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# Assessing the Democratic Deficit in the EU: towards a Participatory Approach

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**Abstract:** The deficit of democracy in the European Union (EU) explains the widening gap between EU citizens and the EU ideas and structures. This fact leads to a situation in which citizens' opinions are not taken into consideration by the supranational bodies. This pattern will continue until the average EU citizen will be able to intervene directly in the policy-making processes of the EU in a more significant way. Citizens' confidence in the EU has eroded largely since the Maastricht Treaty. Furthermore, it is an ongoing process that will not be countered until the deficit of democracy in the EU will be effectively confronted. The EU will never be considered as a real union and a fully democratic structure without the active participation of citizens in the configuration of the political agenda and over the control of the governmental implementation.

**Keywords:** deficit of democracy, European identity, euroscepticism, citizens, European Union, civic platforms

**Resumen:** El déficit democrático en la Unión Europea (UE) explica la creciente brecha entre los ciudadanos de la UE y las ideas y estructuras relacionadas con la UE. Este hecho lleva a una situación en la que las opiniones de los ciudadanos no son tenidas en consideración por el organismo supranacional. Esta tendencia continuará hasta que el ciudadano medio de la UE sea capaz de intervenir directamente en los procesos de formulación de políticas de la UE de una manera más significativa. La confianza de los ciudadanos en la UE se ha erosionado en gran medida a partir del Tratado de Maastricht. Además, es un proceso continuo que no será contrarrestado hasta que el déficit democrático en la UE sea confrontado de una manera eficaz. La UE nunca será considerada como una verdadera unión política y una estructura plenamente democrática sin la participación activa de los ciudadanos en la configuración de la agenda política y sobre el control de la ejecución gubernamental.

**Palabras clave:** déficit democrático, identidad europea, euroescepticismo, ciudadanía, plataformas cívicas

## Introduction

'A system that cannot be improved cannot last, will be deteriorated slowly' (Delsol 2003, p. 101). The words of Delsol can be easily applied to the current situation of the European Union (EU), which seems to be on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the EU and EU elites do not want to undertake any

substantial reforms and try to live from their own returns accumulated by the fact of having enjoyed a privileged position during the last sixty years. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the EU is suffering a profound crisis, not just economic but specially of trust, as the number of people that do not consider themselves represented by the supranational institutions is already significant and continues to growth.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the deficit of democracy in the EU explains the widening gap between EU citizens and the EU ideas and structures. This fact leads to a situation in which citizens' opinions are not taken into consideration by the supranational body. This pattern will continue until the average EU citizen will be able to intervene directly in the policy-making processes of the EU in a more significant way. Citizens' confidence in the EU has eroded largely since the Maastricht Treaty. Furthermore, it is an ongoing process that will not be countered until the deficit of democracy in the EU will be effectively confronted. The EU will never be considered as a real union and a fully democratic structure without the active participation of citizens in the configuration of the political agenda and over the control of the governmental implementation.

Throughout this work the concept of deficit of democracy will be scrutinised in detail, together with its interrelation with other relevant variables crucial in the EU jargon like European Identity or Euroscepticism. The main operationalization method of this work is a case-study; the interpretation of the EU as a clear example of a system with deficient democratic mechanisms in terms of lack of accountability and representativeness of its citizens and in the absence of procedures for allowing and promoting citizens' participation. This is a very interesting approach and yet not overly used in the vast existing literature about the deficit of democracy in the EU. Indeed, there are two principal lines of research about this topic. The first one is focused on the discussion of the existence or not of this problem in the supranational institution and its significance. Andrew Moravcsik and Giandomenico Majone are two of the most prominent figures who defend that the EU's deficit of democracy does not exist or is not that relevant. The second research front concentrates its arguments on the existence of the deficit of democracy in EU institutions by comparing and contrasting the EU institutional framework with the national one, and proposes institutional reforms for decreasing the democratic deficit at the supranational level. Nevertheless, the utilization of EU citizens as a control variable is a newfangled approach as there are very few documents that take into consideration the direct consequences that the deficit of democracy has over them. At the same time, the idea of including more participatory methods for taking into account citizens is more widespread in the American school than among EU academics that also incentivised the path applied in this paper.

After a brief introduction of this issue, the first chapter analyses the definition of the deficit of democracy in the EU, together with the description of the places where this problem can be exactly found. The second section includes all the problems indirectly related with the deficit of democracy, which are direct consequences of the absence of democratic legitimacy of the EU and/or are key factors that have a clear impact over this question as they have contributed to its enlargement. Interesting and challenging issues like European Identity, Euroscepticism and the influence of economic crisis will be analysed, employing the data of Eurobarometer in order to test their interrelation with the deficit of democracy. In the third chapter the question of how to solve and decrease the democratic deficit of the EU is being treated, explaining the crucial role of the citizens' civic platforms in order to achieve that objective. The last part ends with the conclusion of the work.

