



**Would the evolution, the growing power and influence of the European Parliament do much to reduce the “democratic deficit” in the EU?**

**M.A. Dissertation in European studies**

Edvard MITEVSKI

Thesis advisors:

*Prof. Dr. Reinhard RACK*

*Member of the European Parliament*

*Leopold MAURER*

*Head of Unit*

*DG Enlargement, European Commission*

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## Abstract

This study is a qualitative analysis of the “democratic deficit” problem inherent in the European Union since the initial stage, which tends to jeopardize the EU’s future integration. It is argued that national government’ decisions to transfer sovereignty to a new supranational model of governance trigger an imbalance between *input* and *output* legitimacy. Therefore, the primary objective of the study is to examine whether the gradual bestowing of additional powers to the European Parliament would repair this imbalance. Following a discussion of the diversity of theories on the democratic deficit and the origins and causes for its existence, the study thoroughly investigates the entire evolution and the gradual empowerment of the European Parliament and examines the impact of such empowerment vis-à-vis the “democratic deficit” in the European Union. Then the study examines the party cohesion and competitiveness in the European political party space along with the importance of entirely European elections and looks into the EP’s gains in the “EU Constitution”. Finally, the study recognizes the European Parliament as the most legitimate body in Union’s institutional architecture and considers the European Parliament’s empowerment as an important remedy to the “legitimacy crisis” and the “democratic deficit” problem that the Union suffers from.

**Keywords:** democratic deficit, European Union, democracy, legitimacy, accountability, European Parliament, empowerment.

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*In loving memory of Borjan Tanevski, the pioneer of the European idea in the Republic of Macedonia*

## Introduction

Today, more than fifty years after, one can argue that even the founding fathers of the European Communities would have been greatly surprised of the pace of development of their vision for creation of united Europe as a cradle of peace, liberty, democracy and economic growth. Although faced and still facing numerous obstacles of various natures and origins which hinder the construction of a strong, democratically legitimized European Union, what Winston Churchill once called “The United States of Europe”, the EU has evolved as a unique concept of sui generis nature<sup>1</sup>. Though branded as a progressive concept beyond the conventional international organization, comprised of supranational institutions and a legal system with supremacy over the national legal systems, the European Union, as every other international organization cannot be democratically legitimized solely via its member states, which is the case of every entirely international organization. At the same time, having in mind that the core elements necessary for the creation of a State are lacking (for instance single army or full-fledged social policy) the European Union cannot be labeled and democratically legitimized as such.

Hence, in order to move forward to further integration and establish itself as a subject in the international arena, the European Union has to enhance its democratic character. Following the integration pace, in the past and in the present day after the “big bang” enlargement, many difficulties appear to exist. In the name of the future integration many of the setbacks present were resolved by compromise and common sense by the participating states. Nonetheless, there are some phenomena which cannot be simply tackled through debate, but sharp regulatory measures are needed as the integration process itself deepened. One of those vigorously debated phenomena within the European Union is indisputably the so called “democratic deficit”, which is singled out as one of the most exploited expressions related to the lack of accountability, transparency and therefore legitimacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have its definition on what EU really represents. Wagner believes that the EU represents a “compound of states”. Delors perceive it as sui generis, an “unidentified political object”. Wallace sees it as “less than a federation, more than a regime” and Ruggie brands it as “the first truly postmodern political form”.

