

The EU in Crisis: Why Democracy is Not the answer

Ryan Phillips

Lycoming College

Prepared for 2019 EUSA International Biennial Conference

Abstract

Over the last 10 years, the European Union has faced a series of crises. The European debt crisis threatened to break up the Eurozone. The influx of large numbers of unwanted immigrants in 2015 led to a partial breakdown of the Schengen Treaty, undermined the Dublin agreement and created bitter divides over burden-sharing. In June 2016, a majority of British voters decided the future of their country should be outside of the EU. Whether ‘hard’, ‘soft’ or otherwise, Brexit will no doubt leave lasting damage on the project of an ‘ever closer union’. Each of these crises is thought to have generated greater public scepticism toward the EU. While overall trust in the EU amongst the public has rebounded from the depth of the economic recession, a greater percentage of citizens continue to say that they distrust the EU rather than trust it.

What should be done? A common refrain is that addressing these crises, and especially the fall in public confidence, requires enhancing democracy. In this article, I argue that this common wisdom is wrong empirically and normatively. First, dissatisfaction with the EU is driven as much by policy disagreements as it is by polity disagreements. Policy disagreements won’t subside simply because the EU polity is made more democratic. Second, to the extent that Euroscepticism is based on the view that the EU is insufficiently democratic, there are wildly different views on how the EU should be made more democratic. Importantly, different conceptual models cut against one another, simultaneously prescribing and proscribing certain reforms. Third, the idea that democracy is best or uniquely designed to address public distrust and thus stabilize political systems misrepresents what most democratic theorists find valuable about democracy. In short, while the EU might be in crisis, democracy is not the answer.

DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT THE AUTHOR’S PERMISSION

“There is an understandable temptation to load too many expectations on this concept and to imagine that by attaining democracy, a society will have resolved all of its political, social, economic, administrative, and cultural problems. Unfortunately, all good things do not necessarily go together” (Schmitter and Karl 1991).

1. Introduction

Surveying mainstream theories of democracy in 1970, Carole Pateman set out one of the most forceful defenses of democracy as an ideal and practice. The main target of her critique was what she viewed as the corruption of democracy’s original meaning and purpose by those who sought to offer a more “empirically accurate” rendering. Pateman accused Joseph Schumpeter and those he inspired – scholars like Robert Dahl, Bernard Berelson, Harold Eckstein and Giovanni Sartori – of misunderstanding something rather fundamental about democracy. The aim of democratic theory, she wrote, was not to “merely describe the operation of certain political systems,” but to “set standards or criteria by which a political system may be judged ‘democratic’” (1970, 15). An empirically accurate theory of democracy was not a theory of democracy at all.

In this essay, my aim is similar. I want to defend democracy not from its most strident critics – of which there remain a few (Bell 2015; Brennan 2017; Majone 1998) – but from its advocates. Although the content of my argument varies somewhat from Pateman’s, like her my view is that many contemporary advocates of greater democracy in the European Union (EU) have misunderstood something quite fundamental about democracy, indeed more than one thing. The result has been both false promises concerning what democratizing the EU can achieve and the devaluing or revaluing of democracy. Advocates have burdened democracy with a purpose its historical supporters never intended while ignoring the values or principles thought to justify it as

a form of rule. I don't try to explain at any length how this has happened – a genealogical problem itself worth the toil. My aim is primarily diagnostic: to identify what has gone wrong.

My argument, in short, is that many would-be democratic reformers of the EU have embraced a Schumpeterian conception of democracy. These democrats portray democracy as an antidote to the EU's unpopularity. They claim that building popular support for the EU and stabilizing the European project requires democratizing it. This view is wrong on three accounts. First, it is doubtful that democratizing the EU will actually generate widespread support for the EU. Dissatisfaction with the EU is driven as much by policy disagreements as it is by regime disagreements. Policy disagreements won't subside simply because the EU regime is made more democratic. Second, to the extent that opposition is based on the view that the EU is insufficiently democratic, there are wildly different views on how the EU should be made more democratic. Importantly, different models cut against one another such that reforms that would be a democratic enhancement from one view would be irrelevant or worse when viewed from the perspective of others. The most prominent example is federalist versus nationalist interpretations of democracy. Third, the idea that democracy is best or uniquely designed to address public distrust and thus stabilize political systems misrepresents what most democratic theorists find valuable about democracy. Advocates of democratizing the EU misunderstand the purposes of democracy. In short, while the EU might face a public legitimacy crisis, democracy is not the answer.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section, I explain the basic features of Schumpeter's conception of democracy, especially his concern for political stability. In section