In order to overcome the stagnation its image and to continue having a considerable influence on the global decision-making, the EU should evolve in a new supra-national democratic model never seen before, a participatory democratic system in which citizens' opinions play a key role.

## **1. The democratic deficit**

The larger part of the scholar community that describes and explores the deficit of democracy that coated the European Union (EU) analyses this issue from a non-appropriate perspective. They usually observe the existing political entities that are well-known (states, nation-states, regions or international organizations) and they pay attention to the problems connected with the deficit of democracy that appear in these bodies. Scholars also resolve to adjust the potential solutions that may be applicable to these entities to the EU, expecting that what could diminish the democratic deficit at the national level will also contribute to minimize this problem at the Community level. Nevertheless, this is an inaccurate approach that partially explains the wide bewilderment that is installed over the debate of the democratic deficit.

It is indubitable that the EU is a very special structure. This polity 'has evolved as a *sui generis* organization' (Milev 2004, p. 9), utterly different from the previous existing entities and organisms. Therefore, the debate of the democratic deficit should be described from the EU constitutional framework, instead of using other frames of references (Azman 2011, p. 242).

The nation-state notion of popular sovereignty has been worn out in a substantial account during the last fifty years, due to the impact and spread of the telecommunications, the technological improvements and the build-up of the strong financial economic system. This correspond to the 'third transformation of democracy' in Huntington words (Huntington 1991, p. 33), a time where nation-states have been

obliged to devolve several competences over the executive and legislative processes to a supranational body as a result of the more globalised world in where we found ourselves (Dahl 1994). Therefore, the EU is undoubtedly a polity of this third wave of democracy, but the question is if it has gone even further. Several academics, as Fukuyama, ask themselves whether the EU could be the first example of a new democratic wave, the 'fourth democratic wave' (Fukuyama 1993), as the EU complexity structure has never been achieved by any prior polity so far (Chrysoschoou 1998, p. 2).

Citizens of every political entity should have an enormous potential power for modifying the structure and the system in which they are embedded. The principal dilemma is how to motivate EU citizens to participate in an active way in the EU. It is undeniable that the partial elimination of the democratic deficit will make EU citizens feel that they are belonging to a system that takes them into consideration, and as a result, encourage them to be more involved in the EU. Nevertheless, it seems that the EU is walking in the opposite direction. Every time the EU is being enlarged the representativeness of EU citizens in the European arena is being shortened and the successive treaties are an ineffective 'medicine'. At the same time, it is interesting to observe the beautiful cynicism allocated under a system that has never allowed the people to whom they supposedly represent to elect three of the most determinant posts: the European Commission President, the European Council President and the Foreign Affairs Representative, while it goes around the globe giving lessons to other actors about how a democracy should be established and implemented. Hence, the EU cannot be considered as the most suitable body to give this kind of advice.

### 1.1. Definition of democratic deficit

Most of the scholars that address this problem of the EU focus their analysis and studies on the not-enough-transparent institutions of the EU. Nevertheless, the accent of this paper will be placed on the assertion that in the EU there is 'too little democracy' (Jolly 2003, p. 7), as the accountability to citizens and the opportunity to be able to participate to a great extent in the political decision-making should be considered as the utmost dilemma of democracy in the EU.

At the early stages of the EU it was even reasonable to keep citizens' wishes out of the decision-making, mainly because the supranational institution was designed to be an elite-based economic community and not a political project (De Sousa and Marchi 2011, p. 359). As it will be mentioned later at the Academic approaches' subchapter, at the beginning the Community tried to isolate itself from being a democratic participatory system in order to improve the situation of its citizens and Member States without worsening any of them; following therefore Pareto efficient methods. A structure with high political contestation for the political agenda would have never been accepted as easily as it was with the creation of common market because the

different political positions would have prioritized their personal interest. At that time the European Parliament had the name of the *European Parliamentary Assembly* and was playing an absolutely secondary role in the policy outcomes, focusing in providing not binding recommendations to the relevant institutions. Citizens did not have any possibility to influence the policy-making or the decision-making of the Community; nevertheless, there was not any democratic deficit as citizens were having a 'permissive consensus' towards the Community institutions and its elite (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970, p. 41).