As currently designed, the EU is lacking a democratic legitimization and suffers from “democratic deficit” manifested through visible feelings of discontent, disaffection and scepticism among the European citizens. The European citizens are dissatisfied of how the EU performs, branding it as ineffective, unaccountable, not-transparent and not capable to provide them with a political arena for expression of their standings and visions<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, they are accusing the EU for lacking legitimacy, enforcing "behind closed doors" decisions, not taking into account the citizen's will, which lead to notable public distrust to the EU institutions<sup>3</sup>. This state of play surely causes serious problems to the whole EU concept and questions its future existence. It can be freely argued that one of the measures that are to be undertaken as a remedy to this problem is the empowerment of the European Parliament (EP), the so called “First Pillar of legitimacy”, first of all because the European Parliament represents the only Representative Authority elected directly by its citizenry. Nevertheless, although with limited functions and shadowed by other EU institutions, which undermines the "democratic legitimacy" of the Union, the EP has become the source of the EU's democratic legitimacy, perceived as an institution to provide for the “Europe of the citizens”.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to examine whether the democratic deficit will be reduced by giving the EP more power and if such actions will lead to more accountable and effective EU institutions based on trust of the EU citizenry. The analysis is conducted through a detailed examination of the conflicted theories on the democratic deficit and its existence, the historical evolution of the European Parliament, its gradual empowerment and growing influence, along with the importance of the EP political parties and elections.

For these purposes, the study is organized in three chapters. The first chapter explores the various definitions and the genesis of the “democratic deficit” phenomenon in the European Union as part of the debate among the scholars and politicians. The focus of the second chapter is the role

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<sup>2</sup> The causes of this dissatisfaction fall mainly into three categories: The speed of current change, and great uncertainty as to its consequences, whether the change is technological or economic; the widespread feeling of a loss of values and once-cohesive social fabric and due to the feeling that economic liberalism has gone too far and too wrong. See, Perceptions of the European Union, A Qualitative study of the Public's, Study by OPTEM S.A.R.L for the European Commission, at [http://ec.europa.eu/governance/areas/studies/optem-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/governance/areas/studies/optem-report_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Numerous critics argue that this feeling of discontent of the European citizenry has been factor (at least in part) of: the initial Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty and the 49% French vote against; the Danish and subsequent Swedish (in national referendum) rejection of the Euro; the Irish “No” to the Nice Treaty; the British unwillingness to join Schengen and the EMU and the most recent plebiscitary rejection to the EU Constitutional Treaty in France and Holland. In addition, on average only 39 % of Europeans say they tend to trust the European Union. The proportion of people who tend not to trust the EU institutions is highest in Sweden (61%) and Denmark (58%). Source: Euro-barometer, 51.0.

of the European Parliament as a major source of democracy and legitimacy in the European Union. This chapter tackles the evolution, the empowerment and the growing influence of the European Parliament and the importance for greater cohesion and competitiveness in the European political party space as well as the importance of entirely European elections in the process of reduction of the democratic deficit. Finally, analysing the European Parliament's gains in the in the draft Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe, the study examines whether bestowing of additional powers to the EP in the "EU Constitution" will provide for a "fully democratic European Union".

Overall, this paper examines the academic debate concerning the democratic deficit in correlation with the respective empirical findings. Despite particular constraints that may appear it provides for the simplification and further clarification of the existing literature, contributing to the improved understanding of the democratic deficit phenomenon. More specifically, the paper clarifies the role of the European Parliament in increasing the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

## Chapter One The Academic Debate on the Concept of "Democratic Deficit" in the European Union

### 1. Definitions and genesis of the "democratic deficit"

*"The most effective way to restrict democracy is to transfer decision-making from the public arena to unaccountable institutions: kings and princes, priestly castes, military juntas, party dictatorships, or modern corporations".*

*Noam Chomsky*

*Domestic Constituencies, May 1998*

As of the 1990's, along with the intensification of the European integration process, the concept known as "democratic deficit" became one of the most exploited expressions by the scholars exploring the evolution and the functioning of the European Union. The expression "democratic deficit" was coined in the beginning of the 1970s by David Marquand<sup>4</sup>, a British political scientist and Labour Party member, who scrutinized the functioning of the European Community institutions and came across to visible weakness of their democratic components. Marquand referred to the

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<sup>4</sup> Ives Meny, "De la Démocratie en Europe", *Old Concepts and New Challenges* (JCMS 2002) Vol. 41. No. 1, p. 1-13.