

**States, political parties, individuals
and the European Union's multi-level democracy
Accession, loyalty, voice, and exit**

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This paper addresses the issue of democracy in the European Union's (EU) multi-level political system while at the same time trying to assess the modalities of and conditions for individual states' specific positions on EU membership. Such positions and attitudes are analyzed through a framework adapted from Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) classification with the addition of one modality (Accession) to his three (Exit, Voice, and Loyalty). The basic idea is that democracy in the EU, just like its formal institutional structuring, is also multi-level and at least two of these levels, the national and the supranational ones, are relevant for the development of political processes that are recognized as legitimate by EU citizens. Both levels of democracy, however, are showing their limits as the diffuse support once enjoyed by national democracies and the permissive consensus that sustained the EU in the first half century of its existence are waning. This is having two effects: a) new horizontal tensions have developed that undermine mutual trust and solidarity among the member states (MS); b) partially as a consequence, intergovernmentalism is no longer capable of providing fully legitimate decisions at EU level. Both are significantly or even decisively relevant for how individual MS relate to the EU. Whilst the assessment of this relationship requires the consideration of specific factors, which I will also examine in this paper, the importance of how multi-level democracy operates in the EU is paramount.

Democracy in the European Union

The concern for the construction of a united and democratic Europe was certainly present already in 1952 when the decision to create the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) had the aim of providing the newly created institution with democratic legitimacy. This attention was confirmed by the

decision to include a provision for the election by direct universal suffrage of the European Parliament (EP), in the 1958 Treaty of Rome¹.

From an institutional point of view, however, European democracy is still unfinished. The success of the European Economic Community (EEC), fostered in part by the global economic boom that characterized the post-war period at least until the currency crisis of 1971, made less pressing any concern for its democracy. The so-called "permissive" consensus resulting from the benevolent and positive attitudes of European citizens towards a Europe that seemed to bring sizeable advantages with very modest material and political costs, as well as the practice of unanimous intergovernmental decisions imposed by General De Gaulle to defend the vital interests of France, attributed the Community sufficient legitimacy, even if not based on direct democratic control by the European citizens².

Subsequently, the Project for a Treaty for European Union, better known as the Spinelli initiative, as it was named after Altiero Spinelli, MEP and prominent federalist who was its initiator, aimed at creating the conditions for a definite acceleration towards European political union (it is noteworthy that the term "Union" replaced for the first time in an official initiative "Community"). The document at the base of the Spinelli project was approved by the EP and by the Belgian and Italian parliaments, but the lengthy procedure that would lead to its approval and ratification, transformed it in what became the 'Single European Act (SEA) of 1987, which, at least from an institutional point of view, was considered by many disappointing³. Ostensibly, another attempt to make the EU more democratic was made with the Constitutional Treaty in 2004. In this case, however, it cannot be said that the draft responded properly to a fully federalist inspiration; it was still part of the rather gradualist logic that inspired

¹ Asa is well known, the first EP elections were held only in 1979, over twenty years after the Treaty.

² In the majority of Member States opinion polls revealed with benevolent attitudes towards EU policies. This phenomenon was viewed as an albeit passive acceptance of practices and decisions of the Union and termed as "permissive consensus".

³ Commenting on the content of the Act in a speech before the European Parliament, Altiero Spinelli resorted to a metaphorical image taken from Ernest Hemingway's novel "The old man and the sea": like the beautiful fish caught from the old fisherman, the draft Treaty had been attacked by sharks (also metaphorical in this case) until the skeleton was left.

the so-called “Season of the Treaties”, which began in 1987 with the SEA and has ended, for the time being, in 2007 with the Treaty of Lisbon. The latter, by the way, included most of the provisions of the non-ratified "European Constitution." Evidently it was its constitutional emphasis that condemned the Constitutional Treaty and not its contents.

The crisis of party government in "normal" democracies

An assessment of the first fifty years of the EU's history, those enclosed between the Treaties of Rome and Lisbon, undeniably confirms the success of Jean Monnet's gradualist project, but also indicates its obvious limitations. The neo-functionalist belief that increasing the levels and the areas of European economic integration, objectives certainly achieved during this period, would inevitably lead to political integration has been contradicted by the resilience of the Member States (MS) and their governments. Paradoxically, it was the continued resort to treaties, intended to advance European integration, to strengthen the role of national governments and institutionalize intergovernmental processes to a higher level.