three, I show that contemporary scholars justify democratic reforms to the EU in Schumpeterian terms. Then I explain what is both empirically and theoretically wrong with the view that democratizing will and should enhance stability. In the conclusion, I summarize the key points.

2. Schumpeterian democracy

Published in 1942, Joseph Schumpeter's *Democracy, Capitalism, Socialism* is remembered most famously for its definition of democracy. "The democratic method," writes Schumpeter, "is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decision in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (1942, 269). A primary function of the electorate was to elect, not control the government (1942, 272). Indeed, he argued that not only was governmental control "contrary to the spirit of the democratic method," but that popular participation that went beyond the selection of leaders was dangerous, a threat to political stability and the impairment of political leadership. Schumpeter's "modus procedendi" was intended to harness democracy in support of stability, not against it. This proceduralist conception has influenced a long-line of democratic theorists and empirical political scientists (e.g. Przeworski 1999).

Alongside the spectre of totalitarianism, Schumpeter's thinking about popular participation – and the need to limit it – was deeply influenced by the findings of psychologists and sociologists, who concluded that people were neither capable of rational thinking in politics nor were they able become more rational through education. In a section of his book titled "Human Nature in Politics," (Schumpeter 1942, 256–64) he argues that most people are simply incapable of taking reasoned positions about national and international affairs. Not only do people show every form

of debase character in crowds, but individuals' opinions are subject to easy manipulation by others – e.g., through advertising, repeated assertion, crude association and the like (257-258). Additionally, unlike in personal affairs, individuals lack the incentive to think and act carefully. Schumpeter writes,

However, when we move still farther away from the private concerns of the family and the business office into those regions of national and international affairs that lack a direct and unmistakable link to those private concerns, individual volition, command of facts and method of inference soon cease to fulfill the requirements of the classical doctrine [of democracy]. What strikes me most of all and seems to me to be the core of the trouble is the fact that the sense of reality is so completely lost (1942, 261).

For most people, political life shares few similarities with everyday life. Because in politics individuals do not bear immediate responsibility for their actions, they are not prone to scrutinize policies or the effects of different courses of action. This is unlike, say, a pedestrian who has good reason to think about the effects of stepping in front of a Mack truck barreling down the road. Lack of familiarity and personal consequence breeds a lack of responsibility in ascertaining facts and constructing reasoned views about policy options. For the average citizen, there aren't Mack trucks in politics.

For Schumpeter, then, the *modus procedendi* of the democratic method – a free competition for a free vote – was a more *realistic* model of democracy on at least two accounts. First, it was closer to the actual criterion that distinguished democracy from non-democracy (270). Democracies,

but not authoritarian regimes, allow groups and individuals to seek political power through an open competition for the people's vote. Second, the *modus procedendi* was based on a realistic appreciation of what average citizens were capable, or rather incapable of doing politically: "[T]he typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again" (262). Rather than expect the people to form definite opinions on all important issues and then select representatives to carry out their will, the role of the people should be to select the government, which would in turn decide all important issues.

If the belief that people were incapable of taking up the responsibilities of democratic citizenship was one leg of Schumpeter's justification for limiting their role, a second, and related leg (as legs usually are), was that democratic political systems should not tolerate the potential consequences of a more active citizenry:

No more than any other political method does democracy always produce the same results or promote the same interests or ideals. Rational allegiance to it thus presupposes not only a schema of hyper-rational values but also certain states of society in which democracy can be expected to work in ways we approve (1942, 243).