Nevertheless, with the development and transformations experimented over time, the inclusion of citizens became unavoidable, as the union shifted to represent them in the same degree as national parliaments and national governments represent their people. Even more, issues like human right defence, the creation of an Economic and Monetary Union, the promotion of the mobility of European workers, among other things, demanded that the opinions of the citizens were included in the system. Hence democracy started to be an end that required some fundamental aspects. There is an imperious necessity of counting with the citizens of the polity; people that accept as legitimate the decisions taken by the system, and that consider themselves as part of the system. There is also crucial the public control; the accountability of the representatives appointed by the citizens (Lord 2008, p. 316). However, one critical aspect is different in this regard. Normally, when a citizen does not feel him represented with the policies that their representatives are supporting at the local, regional or national level, or if he perceives as mistaken the economic performance of this representatives he will criticise them, but he will not put into question the whole system. In contrast, when the citizen analyse the EU performance, he is not blaming concrete figures of the EU governance, but neglecting the *trinity* shaped by EU institutions, EU policies and EU ways of action (Hix 2008, p. 66).

## **2. Enhancing variables of the democratic deficit**

Very little attention has been paid in the existing literature to the interrelation of the deficit of democracy with other variables that are becoming more and more important every day within the EU environment. The idea of a potential European Identity or the increasing feeling of discontent by EU citizens towards the supranational level have direct consequences over the existence of a democratic deficit in the EU, as it will be explained during the following pages.

### **2.2. The development of an European Identity**

Pierre Manent claims that 'most of the nations in Europe are recognizable over the course of at least seven or eight centuries' (Manent 2007, p. 32). Therefore, it can



sound incredible that the identification of Europe when referring to the EU is a recent circumstance, derived from the setting-up of the European Communities sixty years ago. The self-monopolization of the term 'Europe' is not a random coincidence, but the deliberate course of action from the European institutions to be regarded as a special territory of the world, by defending some general values and promoting a common identity. Nonetheless, the geographical criterion seems unsatisfactory to verify if EU citizens recognize themselves as brothers of a common identity.

Regarding EU treaties, it seems that there is a lack of interest in defining the main concepts of the European Identity. As it can be observed in the different articles of the treaties, there is a vague concept about European Identity. At the same time, the idea of an *European Citizenship*, arising from the Treaty of Amsterdam is also very vague and imprecise (Rebel 2013, p. 9). This indefiniteness leads some authors like Ivic and Lakicevic to denounce that inside the treaties, the European Identity is fundamentally described as an 'instrumental good', as a 'tool' for giving sense to the existence of the idea of the EU (Ivic and Lakicevic 2011, p. 59). Therefore, it should not be contemplated as something atypical that the average EU citizen do not feel identify himself with this instrumental and perverse identity.

In order to surpass the deficit of democracy, an effective civic European Identity is required, at least from the instrumental perception of a *European Leviathan* proportionating vital advantages. The feeling of belonging to a common habitat is an essential requisite for encouraging a higher participation of European citizens in the system, as this affection will make people consider that their opinions are taken into account to a greater degree. Nevertheless, as Rubavičius defends, the existence of an European Identity should not be proclaimed as a vital pillar for having a democratic Europe, as in the majority of the cases a democratic identity only appears after a while in those systems with genuine democratic conditions (Rubavičius 2009, p. 94). Therefore, European Identity will *be here to stay* in the medium-long term insofar the EU will be able to develop itself as an effective and complete economic and political agent with a promising future, and solely if this fact is recognized by the European population.

### 2.3. The increased strength of Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism could be defined as a general feeling of indignation and disapprobation towards the EU. The vast majority of Eurosceptics are against the entrance of new members to the Union, lament the existence of the Single Market and the establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union, staunchly advocate the preservation of the nation-state culture and oppose any further transfer of competences or reinforcing the powers of the EU (Vasilopoulou 2010, p. 70). Indeed, some con-

siderable percentage of Eurosceptics directly attack the EU structure, for example, by defending that the decision-making process of the EU has just scanty elements of consensual democracy but where the focus should be located on the economic forces that makes the EU be a mere 'modified market regime' (Bonde 2011, p. 152).