The theme of democracy in the EU then intertwines with that of the more general and widespread problems of Western democracies. One can also say that the consolidation of democracy in still evolving political systems, such as the s EU, is even more difficult as it is contrasted by international factors that are strong enough to even disrupt those established national democracies that are defined as "normal" (Bardi, Katz, Mair 2011). To this we must add that the question of democracy in Europe has been affected in recent years by changes of perceptions of the EU, now less benevolent and permissive. European citizens have become more and more aware of the increased importance of the European level of policy-making for a growing number of decisions that impact on them directly. In recent years, the economic crisis that affected most democracies

contributed greatly to the acceleration of this process, the causes of which, however, are structural and will not be eliminated by the simple end of the negative cycle⁴.

The existence of a tension between responsiveness and responsibility was singled out as one of the major reasons for the difficulties of contemporary democracies and for the need to articulate democracy at multiple levels (Mair 2014). According to classic democratic theory, the parties and the governments they produce should be:

a) sympathetically *responsive* to their supporters and to public opinion moods and, at the same time:

b) *responsible* toward internal and international systemic constraints (Bardi, Bartolini, Trechsel 2014)

Responsiveness implies the existence of dedicated and effective input mechanisms and an ability by parties to respond accordingly. Responsibility on the other hand requires long-term vision, judgement, and ability to respond to needs that are not necessarily articulated as specific demands. It is then evident that the tension between responsiveness and responsibility is almost impossible to eliminate. In recent years, however, it has increasingly become more visible. Besides the already mentioned changes in systemic factors (end of bi-polar international system and of dollar-parity based monetary system) the increase of this tension may be due to:

- a declining capacity of parties to read, control, and shape public opinion moods and demands;
- changes in the relationship between elites and citizens;
- a growing weight of external constraints on party action.

Although heightened by the economic crisis, the growth of the impact of external constraints is not a new phenomenon. Already since the end of the last century parties'

⁴ The heyday of Western Democracies was favored by intra-bloc political stability and by a continuously expanding economy, which was in its turn fueled by a constant flow of US dollars. These favorable conditions ended with the bipolar international system and with the Bretton Woods based monetary system, whose demises have created new structural conditions. Moreover, the globalization of trade and finance, as well as the growing technical nature of policy-making have made it more difficult for governments to fine tune their responses. This in turn has forced them, to cede decision-making responsibilities in critical areas to non-political actors, such as, for example, the central banks (Mair 2013).

political discretion had indeed become "increasingly constrained by the imperatives of globalization" (Mair 2013). Also, thanks to changes in social stratification (decline of the working class, secularization) the left-right dimension is no longer sufficient to synchronize the preferences of the voters with the positions of the parties.

Political parties' flaws are particularly evident at European level. In the political system of the EU they are present in both the intergovernmental and the supranational institutional circuit. Historically, democratic accountability has been ineffective in both. In the supranational one this is largely due to the inadequacy of the powers of the EP, the institution in which the parties are most present. In fact, the EP, despite several successive increases of its prerogatives, still lacks the power of legislative initiative and the ability to effectively exercise political control of the EU executive. In the intergovernmental institutional circuit, the low salience of European policy-making has long made the representatives of the national parties (the national Ministers in the Council) virtually irresponsible; given that citizens are not well informed about their activities at European level they are more likely to judge their behavior based on their actions at national level.

Responsibility, responsiveness and horizontal Euroscepticism.

Globalization first and then economic crisis have thus forced on parties, and governments, more responsible and progressively less responsive positions (because of obligations and constraints from global events and the consequent need to resort to austerity measures perhaps unpopular but unavoidable); at the same time, citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the political decisions taken at European level (because of their impact, often negative, on their daily lives). The acceptance of responsible policies seems to be increasingly problematic now, as citizens are no longer indifferent. Since the EU is producing more and more decisions that have political implications that are relevant to the MS, a growing number of internal political decisions are affected, resulting in an increase of the vertical interdependence between

the European level and that of the States. The intergovernmental decision-making process has been defined as being "denationalized", since each Government must be horizontally responsive to the other 27 counterparts and not only towards its citizens (Rose 2014). MS' difficulties in being responsive in both directions impair the ability of the intergovernmental circuit to continue to ensure the legitimacy of the EU decision-making process through the national governments'.