For Schumpeter – as for Hannah Arendt – politics was not the sandbox; the consequences of decisions are significant. Governments are capable of imposing decisions anti-democratically that the population might find satisfactory in the long-term but which the population would have

rejected in the short-term (253). Schumpeter refers to the religious settlement in France under Napoleon as such an example. And in addition to securing a significant amount of personal freedom, limiting popular control strengthens responsible political leadership and stability in dangerous times (272). Perhaps most crucially, because citizens are prone to “extra-rational and irrational prejudice and impulse[s]” and therefore likely to support “unintelligent and irresponsible” policies, “at certain junctures” this can “prove fatal to his nation” (262). The citizenry is prone to be whipped up into frenzied and irrational behavior by “groups with an ax to grind”. “Many decisions of fateful importance are of a nature that makes it impossible for the public to experiment with them at its leisure and at moderate cost” (263). Or as he concludes, “History however consists of a succession of short-run situations that may alter the course of events for good” (264). Political decisions are too fateful to let the irrational and easily excitable public to get too close to power.

For Schumpeter, then, the irrationality and manipulability of the average citizen and the seriousness of political decision-making meant that his or her role must be limited to selecting leaders. Of course, one can wonder why citizens are even fit for that responsibility, but for Schumpeter limiting political participation was critical for stabilizing democracy by insulating political leaders from popular pressure. As I demonstrate in the next section, elements of the Schumpeterian concern for political stability also typifies the view of many contemporary analyses of the EU.

3. The neo-Schumpeterian view of the EU: democracy and stability

In one quite obvious way, the EU's many democratic critics are quite opposed to the Schumpeterian conception of democracy. We might be tempted to even call them "anti-Schumpeterians." Many observers of the EU argue that *deepening* democracy – including expanding opportunities for EU citizens to meaningfully contribute to policymaking – is necessary to address the EU's problems.

It is true, of course, that not all observers who have attempted to diagnose and propose solutions to the EU's current problems – including its legitimacy crisis – identify democracy as the way forward (e.g., Hall 2014). But for those who do, should we consider these proponents of democratizing the EU as "anti-Schumpeterians"? I think not. They are best considered neo-Schumpeterians because like their namesake their conceptions of democracy are framed by an overriding concern for *stability*. What's new about their views is that they believe that the EU will be stabilized through enhancing citizen participation rather than limiting it. They claim that enhancing the EU's democratic character will stabilize European integration by building support for EU-level policymaking and turn the tide against Euroscepticism.

In the next section, I address why it's wrong to expect that enhancing the EU's democratic character will stabilize or even build support for European integration. In this section, I document how this expectation is evident. I don't claim that every proponent of democratizing the EU appeals to stability. That would be misleading. What I do show is that across a range of positions it is a common feature. Where they primarily differ is whether what is required is a European or a national response.

Manon Boujou, Lucas Chancel, Anne-Laure Delatte, Thomas Piketty, Guillaume Sacriste, Stéphanie Hennette and Antoine Vauchez have proposed a “Manifesto for the Democratisation of Europe” (Boujou 2018). According to these authors, European governance – “epitomized in the Eurogroup” – has become “opaque and unaccountable,” and democratic decision-making remains blocked by the right of each country to veto any common fiscal policy. As a result of these democratic deficits, European governance is neither fair nor effective; it is “ideologically bias towards economic policies” focused on “financial and budgetary objectives.” At the same time, Europe cannot “take up the challenges which it is confronted: growing inequalities across the continent, the acceleration of global warming, the influx of refugees, structural under-investment (most notably in universities and research), tax fraud and evasion.” According to the authors, the EU is neither democratic nor effective; indeed, it is ineffective precisely because it is undemocratic. The result, according to Thomas Piketty in a video posted on the group’s website (www.tdem.eu), is that the average citizen feels “abandoned” and a “sense of despair.” He cites the June 2014 vote in Britain to leave the EU and the rise of “anti-European governments” in several member countries.

For Piketty and his co-authors, there is a need to address citizen’s feelings of abandonment and to “reconnect” Europe “with its citizens” and “restore solidarity with its citizens” through democratizing the EU (Piketty and Vauchez 2018). Their proposal to “democratize both European institutions and policies” envisions both a new budget – the Democratization Budget – and a new institution – the European Assembly.