A huge number of Europeans consider that the competences transferred to the supranational level should stop because the policies that the EU is lately approving are negative affecting their daily life and, furthermore; the situation has gone too far. In their opinion, the EU is allowing foreigners to 'steal our jobs' and looking the other way when 'personal safety' is being undermined by hundreds of delinquents that come to our country just for 'committing crimes' or to 'abuse of our social benefits' (Dulman 2013, p. 187). The campaigns promoting these thoughts were several times very successful, as with the case of the 'Polish plumber' that will go to France to monopolize all the 'odd jobs', to the misguided vision that the major part of immigrants coming from Romania or Bulgaria are inserted in criminal bands or have in mind applying to take advantage of the social benefits of the recipient country. Indeed, the rise of the radical right-wing nationalist parties respecting the rules of the political game is a critical 'defiance' for the EU, as those parties are not anymore *black swans*. Geert Wilders' *Party for Freedom* in the Netherlands, the *Front National* of Marine Le Pen in France, *Golden Dawn* in Greece, *Jobbik* in Hungary, *UK Independence Party* in the United Kingdom, or the *North League* in Italy are some of the current examples of this tendency. These parties are supported by completely different sectors of the population, even the working class as the argument of protecting and giving priority to the interests of the national citizens could sound very convincing at the time that Europe is dealing not only with an economic crisis, but also with a moral and philosophical crisis (Delsol 2003, p. 58).

In this prospect the political contest that was held on May 2014 appears as an ultimate but at the same time interesting opportunity for the future of the EU. The radical Eurosceptic parties appeared with force in the European Parliament after the elections. Nevertheless, this fact could (and should) lead to the creation of a unified EU response for overcoming the problems embedded in the EU. The Eurosceptic supporters will try to dismantle the supranational arena and transfer back competences to the national arena, and the most suitable way of counteracting will be by offering a common accord about the steps to follow in the future. The attack of the system will awaken the conformist pro-European parties that were installed in a quiet situation derived from the problems arisen after the huge enlargement of 2004-2007. However, after this election there will be an unavoidable clash between EU supporters and EU detractors; all the cards will be on the table and pro-Europeans will not have the opportunity to 'check'. Eurosceptic forces will immediately 'raise the bet' and deciding not to play will mean to renounce to the European project.



## **2.4. The economic crisis and its consequences on citizens' views**

Unexpected 'exogenous threats to the system' situation (Berezin 2009, p. 34) frequently increase the rejection of the existing authority as people do not consider the existing forces to be capable to manage and control the situation. The economic crisis could be considered a relevant threat, as it has increased inequality among the different groups of the society.

The European citizens have experienced the change of their economic situation on first-hand since 2008. And that it is a huge problem, as the economic perception is probably the most conventional instrument to determine the expectations of citizens towards the EU. The worsening of the economic situation has led to a great regression of the citizens' confidence in the EU, but the improvement of the economic expectation would not turn back this tendency with the same speed (Rohrschneider and Loveless 2010, p. 1041). If the EU wants to rely on the output of its outcomes, on its results, as the primary method to satisfy citizens, it would be going in the wrong direction. In the economic sense, the EU should focus itself on trying to solve the problems coming from an unfinished Economic and Monetary Union.

The lack of fundamental structures like a banking union, a common debt pooling or the existence of strong crisis resolution mechanism was already real prior to the crisis. The EU institution did not respond in an assertive manner or promoting radical transformation, they were just solving the troubles one by one and only when the abyss was very close, like with the crisis of the euro. Yes, it was essential to save the euro, but the euro is a mean, not an end. The end is the citizens; a euro without them does not make much sense. Consequently, a more effective coordination of the economic policies is required in order to guarantee the survival of the EU and to promote the involvement of the EU citizens.

## **2.5. Eurobarometer as the best instrument to measure citizens' disenchantment**

There is a considerable amount of academic information concerning the analysis of the democratic deficit of the EU in the institutional sphere, but scholars do not analyse with the same fervour the citizen's view of European Union (EU) democracy. The data collected in the Eurobarometer is a good mechanism for investing the opinion of the EU average citizens regarding the democratic functioning of the supranational entity and it will also be useful in order to test the assumptions that are being drawn in this paper.

The first question that will be analysed is the difference of trust in the EU in contrast with the national institutions. I consider this question relevant because it shows a paradoxical situation, as it can be observed in the "Appendix B". Despite the fact that

there is actually some kind of democratic deficit of confidence in the national and European institutions, the point is that the EU is the one that has democratic surplus, as Hobolt pointed out (Hobolt 2012, p. 91). In the last Eurobarometer (European Commission 2013a), thirty one percent of EU citizens tended to trust the EU, while just twenty five percent and twenty three percent were satisfied with their parliament and their government. It is true that the confidence of citizens in the supranational sphere has experienced an enormous regression, passing from fifty seven percent of support during spring 2007 or forty one percent in spring 2011 to the merely thirty one percent already mentioned. As a result, some measures should be taken to counteract this tendency, but the fact should go in line with the citizens' loss of confidence over every kind of institutions in general. As Miller points out there is 'no state, union, or other political entity entirely democratic' (Miller 2011, p. 322)