The original structural inadequacy of intergovernmentalism (see below) is being highlighted by the growing horizontal tensions between MS or groups of them. In fact the inability of MS to be mutually responsive has contributed to spread the perception of an increasing divergence of interests between them and revealed the emergence of a new phenomenon, which, for reasons I will explain below, I call "horizontal Euroscepticism" (HES – Bardi 2014). It manifests itself in the form of statements, positions and negative actions, expressed by citizens or political actors of a given Member State, and directed towards other, one or more, specific Member States. These sentiments are determined precisely by disagreements that are perceived as sources of potential conflict or of real antagonism between individual MS or groups of them. Since the reasons for these conflicts are rooted in common EU membership, the phenomenon is distinguished from nationalism. HES has a negative impact, albeit indirect, on perceptions and attitudes of citizens towards the EU, while not relating directly to its institutions. On one hand, there is the perception that decisions taken at European level by intergovernmental procedures are increasingly being imposed by a few, "strong" MS, to the detriment of many, "weaker" ones. On the other hand, the perceived reluctance, or even refusal, by "weak" MS to respect such decisions can be seen indicative of a deliberate and unwarranted intention to take advantage of the generosity of the "strong" ones. The fact that this is done in full respect of the Treaties and, procedurally, of MS' sovereignty, is insufficient not to prevent the acceptance of EU decisions by both sets of MS even if in itself it does not necessarily imply the development of anti-EU attitudes. This phenomenon was termed indirect, selective, and MS-induced Euroscepticism (Bardi 2013). I decided that horizontal

Euroscepticism is a better definition than the ones I had adopted previously, because, unlike other forms of Euroscepticism, which are essentially oriented vertically and bottom-up between the national and the EU level, it operates horizontally at only one level of the multi-level European political system. Table 1 lists the main characteristics of HES provides a typology of its main observable manifestations.

Table 1 <i>Characteristics and manifestations of horizontal Euroscepticism</i>	
Characteristics	Manifestations
Aimed at selected MS	Policy positions/decisions based on anti-selected MS motivations
Coming also from non-Eurosceptic actors	Negative attitudes and manifestations aimed at selected MS
Motivated by EU-related issues and/or decisions	Manifestations of national pride with implicit distancing from other MS
Divorced from explicit anti-EU criticism	Development of mistrust and suspicion between member-states and deterioration of intergovernmental relations and procedures

The key difference between HES and other forms of Euroscepticism is that the former also affects individuals, parties and political actors that are intrinsically pro-EU; as such it weakens support for the EU, rather than strengthening opposition to it. HES can find different types of expression (see table 1).

Member States’ attitudes, intergovernmentalism, and the EU.

HES thus undermines the very basis of intergovernmentalism, which is based on mutual trust among MS and on the premise that the possible disadvantages of the inevitable compromises needed to make unanimous (and therefore legitimate for all) decisions on certain issues will eventually be compensated by advantages coming from

decisions on other issues. On the contrary, HES stems from the belief that some MS are *systematically* taking advantage and makes more and more difficult not only the building of a European demos, if anyone still believes it is necessary and even remotely possible for the completion of the EU project, but also the everyday functioning of the EU. In Simona Piattoni's words: "Egoistic pursuit of a narrowly defined national interest, impatience with EU-level decision-making procedures, unilateral suspension of collective agreements, disregard for the application of jointly decided rules and a mounting disenchantment with the European project mark our daily political lives" (2017 p. 2). Piattoni expresses her doubts as to whether the one based on intergovernmentalism is "an appropriate notion of democracy for a highly interdependent setting like the EU[.] Can intergovernmentalism – – really legitimate further integration in ... sensitive policy areas such as fiscal, budgetary and even social policy?". What is then needed is "a new kind of institutional architecture which would allow the Union and its member states to be both responsive and responsible vis-à-vis one another as well as collectively towards the rest of the world" (2017 p. 10).