The proposed Democratization Budget (Article 7 of their proposed treaty) would be funded by four European taxes: a harmonized 37 percent tax on corporate profits, a progressive tax on top wealth, a progressive tax on high incomes and a tax on carbon emissions (Art. 9.3; A budget for Europe). Its core goal would be to ensure social solidarity (TMDE Art. 1), principally by using funds to reduce inequalities within member states (Art 9.5 establishes a ceiling on net spend of .1% of a country's GDP). The fund would focus on "fiscal solidarity" through long-term investments in public goods, like training and research, efforts to reduce global warming, and support for the reception of migrants and refugees. The authors believe that Europe's citizens can be won back in support for European integration through "securing the long-term viability of a genuine political model of social, fair and sustainable development in Europe." "Europe will only reconnect with its citizens if it proves it has the ability to bring about genuine European solidarity, by having the main beneficiaries of the globalization process fairly contribute to the financing of the public goods Europe desperately needs" (Piketty and Vauchez 2018; Preamble Treaty - Manifesto for the Democratization of Europe). They conclude, "If the European fiscal system is not capable of compensating the losers in the common market via redistribution, rejection of the European project is inevitable" (A budget for Europe).

The proposed European Assembly would be composed of national and European representatives who have the authority to make decisions regarding the Democratization Budget, including levels of taxation and spending. This new body would be composed of both members of the European Parliament and national parliaments. The authors envision an 20/80 split (Art. 4.1) because a less national grouping "might detract from the legitimacy" in the perception of European citizens. While decision-making would include finance ministers in the Eurogroup

(Art. 2.1), the process envisioned would mean that the Assembly would have final and ultimate authority over the Democratization Budget (Art. 8, 11.10). One expected benefit of such an empowered European Assembly is that national politicians would no longer be able to blame Brussels for fiscal policies they disagree with since national parliamentarians would be directly responsible for fiscal priorities (Piketty and Vauchez 2018), thereby eliminating one source of public scepticism.

For the contributors to the Manifesto for the Democratization of Europe, the Democratization Budget and European Assembly are intended to address “the lack of democratic accountability and the political immobility which characterize this economic government of the Union,” which poses “a great democratic and social challenge for the European Union” (Preamble). Other proposals such as joint Eurobonds (Art. 10.4), oversight of economic and budgetary policies (Art. 13, Art. 16), control over funds distributed by the financial assistance facility (Art. 14), input into European Central Bank monetary policy (Art. 15.1) are intended as means to democratize European economic governance.

Like the authors of the “Manifesto for the Democratisation of Europe,” Catherine de Vries and Kathleen McNamara (2018), Matthias Matthijs (2017) and Sheri Berman (2017, 2018) argue that to stabilize the European project there needs to be an injection of greater democracy. However, whereas Boujou et. al. argue for strengthening supranational democracy, this second set of authors calls for strengthening national democracy. For de Vries and McNamara, the continent’s series of conflicts and crises – the decade-long eurozone crisis, refugee crisis, Hungary’s and Poland’s illiberal turn, and Brexit – and continuing diversity have led “many voters” to “doubt

the competence and integrity of their political and financial masters in Brussels and at home.”

The result of the confluence of these crises is that “Euroskepticism has moved from the fringe to the mainstream.”

For Matthijs the confluence of crises noted by de Vries and McNamara are themselves the result of a deeper problem: the divergence of the European project from its original purpose. For the first four decades the purpose of European integration was to restore the political legitimacy of war-ravaged nation-states after World War II through providing a “degree of continental coordination to help provide economic prosperity and political stability” (87). However, national governments themselves retained control over the most important policy levers. Beginning in the mid-1980s with the passing of the Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992), “Europe’s elites set their signs on a loftier goal: forging a supranational economic regional order over which an enlightened technocracy would reign supreme” (86). The result is that national governments no longer have the economic or social policy levers at their disposal to address the numerous challenges they now face, like stimulating their economies, protecting key industrial sectors, addressing youth unemployment or maintaining immigration at acceptable levels. Establishing a supranational regional economic order has come at the expense of national governments’ ability to produce the policies their citizens demand.