Nevertheless, Eurobarometer is also appropriated to observe if there is indeed some strong relation between the Euroscepticism, European Identity, European legitimacy and the economic crisis. For this operation, other four questions of the Eurobarometer have been studied, those closely connected to the fields that have been previously mentioned: 'to what extent citizens agree or disagree with the statement that their voice counts in the EU' (European legitimacy), 'do citizens feel that they are citizens of the EU?' (European Identity), 'citizens' evaluation of the current situation of the European economy' (Economic crisis) and 'citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU' (Euroescepticism) (European Commission 2013b). A comparative analysis of the answers proportionated by EU citizens provides some strong causal relationships between the variables, as it can be observed in the section "Appendix A".

In those countries with a smaller percentage of citizens perceiving as good the current status of EU economy, citizens tend to disagree with the idea that they are being fairly represented in the EU. In Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Spain the percentage of people that consider the performance of the EU economy to be something positive is under twenty percent. Those four countries are in the top-five (together with Greece) of countries that consider their demands not to be met at the supranational level, as eight out of ten citizens of those nations consider that. Although France appears to be an exception, this finding strongly contradicts the impressions of a great number of academics like Hix that do not consider that the improvement of the economic situation of the EU will cease the increasing dissatisfaction of EU citizens towards the EU. A lower number of people considering the economic performance of the EU as deficient will entail also lower number of people criticising the EU and EU actors for considering their opinions do not count. Therefore, the economic picture really matters.

The disenchantment of the citizens of Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Spain with the EU democratic mechanism is remarkable, as far as a minimum of sixty percent of

the population is questioning the democratic mechanisms of the EU, probably for the implementation of a considerable number of structural measures imposed from Brussels. These 'mandatory recommendations' were intended to decrease the budgetary debt and the public deficit of these countries and entailed a consequent decrease of the national sovereignty. As a result, this trend also affects negatively the perception that the voice of those countries is being heard in the EU institutions.

When the majority of the population of some country is contented with the democratic system of the EU, as for them it is functioning correctly and as it should, the European Identity becomes stronger there. The percentage of people that consider themselves European citizens is closer or higher to seventy percent in Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Poland, which are clearly the less Eurosceptic countries.

Finally, those countries in which more citizens believe that their opinions and decisions could shape the policies and future of the EU are also those countries in which European citizenship is more widespread. Despite Croatia appears as an outsider, due to its recent accession, citizens of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden think that they have the power to influence at the supranational level, and this contributes to a stronger European Identity in these nations.

As it has been concluded, none of these elements could be interpreted separately from the rest, as they are completely interconnected. Consequently, a possible solution for solving or minimising the deficit of democracy of the EU will also notably reshape the future of the European Identity and the Euroscepticism.

### **3. How to solve the democratic deficit?**

As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, the democratic deficit of the EU does not affect just a single aspect of the supranational body, but it is a 'multifaceted challenge' (Crum 2005, p. 458). In order to overcome this question it is required to provide more power to those representative institutions that represent European citizens, at all possible levels. Therefore, the most important modification for decreasing the democratic deficit is not connected with the reform of the institutional framework. There is an urgent need for modifying the vision that the EU can be solely based on output legitimacy, with very weak elements of input legitimacy. A successful entity cannot merely rely on the serviceability of their political outcomes; the famous statement 'government for the people'. On the EU structure citizens' participation should be the essential element in order to have a real 'government by the people'. Furthermore, the output legitimacy is strongly limited in the case of the EU.

The size of a certain polity is directly connected with the effectiveness of the participation of the people that shape such a polity; usually the bigger the entity,

the lower the possibility of citizens for expressing their views (Dahl 1998, p. 107). In other words, this very old idea stating that the larger the group of people represented in a democratic system, the more difficult to give them the opportunity to voice their opinion is evident and appears strongly in the case of the EU. Nevertheless, there still are some mechanisms that allow citizens to provide their judgement as a whole. As it has been illustrated in a large number of occasions, the most appropriate instruments for EU citizens to reflect their position about the EU have not been the elections to the European Parliament but the referendums on EU issues.

This mechanism proportionated a better overview for finding out the existing confidence of citizens over EU institutions and at the same time promoting their possibilities to influence the system. Nonetheless, it is obvious that there are limitations to enhance the applicability of these referendums, as they are not pragmatic, costly and they cannot be employed for managing daily competition or for articulating dissatisfaction with ordinary policy reforms (Follesdal and Hix 2006, p. 552). Even more, if these obstacles were not been considered, and it were really possible to celebrate a pair of referendums every year about certain relevant issues, it might lead to paradigmatic situations.