This paper does not share Piattoni's normative concerns, however respectable and even commendable, but is based on a similar view of the responsibility-responsiveness tension, also seen as operating horizontally between MS and not only vertically between governments and citizens. My main difference with Piattoni's position is that in my view intergovernmentalism was always flawed, and therefore not only questionable for future steps in "further integration"⁵. On the contrary, if parties and governments give priority to their government functions at national and European level and increasingly concentrate on political outputs rather than citizens' inputs, acting "responsibly" as Trustees, they are challenged by the non-existence, particularly at EU level, of widespread, albeit passive, citizen support. The permissive consensus that existed in the past and was key to the success of intergovernmental decision-making rested on the fact that EU decisions did not seem to have, as they do now, short-term

⁵ For an early analysis of the limits of intergovernmentalism see: (Weiler 1985)

impact at national level and that, as a result, citizens did not perceive the existence of significant links between the two levels. At the same time, contrasts between MS were on specific issues and were easily resolved, often with compensations in different policy areas. Now they are about the very nature of the relationship between given MS, as expressed by HES sentiments.

The lives of contemporary European national citizens are affected by decisions taken elsewhere, first and foremost in the other member states. Likewise, their decisions affect the lives of the citizens of other member states. The challenge for the EU, particularly in times of crisis, is to identify the principles that can restore a new understanding of democracy in a highly interconnected context (Piattoni 2017 p. 15).

These considerations confirm the complexity of the relationships that exists between the MS and EU institutions (on a vertical axis) and between pairs or sets of MS (on a horizontal axis)⁶. They also highlight the relevance of several dimensions that need to be integrated, not only to understand how the EU as a multilevel system (units and structure) exists and operates (Marks and Hooghe 2001; Bartolini 2005; Piattoni 2010), but also how MS attitudes towards the EU and other MS as well as their mutual relationships are structured. Most of all, in view of the growing levels and proliferation of types of skepticism (a. Euroscepticism - against European institutions; b. Polity-skepticism - against how national polities are governed - Mair 2013; c. Horizontal Euroscepticism - selectively against other MS) a more complex framework than adopted so far is needed to assess equilibria within the EU. This is also useful, if not necessary, in consideration of Brexit, to ascertain levels of MS commitment to the EU. Such framework for the three relevant institutional levels (EU – national – subnational) should consider the following elements⁷:

I. Actors:

- 1) States (leaders, apparatuses and diplomats)
- 2) Parties (party-based leadership)

⁶ In actuality, another set of horizontal relationships formally exists, that among EU institutions. As this study focuses mostly on the role and attitude of the MS, this set of relationships will be considered only contextually.

⁷ The elements of the framework are intuitively relevant and as such the list is self-explanatory. In future versions of this paper an articulated justification for these choices will be included.

3) Individuals (and non-party political groupings)

II. Political dimensions and Instruments:

1) International: Treaties

2) Internal (party-based representative democracy): Elections

3) Internal (direct/deliberative democracy): Referendums

III. Democratic control:

1) Permissive consensus (prevalence of responsibility)

2) Retrospective (balance of responsibility and responsiveness)

3) Immediate/prospective (prevalence of responsiveness)

IV. Systemic interactions:

1) Vertical - Top-down (Eurocratism)

2) Vertical - Bottom-up (Plebiscitarianism)

3) Horizontal (Intergovernmentalism)

V. Determinants:

1) International systemic factors

- Political factors (national and international and, to a lesser extent, subnational)

- Socio-cultural factors (mostly national, but also subnational, and, very limitedly, European))

- Economic factors (national, specifically EU, and broadly international)

2) Values/Ideology (citizens, movements, leaders and parties)

3) Costs vs Benefits (economic)

4) Costs vs Benefits (symbolic)

5) Salience and intensity of attitudes (influenced by social context)

6) International political contingencies

7) Internal political contingencies

Given this complexity, the familiar dichotomous classification of MS attitudes as pro- or anti-EU is no longer satisfactory, also because, as is clearly illustrated by Brexit, attitudes can lead to different potential actions that are obviously more important than the attitudes *per se*. Having this in mind and trying to keep the classification

sufficiently manageable, the MS-EU relationship is shaped along at least four possible modalities that I have identified adapting Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) famous classification:

- 1) Accession (Founding and enlargements)
- 2) Loyalty
- 3) Voice
- 4) Exit

This classification departs from the original in two respects:

