

THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT VERSUS DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT POLICY

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Abstract

This paper will deal with the quality of democracy in the EU focusing on respective dynamics which relate to the European Union Enlargement Policy. Although its' many dimensions, the debate over the *democratic deficit* in the European Union, in the first instance relates with the approaches regarding on how the EU can produce more transparent and accountable policies. Moreover, the institutional and socio-psychological dimensions of the problem constitute strong variables to unlock the issue.

Concerning the quality of democracy in the EU, there is a basic and recurring dilemma of public consultation which provides the 'input democracy' versus 'output' democracy when elites are placed in the top of the decision-making pyramid. Moreover, at every stage of the European integration process, the question of democratic legitimacy has become increasingly sensitive. The question -to what extend the EU yet in nowadays suffers a democratic deficit and if this problem is being exported through the integration process- is a crucial point for the future of the Union. These questions will be tackled through the following paper starting with an overall introduction to the issue, followed by addressing the *democratic deficit* and dealing with the *democratic deficit* and the EU Enlargement Policy. The paper will sum up with concluding remarks.

Key Words: EU; Democratic Deficit; Deliberative Democracy; EU Enlargement Policy

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Introduction

The debate over the *democratic deficit* in the European Union has many dimensions. However, this debate in the first instance relates with the approaches regarding how the EU can produce more transparent and accountable policies. Yet, the institutional and socio-psychological dimensions of the problem constitute strong variables to unlock the issue.

It should be pointed that 'democracy is more than just policy outputs in harmony with the interests of citizens. The essence of democracy is political choice. If the political marketplace does not provide a choice, the connection between voters' preferences and policy outcomes relies on the luck of the elites and institutions' (Hix. 2003, p.24).

Thus, democracy is also about the ability of voters to choose between different groups of elites, with rival candidates for political leadership and rival programmes for public policy. This competition is the basis for the so-called input democracy versus the output democracy approach and not only allows voters to reward or punish leaders for their actions, but also promotes policy debate, deliberation and democratic contestation.

According to the mainstream literature regarding deliberative democracy, there is a basic and recurring dilemma of public consultation versus output democracy when we place elites in the top of the decision-making pyramid. On the other hand there is a persistent problem according which we might have deliberation but this, without political equality. In this light, emerges an important question: Can we match

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both...? Can we have a democratic method that includes and represents everyone under conditions where people can become informed and can think through complicated matters? Can we match deliberative democracy with political equality? In this context, the European Union needs measures to improve its democratic legitimacy.

The *democratic deficit* is a concept that denominates the detachment of the European Union from citizens. Furthermore EU's various bodies suffer from a lack of accountability turning to inaccessible to the ordinary citizen because their method of operating is more than complex. On the other hand, there is also the problem of the European *demos* and the socio-psychological perception of being Europeans.

Addressing the Democratic Deficit

At every stage of the European integration process, the question of democratic legitimacy has become increasingly sensitive. The Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties contributed to improving the democratic legitimacy of the institutional system by reinforcing the powers of Parliament with regard to the appointment and control of the Commission and successively extending the scope of the co-decision procedure. The Treaty of Lisbon continues in the same vein. On the one side, it strengthens the powers of the European Parliament on legislative and budgetary matters and enables it to carry out more effective political control of the European Commission through the procedure of appointing the President of the Commission. On the other side, it strives to increase citizen participation in the democratic life of the Union by creating a citizens' right of initiative and by recognizing the importance of dialogue between the European institutions and civil society. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty provides that the sessions of the Council of Ministers will be made public in order to promote transparency and information for European citizens (Europa. n,d).

The Democratic Deficit and the EU Enlargement

The question -to what extent the EU still suffers a *democratic deficit* and if this problem is being exported through the integration process- is a crucial point for the future of the Union. And if so, accordingly; if this problem persists we need to analyze if the EU's situation is worse than many of its candidate states. Most studies find that the EU's ability to influence patterns of democratization in the candidate countries has been quite limited. It should be pointed that joining the European Union has changed the nature of democracy in the new member states but also it has an altering role in potential candidate and candidate countries. Actually, the broader patterns suggest that diversity regarding democratic models persists, both between eastern and western Europe, within the new member states compared to old members and furthermore with incumbent states and candidate countries. Although the European Union has in many ways supported democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, it has also imposed new constraints related to the democracy in national basis. National parliaments tend to be less powerful democratic players during the integration process and also after a country joins the European Union.

As a consequence of the enlargement policy related to the external policy in general, democratic decision-making within the European Union has to accommodate a more diversified set of political interests and orientations. It is turning to a crucial point that there is a need to provide citizens with greater access to the European decision-making process. This seems to be most urgent in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. This is due to the fact that according to the new constraints and dynamics of integration, citizens feel particularly detached from the decision making process. Nevertheless, the facts also suggest that in many cases, external influences might have a good potential to play a constructive role provided that the conditions for the respective transformation are also favourable for the candidate countries.

The overall EU policy towards Eastern candidates points to the limits of enlargement through the application of different tools of democracy promotion. However, democratic deliberation is in a large extent undermined by the technicalities of the integration process and by the elite detachment from the *demos*. Among other principles and norms that dominate the enlargement process, the specific weight falls upon the different technicalities oriented towards -speed, efficiency, and expertise which constrain democratic politics in the candidate countries and limit their EU accession to a narrow sphere of elite's and expert's domain. The magnitude of domestic costs and the patterns of the EU's impact in the politics constitute the main set of factors related to the EU orientation. This derives from the asymmetry of the integration process centring and favouring the Union. Furthermore and what is worst, the limitations of the EU's impact on candidate countries are often related to the lack of clear conditions, inconsistent application of conditions, or superficial monitoring. This is quite problematic for the politics on national basis with a specific focus at democracy matters.

Concluding remarks

Thus, focusing at elites in the EU level but also taking in consideration the elites at national levels it should be pointed that -what is quite problematic is the detachment from the *demos* in both cases. This detachment continues to affect the quality of democracy and furthermore impedes the possibility for democratic deliberation. That is in addition to the problems related to political and democratic equality. In conclusion, the question of deliberation, political equality and the process of continuous consulting with the people are problems with no simple and immediate answers neither for the EU incumbent members nor for the candidate countries for EU integration.

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