 2006* in “European Union Politics”, Vol. 10, No. 3/2009, p. 336.

⁸ On theoretical aspects of democratization at EU multilevel governance, see Gerard Delanty, *Europeanization and democracy: the question of cultural identity*, in Joan DeBardeleben and Achim Hurrelmann (eds), *Democratic Dilemmas of Multilevel Governance: Legitimacy, Representation and Accountability in the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 77–90; Mark Franklin, *European elections and the European voter* in Jeremy Richardson (ed.), *European Union: Power and Policy-Making*, 3rd edn. London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 227–246.

⁹ Adrian Vatter, Julian Bernauer, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

Defining the democratic input in the European Union

What conclusions can be drawn if we sum up all Zielonka's arguments? In our view, one of the most important findings is that the multilevel democratic representation is warranted for several reasons: one directly through the European Parliament and other indirectly through the national parliaments¹⁰. On the one hand, the authors argue that the two channels of parliamentary representation are based on various principles of representation.

Table 1. National parliaments and the European Parliament compared¹¹

	National parliament	European Parliament
Level	National	European
Total number	27 (15 with two chambers)	1
Focus on legislative behavior	Dedicated to national (primary) and EU affairs	Exclusively dedicated to EU affairs; increased legislative role in recent years
Influence over EU legislation	Indirect	Direct
Executive control	Limited control over national governments	EU has made limited progress in terms of "executive oversight" ¹²
Electoral system rules	Varying	Proportional representation
Distribution of seats	Distributed more or less proportionally to electoral districts	Distributed by member state with an overweighing of the smaller member states
Term	Varying between 4 and 6 years	5 years
Party organization	National	Supranational political groups (federations of national parties)
Citizens' perception	<i>First-influence</i>	<i>Second-influence</i>

Hurrelmann and Debardeleben identify three channels of democratic input in the European Union-the European Parliament, national democratic processes surrounding the Council of Ministers, and the activity of the civil society in the consultation procedures of the European Commission¹³. Moreover, the authors argue there are also three intelinked dilemmas influencing the democratic European process. Most fundamentally, the concept of "multilevel governance" highlights a combination of three dilemmas: first "a incongruence in territorial space" between the effects of democratic control and the regional authorities¹⁴. In

¹⁰ Ben Crum, John E. Fossum, *The Multilevel Parliamentary Filed: a framework for theorizing representative democracy in the EU* in "European Political Science Review", Vol. 1, No. 2/2009, pp. 249-271.

¹¹ See also *Ibidem*, p. 253; Richard Whitaker, *National Parties in the European Parliament: An influence in the Committee System?* in "European Union Politics", Vol. 6, No. 1/2005, pp. 5-28; Philip Manow, Holger Döring, *Electoral and Mechanical Causes of Divided Government in the European Union* in "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 41, No. 10/2008, pp. 1349-1370.

¹² More executive functions notably in the foreign affairs field remained in the field of national governments. For more contribution over the effects of Maastricht Treaty, see Michelle Cini, *European Union politics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 178.

¹³ Achim Hurrelmann, Joan Debardeleben, *Democratic dilemmas in EU multilevel governance: untangling the Gordian knot* in "European Political Science Review", Vol. 1, No. 2/2009, pp. 229-247.

¹⁴ J. Greenwood, *Organized civil society and input legitimacy in the EU* in Joan DeBardeleben and Achim Hurrelmann (eds), *Democratic Dilemmas of Multilevel Governance*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 177-194.

addition to the stage of initiation, we have to consider the democracy promotion and EU integration as conflicting logics. Kristi Raik stresses the difference between the indirect and unintended impact factors of integration¹⁵. The effects of these interactions and exchanges of factors have been more pervasive than the EU's policies of the candidate countries¹⁶. According to Raik's theory "by penetrating the domestic politics of applicant countries, integration into the EU becomes an inseparable part of (re)producing" the democracy of candidate countries¹⁷. Second, as a general hypothesis subsuming the different integration instruments, Raik proposes a new theoretical and methodological framework of discourse analysis. Although Raik maintains the need for reform emphasizing the link between European Union's institutional instruments and the democracy promotion, others may take the view of the lack of satisfaction and knowledge about the European Union as one of the major obstacles to fostering greater appreciation and enthusiasm.