For both de Vries and McNamara as well as Matthijs the solution is to reinvigorate national democracy. The solution to these problems, de Vries and McNamara write, is not “falling back on elite-driven, technocratic blueprints for more integration,” but an open “democratic debate” in member states about “the degree to which the European Union infringes on a nation’s laws,

political capacity, and identity”. This requires a “more democratically informed process” that would allow national governments to opt in or out of participation in various areas of collective governance, while retaining some shared bases of collective action and purpose. In stressing the expansion of domestic democratic politics, they conclude, “Developing a *legitimate* and *stable* political community at the European level can come only through the hard work of allowing *democratic politics to unfold*” [emphasis added]. Similarly for Matthijs, “More Europe is not the answer to the EU’s problems”. He continues, “Democratic legitimacy, for better or worse, remains with Europe’s national governments. There are no technocratic solutions to Europe’s political problems” (94). Because distributive policies create winners and losers, they should be legitimated through regular elections and be the “sole preserve of national governments”. Only by restoring the centrality of national democratic politics can the EU step back from “the brink of disintegration” (86). Likewise Berman concludes, “Liberal democracies’ problems over the past years haven’t come merely or even primarily from the challenges they have faced but rather from a diminished capacity to recognize and respond to them.” To limit the appeal of anti-liberal, anti-democratic populism, requires making the central institutions of national democracy – national parties and parliaments – more responsive to popular demands and reducing the drift toward technocracy. Diminishing support for anti-democratic, ill-liberal populist parties requires domestic institutions more in touch and responsive to citizens’ needs.

In sum, these neo-Schumpeterians, like Schumpeter before them, couch their prescriptions for Euro-democracy within an overriding concern for political stability. Proponents of democratizing the EU link public opposition to the EU’s democratic deficit: the EU’s social illegitimacy is due to the EU’s democratic illegitimacy. While they disagree about how to democratize the EU – the

supranational vs. the national route, they argue that in order to stabilize public support for the EU, what is needed is to strengthen democracy. But are they right to think so?

4. Why democracy is not the answer

From a high of 62.7 percent net support amongst the public in 1991 (quoted in Hooghe and Marks 2008: 10), in 2016 it stood at just 37 percent: 56% responded membership was a good thing and 19% responded membership was a bad thing (Nancy 2016). The aggregate score hides some wide variations. Net public support is significantly lower in Greece (2 percent), Italy (8 percent) and the UK (21 percent). Given these trends, concern about declining public support for European integration is understandable. But if Euroscepticism is a problem, is democracy the solution? If the answer is yes, three things must be true. First, the EU's democratic deficit would have to be a primary source of public opposition to the EU. If Euroscepticism were the result of other factors, making the EU more democratic would be irrelevant. Second, Eurosceptical members of the public would need to agree not just that the EU needed to be more democratic, but also about *how* to make it so. If they held different understandings of what democracy is, they would also disagree about how to reform the EU. Third, from a normative perspective stability would have to be an inherent value of democracy. In what follows, I argue all three of these assumptions are mistaken.

4.1 Euroscepticism is driven by perceptions of policy as much as regime

The first reason that democratizing the EU will not make a marked effect on public attitudes toward the EU is that policy disagreements are often at the root of Euroscepticism. Policy disagreements are unlikely to subside even if they were settled more democratically. The

existence of policy disagreements is evident in studies of public opinion and voting behavior as well as the two issues that advocates of democratization frequently discuss: the response to the economic crisis and the immigration crisis. The important point is that supporters and sceptics hold conflicting views about what should be the policy outputs and priorities of the EU.