For example, Swiss citizens vote on average from four to five times a year in the form of referendum. Swiss citizens could propose some initiatives to introduce or reform a concrete policy by collecting 100.000 valid signatures, and later a referendum will be held. Last February a proposal defended by the Democratic Union of the Centre, popularly known with the name *Swiss People's Party* was approved. Citizens decided to impose entry fees to their European neighbours, by a very narrow margin (50.3% vs. 49.7%), thereby ending the free movement of people agreement existing between Switzerland and the EU since 2002 (Europa Press 2014). So far so good: a legitimate decision taken by Swiss citizens, respecting the rules of the democratic game with the mechanisms that are at their disposal. Nevertheless, there were two fundamental problems. The first one is that the debate was polarised by the supporters of the introduction of restrictive quotas, as they uphold with greater emphasis the discussion of the matter; the absence of an informative balance led to those undecided and hesitant voters to opt for the first option. Secondly, and connected with the previous point, the Swiss society believed that the referendum was supposed to be unsuccessful by a considerable margin, and therefore a considerable number of citizens decided not to go to the polls as they considered that their personal vote would not alter the final outcome. As a result, the anti-immigration measures were approved despite less than twenty percent of the Swiss population truly wants to introduce modifications in the Schengen agreement signed with the EU (Agence France-Presse 2014). Without relinquishing referendums as a legitimate constitutional instrument,

it is advisable to come across other mechanism that could be protected from populism triggered as a reply to situations of crisis or dissatisfaction.

For all these reasons, the best way to complement referendums and popular initiatives for incrementing the participation of EU citizens is, as Moravcsik advocates, to find 'some structure that will offer new political cleavages based on interest' (Moravcsik 2002, p. 615). Civic organizations should be promoted, reformed in order to be transformed into citizens' civic platforms, a completely new interpretation of social entities different from the ones that existed to date, partially because the EU should not focus itself on trying to resemble as much as possible to the nation states in its institutional, procedural and normative mechanisms, but should develop a new set of instruments and structures resulting for its condition of exceptional polity (Meny 2003, p. 10).

A new configuration with the involvement of these groups can be the first step increasing the ideological debate, an indispensable condition to motivate citizens to participate in the system. As Dahl highlights, it is evident that in such heterogeneous sphere as the EU there are considerable difficulties to find common beliefs that succeed to unite a large percentage of populations coming from international organizations, institutions or processes (Dahl 1999, p. 19). In contrast, it will be much more effective to piece citizens together in civic platforms and recognize and increment the force of these bodies, as they are smaller units and they can display the contestation of the political agenda in a more manageable manner. Citizens will be willing to participate in these civic platforms because for some time now they are becoming aware of the importance and impact that EU policies have over their lives (Schmitter 2003, p. 83).

The potential of these organizations was already contemplated in several documents like the "White Paper" in 2001, despite that since then the European Commission has done the minimum to promote collaboration with civic platforms, just mentioned them for defending its democratic behaviour, but without any kind of real cooperation with them. Another document in which these organizations are defended is the Opinion launched in 1999 for the European Economic and Social Committee on "The role and contribution of civil society organisations to the building of Europe" (European Economic and Social Committee 1999).

In contrast with the case of the White Paper, where the civil society term was undefined, this Opinion describes it as a 'collective term' for every kind of social proceeding organised both by individuals or groups but outside the interference of the state. They emphasise the dynamic nature of this term, normally associated with action and a more participatory behaviour of citizens, encouraging them to get involved in the democratic system (European Economic and Social Committee 1999, p. 18). It is interesting to notice this contrast between the definition of the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee because of



their different interpretation of the concept of ‘participatory democracy’ by those two documents. The White Paper for starting does not define what this idea exactly means; neither contemplates any kind of deep reform in order to increment the possibility of participation of citizens through civic organizations and justify the European governance and the satisfaction of citizens by a utilitarian approach, by the effectiveness of the output.

On the contrary, the European Economic and Social Committee is not afraid to enter in ‘troubled waters’ by defining how participatory democracy could be adapted in the EU or by encouraging a more horizontal supranational level with a closer relation between citizens and elites (Lukšič and Bahor 2010, p. 90). At the same time, the Committee of the Regions also has a similar approach to the European Commission on this issue. It looks like that those institutions in which the political actors are elected by citizens underline the importance of a representative democracy while those institutions in which the citizens have nothing to say about who are their representatives are against. A rhetoric question for another paper could be whether those authorities are against because they are afraid of losing their privileged position. Nonetheless, one point is clear, the view that predominates in the supranational level is the one of the European Commission and not the European Economic and Social Committee. Unfortunately, the main problem here is that the former is much more powerful than the latter, still enjoying the competence over the legislative initiation among other things. Nevertheless, these briefly summarizes of how the concept of civic society has been treated by different European Institutions are useful for underlining that the idea that will be described in this chapter is not something completely radical as to a greater or a lesser extent was already contemplated in a document dated of 1999.