- 1) A fourth modality, Accession, has been added. Hirschman's classification was originally developed for describing and explaining reactions to decline (in markets and organizations). The three options that in his scheme were available to consumers in markets or to members in organizations resulted from the assumption that being actors in markets or members in organizations is a given and not a choice. Although this may seem to be applicable to the current EU situation (whether the EU is declining or not can certainly be a matter of discussion, but it is undeniable that its members belong to it) the modalities and timing of MS accession have differed and this is no doubt relevant as to the understanding of how individual MS relate to the EU (and to one another). Not to mention the fact that there are states, several in the Balkan area, Iceland and excluding Turkey for the time being, that are at various stages of negotiations for entry into the EU;
- 2) The addition of "Accession" inevitably reverses the logical sequence of the original Hirschman classification, which, to explain reactions to decline, described the most extreme type of action possible (Exit) first, the more moderate option (Voice) next and the "no reaction" position (Loyalty) last; in my classification "Accession" must come first, chronologically, to be followed, logically, by "Loyalty", "Voice", and "Exit".

MS attitudes and positions towards the EU: Accession, Loyalty, Voice, and Exit

For each of the categories included in the amended classification the next four tables will indicate the relevance of the elements we have listed above.

Table 2 - ACCESSION		
I. Actors	States Party-based leadership Individuals & movements	Very important Very Important Mostly indifferent
II. Instruments	Treaties Elections Referendums	Necessary Important From irrelevant to necessary
III. Democratic control	Permissive consensus Retrospective Immediate/prospective	Generally prevalent Indirect and scarcely relevant Selectively very important
IV. Systemic interactions	Vertical - Top-down Vertical - Bottom up Horizontal	Very important Selectively important Very important
V. Determinants	International systemic factors Values/ideology Costs/Benefits (economic) Costs/Benefits (symbolic - moral) Salience and intensity International political contingencies Internal political contingencies	Very important Very important Selectively important Very important Selectively important Important important

Accession is essentially an elite driven process. This was certainly the case for the founding of the EU. Before the EU, the European Community (EC) had well recognized “Founding Fathers” in Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, and Alcide De Gasperi. The Federalist movement, albeit influential, did not have a strong grassroots base either. The various Treaties that from Paris to Rome marked the completion of the EC’s foundation, confirmed the elite driven nature of the process. EC citizens prevalently accepted with favor the idea of European integration but it would be inaccurate to say that they promoted it or even strongly supported it. This

was the beginning of “permissive consensus” and it is in this light that EC acceptance by the citizens is to be understood. Consistently, systemic interactions consisted of horizontal contacts and negotiations among top national leaderships and, immediately after the creation of the first Communitarian structures, of top-down guidelines by the newly created Eurocrats to the national governments and administrations. The most important element, at least in terms of explanatory potential for MS’ lasting attitudes, is the determinants, the driving factors, that is, behind Accession. Although the founding of the EC can be explained on the basis of all the factors listed in the table, there is no doubt that International systemic factors (the Cold War) as well as the idealistic values and symbolic rewards behind the hope to forever ban war in Europe were dominant. The economic costs and benefits of integration were certainly taken into account, and successive favorable assessments of their balance were certainly relevant for the maintenance and early progress of integration, but like the other determinants listed in the table, were not as important.

An assessment of the successive accessions of the 22 non-founding MS would require a detailed analysis of each one, something that I cannot do here. I will limit myself to highlight the major differences with the founding MS’ modalities. Although the role of the elites is also fundamental, the need to “sell” the idea of entering an organization that operates with rules made by others has generally required greater popular involvement, to the point that in some cases accession referendums were called (in two cases, Norway and Switzerland, with negative outcomes). Moreover, symbolic rewards, in the over twenty years that passed between the Treaty of Paris and the first EU expansion with the accession of Denmark, Great Britain, and Ireland, lost much of their attractiveness and the perceived economic benefits of EU membership became paramount.

Table 3 - LOYALTY

I. Actors	States Party-based leadership Individuals & movements	Very important Very Important Scarcely important
II. Instruments	Treaties Elections Referendums	Important (progress) Important Irrelevant
III. Democratic control	Permissive consensus Retrospective Immediate/prospective	Still prevalent Relevant Not very important
IV. Systemic interactions	Vertical - Top-down Vertical - Bottom up Horizontal	Very important (operationally) Relatively un-important Important
V. Determinants	International systemic factors Values/ideology Costs/Benefits (economic) Costs/Benefits (symbolic - moral) Salience and intensity International political contingencies Internal political contingencies	Very important Very important Rather important Important Selectively important Rather unimportant Relatively important