A large body of research demonstrates that the EU public hold different and conflicting attitudes toward Europe and European policies (C. E. de Vries 2013; C. de Vries and Hoffmann 2015; Mair 2007; Stoeckel 2013). In her study of Euroscepticism, Catherine de Vries (2018) argues that people's attitudes toward the EU can be organized into a four-fold schema. "Loyal supporters" believe that the EU regime – the way rules and procedures operate in practice – and EU policy outputs are superior to their national regimes and national policy outputs. Loyal supporters are the most pro-EU in orientation. In sharp contrast, "exit sceptics" believe that the EU regime and EU policy are inferior to the national regime and national policies. As hard Eurosceptics, they are the most likely to choose to leave the EU if given a chance. The other two types hold an ambivalent attitude toward the EU. "Policy sceptics" believe that the EU regime is superior to their national regime, but EU policies are worse than those produced by their national governments. And "regime sceptics" believe that the EU regime is inferior to their national regime, but superior in terms of policy. Importantly, these differences capture people's different issue priorities, which in turn inform different demands for EU reform.

Based on an analysis of the 2014 European Elections Survey, de Vries finds that overall for EU citizens who live in better national conditions where unemployment is low and quality of governance high, limiting immigration is the most important issue. For those living in worse

national conditions where unemployment is high and governance is poor, unemployment is the most important issue. Importantly, however, these generalizations mask significant variations. For policy sceptics living in countries in bad national conditions, just 8 percent think immigration is the top issue. For exit sceptics living in good national conditions, immigration is the top priority for 33 percent and 26 percent respectively. (2018, 116–21)

One priority where sceptics and supporters converge is unemployment. For loyal supporters as well as regime, policy and exit sceptics alike, addressing unemployment is their top priority. Does that suggest a viable area of policy-making agreement? The answer is no for the simple reason that they hold different views about what measures should be taken to address unemployment. In particular, the public disagrees about redistributive policies, state intervention and national control. Whereas regime sceptics support increasing redistributive policies to address economic inequality, policy sceptics and exit sceptics want less redistribution. Regime sceptics want less state intervention in the economy, but exit and policy sceptics are ambivalent. Though all sceptics want greater national control over policy-making, loyal supporters do not (2018, 122–24). This means that large sections of the public are likely to oppose the proposal put forward by Boujou et. al. for a European Assembly and a Democratization Budget for what it tries to do (redistribution) and/or how it does it (supranational decision-making). Even though unemployment is a top priority amongst the public, they disagree about how it should be addressed and who should make decisions.

De Vries' portrait of a divided EU public on issue priorities and how to address them tallies with recent research on public opinion and voting behavior (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). According to

Sarah Hobolt and James Tilley, policy preferences don't just affect people's attitudes, they also affect how they vote. In classic retrospective voting fashion, following the Eurozone economic crisis, many voters in western Europe who experienced economic hardship punished mainstream parties by opting for challenger parties. Overall about 9 percent of voters defected from the mainstream parties – i.e., parties that regularly form the government and primary opposition, for challenger parties – i.e., parties that have never formed the government. Support for mainstream right parties dropped by 6 percent and mainstream left parties by 3 percent over the previous election. Simultaneously, public support for the challenger right parties increased by 4 percent and the challenger left parties by 3 percent. There were, however, big differences in the ideological orientation of defectors to different parties. Those who left the mainstream parties to join the challenger right parties were much more anti-immigrant and anti-EU than mainstream loyalists. Defectors to the left challenger party were more pro-environment and pro-immigrant than mainstream party loyalists, and significantly more in favor of greater redistribution. Policy differences were reflected in differences in voting behavior.

Of course, policy disagreements are at the heart of two issues widely seen as the cause of the public EU's legitimacy crisis: the Eurozone crisis and immigration. Northern states – and especially Germany – have largely driven the institutional and policy response to the Euro-zone economic crisis (Bulmer 2014). The European Parliament, the Commission and the peripheral states have largely been sidelined in decision-making. The result is that the EU response has reflected Germany's understanding of the causes and solutions to the economic crisis. The result has been a preference for austerity, stronger fiscal rules, and greater national and financial oversight. This response has come at the expense of those who advocated for intra-European

solidarity, fiscal stimulus, higher inflation in core countries like Germany, and debt mutualization and forgiveness.