In several countries around Europe a large set of ‘rebellions and opinion groups’ are appearing under the premises of ‘justice and freedom’. These bodies have been fragmented and scattered, but they are the ‘only way to save Europe’ (D’Arcais 2014, p. 19). These groups should be united and structured conforming citizens’ civic platforms, which should not be understanding as conventional and traditional political organizations but organised social-political platforms. The newly social networks potentiality really represents a wide and interesting mechanism (Manning 2013, p. 3) in order to articulate the position and political proposals of these platforms by promoting the maximum level of interaction and debate between members of the association.

One clear example of this kind of structure could be found in Latvia with the online platform *ManaBalss.lv*. By this mechanism, which it is operative since 2011, Latvian citizens can be easily involved on the policy-making process of their country by presenting ideas that could be enacted into law by their representatives if they gather enough support. This innovative method has been relatively successful,

as several legislative reforms have been actually introduced on the last years in Latvia (C. Quintas 2014).

The idea of a civic platform should not be static and predetermine. In opposition to the old and traditional structures, those new configurations should and will not have a concrete *modus operandi*. It is evident that there are several territories on the European Union with very similar problems, and there is the necessity of a new hybrid mechanism that provide solution to those problems. The Latvian' idea is focused solely on the legislative involvement, but questions like the democratic control of the economy or the respect and extension of rights could be analysed and discussed to a higher degree on transnational basis. The local and the supranational arena should be closer than ever, and the civil platforms' configuration provide the perfect framework to achieve that goal.

Indeed, this civic platforms should be attributed with new powers. As far as European Commission still has the legislative initiative competence, it could be interesting that every EU Commissioner must bring to the EU Commission meetings three political proposals per year from the platforms that are under his department. The officials of every Commissioner' department could select those proposals that they consider more adequate, in order that this new mechanism could be interpreted as a smoothly important step towards increasing participatory democracy and citizens' involvement and not as a radical attempt of reshape the entire system. Nevertheless, it must be also required that at least one of this three proposals should be transferred to the EP and European Council in order to be discussed, as far the European Commission could be tempted to limit this instrument.

An institutional revolution to give European democracy a second life is required. And in order to provide this fresh air, it is not enough that elected political representatives take the political sphere as temporary civil service and not make politics a profession and a career (D' Arcais 2014, p. 17), but European citizens should want to become involved in the EU' structure. Once they observe that they really can impact the political outcomes of the supranational institutions, they will be more willing to participate; all parties will gain from these citizens' civic platforms.

## **Conclusion**

Most scholars have focused their proposals for decreasing the democratic deficit in the European Union (EU) on the introduction of reforms over its institutional structure. This path is easier, or at least less complicated for achieving positive results in the short and medium term. Nevertheless, in order to guarantee the stability and specially the durability of the EU ideas and EU structures in the long term, it is necessary to decant for a more complicated path to reconnect citizens with institutions. This way basically would consist in opting for a more participatory system, where EU

institutions are more accountable to the people that they are representing. Sooner or later, citizens will not continue accepting the European Commission's excuse that the democratic accountability is mainly a state matter, and they will start to be tired with the European strategy of proposing populist measures as an exchange of forgetting the demand of being a more relevant part of the system. The call for a more participatory system should not be only made in times of crisis for being forgotten once the storm passes by. The European Union has no legitimacy for addressing Europe's and in some cases global problems if firstly does not solve the democratic deficit question.

One of the problems that could arise after having exposed a critical overview of the democratic deficit in the EU during this paper is asking why European citizens do not exhibit an energetic demand calling for the immediate modification of this situation. EU citizens are under some sort of anaesthesia motivated by being in a comfortable position in where several accommodative conditions and comfortable elements are taken for given. It is possible that the radical Eurosceptic postures and the economic crisis may play a decisive role in the awakening of citizens by encouraging them to ask for their right to participate actively in the European system.