Like Accession for non-founding MS, Loyalty, as well as Voice and Exit, would require detailed analyses for each MS or group of MS whose circumstances are similar. Moreover, especially in the case of Loyalty, the timeframe is also very important, as its significance varies enormously whether it occurs in the years immediately after the Founding (for the initial Six), after Accession (for the remaining MS), or decades after. Here I will limit myself to analyzing separately early and later conditions for Loyalty. Like Accession, early Loyalty concerns prevalently the elites, who remain rather insulated from the citizens and build without excessive public scrutiny their specific

MS' relationships (horizontally with one another and vertically with EU institutions). Elections become the most important instruments, as, in the near-absence of Treaties (thirty years passed between the Treaty of Rome and the Single European Act) the most important institutionally driven elements of change are given by the possible replacement through elections of selected pro-EU national governments with more skeptical ones or viceversa. As symbolic rewards are still valued and the economic costs of EU membership are still perceived as being non-existent or lower than the benefits, citizens still endorse the process with their permissive consensus. Its lastingness, however, is guaranteed by the retrospective satisfaction coming from the apparent success and progress of European integration. Systemic interactions are still prevalently top-down, with an even greater role, if possible, of the EU's bureaucracy than for Accession. With time, Loyalty becomes a residual and more problematic category. According to Hirschman (1970 p. 78), absolute loyalty entails forfeiting any sort of influence but with "the expectation that someone will act or something will happen to improve matters". More often, however, "loyalty holds exit at bay and activates voice". The implicit assumption is that discontent with the way things are run in an organization will necessarily emerge at some point and that even the most loyal of its members will voice their demands for, more or less sweeping, change.

Table 4 - VOICE

I. Actors	States Party-based leadership Individuals & movements	Important Important Rather important
II. Instruments	Treaties Elections Referendums	Important (adjustments) Very Important Potentially very important
III. Democratic control	Permissive consensus Retrospective Immediate/prospective	Relatively irrelevant Relatively important Very important
IV. Systemic interactions	Vertical - Top-down Vertical - Bottom up Horizontal	Very important (encroachment) Very important Very important
V. Determinants	International systemic factors Values/ideology Costs/Benefits (economic) Costs/Benefits (symbolic - moral) Salience and intensity International political contingencies Internal political contingencies	Low importance Relatively low importance Very important Declining importance Selectively important Rather unimportant Relatively important

It would thus appear that Voice is the most preferable or even the “healthiest” modality. It is certainly the one that introduces the need for more advanced forms of democratic participation and even control. The role of citizens, as individual or members of organized movements, becomes more important along with that of elections, whose outcomes can change profoundly or even reverse MS’ attitudes and positions. As the perception of the economic costs of EU membership outweighs all potential economic and symbolic rewards, permissive consensus becomes a thing of the past and forms of immediately prospective control of EU policy-making and institutions prevail. Systemic interactions are intensified in all directions and forms: as the resilience of the

EU's bureaucracy and the enormous weight of the “*Acquis communautaire*” help maintain a strong top-down flow, for the first time demands for change fuel significant bottom-up processes; at the same time the prevalently intergovernmental decision-making model of the EU creates the conditions for frequent and very important horizontal contacts among MS.

Table 5 - EXIT

I. Actors	States Party-based leadership Individuals & movements	Important Very important Very important
II. Instruments	Treaties Elections Referendums	Important (secession clauses) Important Decisive
III. Democratic control	Permissive consensus Retrospective Immediate/prospective	N/A Relatively important Fundamentally important
IV. Systemic interactions	Vertical - Top-down Vertical - Bottom up Horizontal	Scarcely relevant Extremely important Very important
V. Determinants	International systemic factors Values/ideology Costs/Benefits (economic) Costs/Benefits (symbolic - moral) Salience and intensity International political contingencies Internal political contingencies	Low importance Very highly important Very important Very important Very highly important Selectively important Predominantly important