Consistent with these recent researches, Cichowski's analysis provides a guide for understanding the citizen's attitudes cross-nationally at two levels: *first*, the study offers comparative research on the levels of aggregate support; *second*, it develops a relevant hypothesis based on how EU enlargement "may serve as a proxy for individual attitudes about European integration"¹⁸. The relationship between political conditions and the citizen's support for national political institutions is derived from the fact that the determinants of public support for European integration in member states countries has developed in terms of three open models: utilitarian, value, and political economic perception¹⁹. Similarly, others scholars have focused on the factors influencing the attitudes in member state countries.

Gabel and Anderson argue "the institutional reforms have altered the EU in the direction of representative democracy"²⁰. In addition, past research has dismissed the citizens' preferences viewed as providing the understanding of two fundamental aspects of the European integration. *First*, the question regarding the calls for reforms cannot be filled simply by functioning institutions. According to Hooghe Marks, the preferences over the European institutional architecture are the product of two functional theories: a. the politicization of the EU enlargement; b. furthermore, the citizens' attitudes have become decisive for jurisdictional outcomes²¹. Second, in contrast, Gabel and Anderson show that the development of central institutional reforms "the European electorate may play an increasingly important role in structuring political competition"²². Moreover, Mattila and

¹⁵ Kristi Raik, *EU Accession of Central and Eastern European Countries: Democracy and Integration as Conflicting Logics* in "East European Politics and Societies", Vol. 18, No. 4/2004, pp. 567-572.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 569.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ The recent literature touching on the range of issues pertinent to democracy promotion in post-communist democracies is too vast to list it, but a number of works are worth noting. On the issue of democracy assistance and Eastern realities two recent papers have to be synthesized: Rachel A. Cichowski, *Western Dreams, Eastern Realities. Support for the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe* in "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 33, No. 10/2000, December 2000, pp. 1243-1247; Robert Rohrschneider, Stephen Whitefield, *Understanding Cleavages in Party Systems Issue Position and Issue Salience in 13 Post-Communist Democracies* in "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 42, No. 2 /2009, pp. 280-313.

¹⁹ Rachel A. Cichowski, *op. cit.*, p. 1243.

²⁰ Matthew J. Gabel, Cristopher J. Anderson, *The Structure Of Citizen Attitudes And The European Political Space* in "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 35, No. 8/2002, pp. 893-896. See also Stephen Whitefield, Milada Anna Vachudova, Marco R. Steenbergen et al., *Do expert surveys produce consistent estimates of party stances on European integration? Comparing expert surveys in the difficult case of Central and Eastern Europe* in "Electoral Studies", Vol. 26, No. 1/2007, pp. 50-61.

²¹ Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Markes, *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus* in "British Journal of Political Science", Vol. 39/2009, pp. 1-23.

²² Matthew J. Gabel, Cristopher J. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 893-896.

Raunio analyze party-voter congruence on European integration tested with data showing that parties are closer to their electorate on the left/right orientation than on the EU dimension²³.

Conclusions: Past strategies, future directions

The foregoing study demonstrates that the European Union is a significant presence in the field of democracy promotion policies. Its commitment to focus on the democracy promotion compares in quantity terms the “Western perspective” with the US policy, while qualitatively the European democracy promotion develops a distinct coordination. However, the EU political approach enhances a closer combination of “formal democratic forms” and “legal-building elements”²⁴.

²³ Mikko Mattila, Tapio Raunio, *Cautious voters-Supportive parties-Opinion congruence between voters and parties on the EU dimension* in “European Union Politics”, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 427-449.

²⁴ See also Richard Youngs, *The Case of European Strategy*, CEPS (Center for European Policy Studies), Working Documents, No. 167, October 2001. Full report available for free download (<http://www.ceps.be/book/democracy-promotion-case-european-union-strategy>).