A successful, dynamic and democratic EU is of absolute importance for EU citizens and EU Member States. In a time where all the world is interconnected and every country could perform the economic cooperation with the actor that it considers more profitable, states like Great Britain or Italy will be reduced to mere bystanders of the global economy without the European integration and the European internal market. The supranational institutions introduced almost sixty years ago and the policies that these bodies implemented shaped the privileged situation of European citizens, a situation that very frequently is taken for granted, but that is being challenged with the emergence of competitive economies from almost every region of the world like in the case of Eastern Asia with China and India, Brazil in Latin America or South-Africa in Africa. With special attention to the first area, the traditional economic balance of power seems to be under a great pressure demanding a new polycentric structure in which the influence of the EU will be reduced in a considerable manner, taking advantage of the weak current status of Europe.

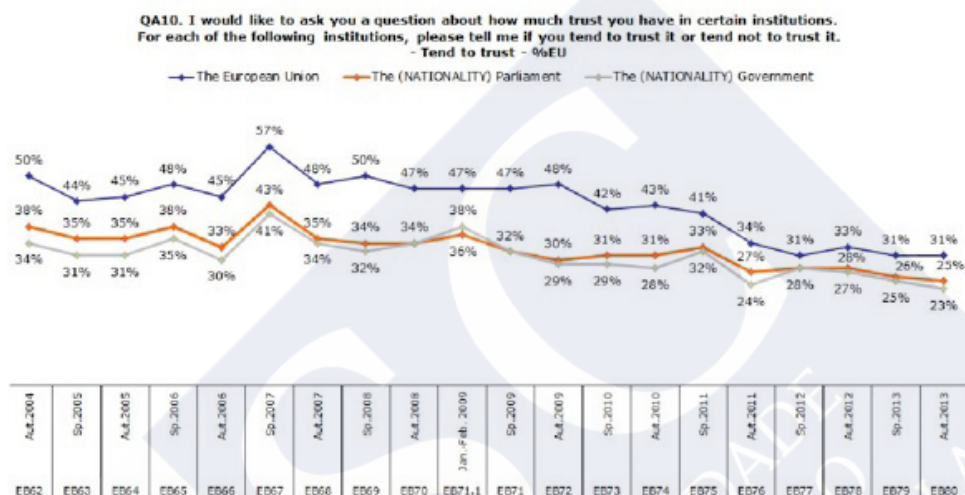
In order to counterbalance this situation, the EU should rise from its own ashes as soon as possible. And the moment is now because the development of the EU seems to be in an uncertain dramatic stage. Some time ago Enrico Letta proclaimed (Gualdoni 2014) 'the only way to battle with political passion is by having the dream of a European political union'. As in the eighties with the four freedoms, in the nineties with the common currency and in 2004 with the acceptance of the Eastern countries, pro-Europeans need nowadays a new dream in order to have a role in the world of the future. A more participatory system in which European citizens' voice becomes louder could, and should become that new dream.

### Appendix A: EUROBAROMETER Autumn 2013

	How democracy works		Perception of economy		My voice counts		Are you a citizen?	
	Satisfied	Not satisfied	Good	Bad	Agree	Disagree	Yes	No
Austria	42	54	33	64	34	64	63	37
Belgium	61	37	30	69	47	51	70	30
Bulgaria	52	27	47	37	26	63	49	50
Croatia	44	43	34	59	42	52	58	42
Cyprus	31	61	18	78	11	86	46	54
Czech Republic	49	45	29	68	19	79	55	45
Denmark	63	31	37	60	57	41	71	28
Estonia	49	37	51	37	19	76	72	27
EU-28	43	46	28	65	29	66	59	40
Finland	56	41	31	67	38	60	73	27
France	41	47	14	78	36	59	57	42
Germany	48	45	37	59	41	54	73	26
Greece	22	75	23	75	13	86	42	58
Hungary	56	39	37	60	37	60	59	40
Ireland	50	39	24	71	31	62	67	32
Italy	33	58	11	86	17	79	45	53
Latvia	56	29	51	37	15	77	53	46
Lithuania	51	28	60	28	23	67	64	35
Luxembourg	64	29	30	65	42	53	85	15
Malta	62	25	36	48	46	46	74	24
Netherlands	43	50	34	64	40	57	58	42
Poland	69	17	51	36	39	52	67	28
Portugal	16	75	9	86	18	79	58	40
Romania	49	36	47	40	19	74	56	41
Slovakia	42	52	28	70	27	69	70	30
Slovenia	40	54	34	63	28	68	61	38
Spain	30	59	18	77	18	80	69	30
Sweden	50	43	20	79	47	50	69	31
UK	36	45	22	63	19	74	42	56



## Appendix B: Tendency to trust in certain institutions



Source: Eurobarometer 80 (European Union 2013a)

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