The discussion of Exit from the EU is the one that requires more elaborate considerations on the Hirschman model. Of the two types of attitude/behavior that express criticism, Exit has a clear economic connotation and Voice is no doubt more political. Increasing prices or declining costs of goods ordinarily induce consumers to

switch brands and buy a different product (1970 p. 25). Exit in this case is a sanction that can be easily reversed if the price or quality of the original product are reinstated. Resort to voice is thus rather infrequent as exit is a more direct and effective way to induce virtuous behavior by the supplier of the goods in question. “The presence of the exit option can sharply reduce the probability that the voice option will be taken up widely and effectively” (1970 p. 76). In organizations, such as the EU, the picture is quite different: “voice is likely to play an important role in organizations [if] exit is virtually ruled out. In a large number of organizations one of the two mechanisms is in fact wholly dominant: on the one hand, there is competitive business enterprise where performance maintenance relies heavily on exit and very little on voice; on the other, *exit is ordinarily unthinkable*, though not always wholly impossible, from such primordial human groupings as family, tribe, church, and state” (1970 p. 76, emphasis mine). The EU can to a large extent be considered akin to Hirschman’s “primordial human groupings”. Although membership is voluntary and negotiated, once it is acquired, it can be reversed only following very troublesome decisions and through lengthy and difficult procedures. Exit is an act that is decidedly final and not a more effective surrogate for voice. Thus “the principal way for the individual member to register his dissatisfaction with the way things are going in these organizations is normally to make his voice heard in some fashion” (1970 p. 76).

This being the case, Exit requires conditions that depart sharply from those of the other options. Although still elite driven (mostly because of institutional constraints) Exit responds to citizens needs and demands. In the only case of Exit so far experienced in the EU, Brexit, a referendum was the decisive instrument. The Treaties, through article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, were still relevant, but only in terms of their providing an orderly and relatively less traumatic procedure for the separation. Elections of course were also important, as the formal roots of Brexit are in the 2015 General election campaign when David Cameron promised the calling of a referendum on the UK’s EU membership in an attempt to outflank Nigel Farage’s UKIP’s anti-EU stance. Democratic control was unquestionably prospective: although the motive for Brexit, a

decision taken substantially by those British citizens who as a majority voted for this outcome in the referendum, may have had retrospective motivations (disappointment – see Hirschman 1982), there is no doubt that the process was driven by a mandate imposing immediate action on the UK government. Systemic interactions clearly privilege bottom-up processes on the vertical axis, the top-down ones being residually limited to the role of the EU administration in guiding, for their part, article 50's provisions and procedures; horizontal interactions are fundamental, as they will dominate the next two years of negotiations between the UK and the EU and, more directly, its remaining members. As for the main factors behind Brexit, in a departure from other options' scenarios, the expectations were of rewards of both a symbolic and economic nature. Values were also highly relevant. The sovereigntist revival and emphasis that characterized the political debate in the UK were certainly indicative of the hope and expectation that Brexit would restore not only formal "British Independence", but also British prestige and influence in the international system⁸. At the same time, it is expected by its supporters that, financially and economically, the UK's decision to Exit will not only mark the end of net contributions to the EU budget (.23% of the country's GNI in 2014), but also allow for a solid and lasting regeneration of the UK economy. The salience of the issues surrounding Brexit was also extraordinary in comparison to the other options. This was due to internal contingencies (the echo of the crisis that affected mostly the Euro Zone countries and the ensuing increased pressure on the UK job market posed by EU nationals from the affected MS) and to international ones (security above all).

By way of conclusion: some final observations, inferences, and speculations.

The analysis in this paper starts from the premise that there is a connection between the general crisis of contemporary democracy and the growing difficulties of the EU. Moreover, the EU's *malaise* has deep roots in its original design based on the

⁸ Here one could add, properly in a footnote, as in this paper I have not had the time and space to describe them for all options, that political contingencies/idiosyncrasies have also played a role at least as reinforcing factors: British insularity, superior military capacity (*vis-à-vis* the other MS), monetary independence are probably the most relevant.

assumption that the unanimity in intergovernmental decision-making mandated by its Treaty-driven confederal institutional structure would be sufficient to guarantee its progress with the unconditional approval of the MS. As has been argued in the paper, this is no longer the case. These two combined limits cast a very long and dark shadow on the future of the EU and various institutional solutions are being proposed to strengthen the organization and perhaps even turn it into a proper federally structured supranational state.

Normative considerations aside, understanding the intricate set of the EU's multi-level democratic structures and processes requires an analytical framework capable of tackling this complexity. The one provided here has been tentatively applied to the analysis of four options available to MS in positioning themselves vis-à-vis the EU. Hirschman's Exit, Voice, Loyalty trichotomy, with the addition of Accession, appears to be particularly well suited for this exercise, as for the first time Exit from the EU has become a reality after the UK referendum. For each of the options, five sets of relevant elements, each consisting of several nominal categories, for a total of at least nineteen variables, have been identified and assessed⁹.

The descriptive analysis of the four options allows for some preliminary observations. The first one is, that consistently with Hirschman's suggestion, unconditional loyalty is an option that is applicable only in very particular circumstances (immediately after the founding of the EU or in the very initial stages of new memberships). Although theoretically available at all times, it ordinarily only serves the purpose of orienting constructively the next option, Voice. This is particularly true when issues are political in nature. Loyalty allows critical Voice but inherently implies recovery.

It is too soon to reflect on how Brexit will affect the EU. It is however evident that there are two camps with completely opposed opinions. Supporters of Brexit (in the UK and in other MS) hail it as marking the end of Brussels' tyranny, whereas its

⁹ This paper represents the very early state of development of my reflection on this. At this stage, I have not addressed the issue of determining the exact nature of these variables (which are independent or dependent?), as I am mostly interested in using the framework to describe the conditions for each modality, trace the evolution of individual MS attitudes towards EU, and map the relations across MS. More extensive theoretical considerations will be included in future versions of work.

opponents fear and even predict that it will provoke a disastrous domino effect. According to Hirschman (1970 p. 24), however, both critics (alert consumers) and loyal supporters (inert consumers) are necessary for the success of a firm or an organization: the former give the stimulus for recovery, the latter guarantee a bedrock of support (or demand in the case of markets) for survival. This would suggest then that Exit in the EU can be beneficial if limited. By showing there are alternatives it could provide in the EU as well a stimulus for improvement and recovery.

What is left now is the most tentative exercise of all those that in theory fall within the remit of this paper: trying to identify the conditions that favor Exit vs Voice and/or Loyalty. As I have already mentioned in an earlier footnote, this paper is essentially an exercise in the description of the complexity of EU and MS relations. What follows is as an arbitrary selection of inferences and speculations on possible causal links in such relations.

1. Reasons for accession (instrumental vs. ideal)

It can be surmised that the motives that led different MS to membership have a lasting effect in shaping their position on and attitudes towards the EU. In some cases, motivations of membership can certainly be considered instrumental (I conducted a number of interviews with the leaders of new MS in 2004 that explicitly reveal that). Thus, the continued Loyalty of such members can be seen as conditional upon the contingent satisfaction of their instrumental objectives, whereas more fundamental changes are needed to alter the attitudes of those MS whose membership's motivations were based on ideals.

2. Issues (economic vs political; security vs integration)

Likewise, MS who attribute importance to economic or security issues are less willing to accept, for the sake of loyalty to the EU, sub-optimal decisions in areas they consider essential for their interests and membership. Debates on such issues, however, are more conducive to assertive behavior on the part of more loyal MS as well.

3. Actors (Elites vs individuals)

This is the factor whose effects have probably changed the most over time, as the relative importance of the type of actors that are relevant for shaping EU decisions has changed. In a first phase elites were dominant and acted responsibly, as trustees, in what they perceived to be the best overall interest of their respective MS and of the EU (EC) as a whole, with no need to respond to, then non-existent, demands from citizens and specific groups of them. As such, the role of elites could be seen as favoring Loyalty or, alternatively, very constructive Voice. But as Hirschman himself (1982) has underlined, social context is fundamental in determining actors' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. What is positive, acceptable, or even irrelevant at a certain point in time or under certain circumstances can acquire a totally different significance in a different context. Actor disappointment can be a powerful factor in provoking radical shifts, as in from Loyalty to very negative Voice or even Exit. This usually happens through an intermediate step: the activation of non-elite actors eventually made aware of the existence of the inherent costs of EU membership. Elites in turn become much more responsive to these instances and therefore take more or less openly critical positions vis-à-vis the EU.

More factors than the ones briefly listed above no doubt exist that influence and have causal effects on MS-EU relations. More research is needed to identify these factors and acquire a more complete mapping than drawn up so far. This is what I plan to do next. As basic as this objective may seem, it is a necessary step towards conceptualization and theoretical reflection. Many examples in the social sciences indicate that explanatory theory building is stimulated by the observation and knowledge of facts. I hope my continuing efforts are in keeping with this tradition.

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