Likewise, immigration policy splits the European public. While a majority of Europeans might agree about limiting unwanted immigration from outside of the EU, they disagree about the desirability of intra-EU immigration. Citizens in the Northern countries are on average much less supportive of the EU's freedom of movement, while citizens in Southern countries are much more supportive of the right to immigrate to other EU countries. It's not difficult to understand why. A central feature of the Single Market has been EU citizens moving from economically less dynamic areas to more economically dynamic areas. During the depth of the Eurozone crisis, significant numbers of citizens in Southern countries moved northward in search of better employment opportunities. It's little wonder that when David Cameron sought a so-called handbrake on immigration in 2014, his pleas fell on deaf ears (Thompson 2017). While citizens in Northern countries might perceive the influx of immigrants from the South and East as cultural or economic threats, those arriving see economic and cultural opportunities.

The last time there was a major improvement in public support for the EU was in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Sandholtz 1993: 21-22). This was in the context of the implementation and apparent success of the 1992 program. One might argue that the democratic reforms envisioned would lead to replicating the policy success of the Single European Act. However, just because the people's representatives have an increased ability to act, does not ensure that they will adopt policies that will command general support. In fact, what research on public opinion and electoral behavior suggest is that there are deep policy disagreements among both supporters and

sceptics. Catherine de Vries writes, “[D]ifferent types of sceptics within the same country hold starkly different issue priorities and positions.” As a result, she continues, “European and national elites face the difficult task of developing a policy response that can appease all of these constituencies simultaneously. This will most likely prove to be very difficult” (10). No recent event made this more obvious than the EU response to the financial and debt crisis. Is there any reason to think that either Greeks or Germans would have been more accepting of fiscal austerity or fiscal stimulus if it had been put to an EU-wide popular vote?

4.2 The public disagrees about what democracy is and how the EU should be more democratic

“There is no single meaning of the ‘democratic deficit’” (Follesdal and Hix 2006, 534).

Public opinion toward the EU is partly driven by policy positions. Supporters and sceptics evaluate the policy outputs of the EU differently. These differences are not likely to go away simply because decisions are made more democratically. That said, it is certainly the case that at least some portion of public opposition toward the EU is a result of perceptions that it is insufficiently democratic (Rohrschneider 2002; Rohrschneider and Loveless 2010). Assuming that not everyone will be convinced by simply a clearer articulation and defense of the EU’s democratic credentials (Moravcsik 2002), this would suggest that a necessary if not sufficient step toward building public support for the EU requires enhancing its democratic character. Is Euro-democracy a solution to Euroscepticism?

If Euro-democracy were a solution to Euroscepticism, it would mean that not only the public agrees that the EU needs to be more democratic, but also that they agree about how to make it so. If they disagreed about how to make it more democratic, then democratic reforms would be judged differently by different people. Reforms – say, enhancing the powers of the parliament – that might be judged positively by certain sections of the public, might be seen as irrelevant or worse by other sections. So, what evidence do we have that the public thinks about Euro-democracy in similar ways or in different ways?

There is both indirect and direct research that suggests the EU public thinks differently about democracy and democratic reform. The indirect evidence is that in the context of previous treaty negotiations, political elites themselves have disagreed about how to reform the EU (Bevir and Phillips 2017; Rittberger 2005; Schrag Sternberg 2013; Wallace and Smith 1995; Wiesner 2019). Amongst elites, one of the prominent disagreements is between federalists and nationalists. Federalists have typically supported strengthening the legislative, budgetary and oversight powers of the directly elected European Parliament. Nationalists have typically supported strengthening the role of national representatives and national parliaments in decision-making. Importantly, reforms that would be viewed as enhancing democracy from the federalist perspective would be impertinent or even objectionable from the nationalist perspective, and vice versa. For instance, prior to the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament and the European Council proposed very different reforms (Bevir and Phillips 2017). The European Council argued that strengthening the legitimacy of the EU required enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Councils. This included recommendations for better interdepartmental coordination among Member States and greater coordination of activities through the General

Affairs Council. By contrast, the European Parliament called for strengthening the supranational elements of decision-making, including incorporating the Common Foreign and Security Policy in the Community pillar and extending the EP's budgetary competence by eliminating the distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory spending. This disagreement between the member states and the European Parliament is mirrored in the positions taken up by Boujou et al. on the one hand and McNamara and de Vries, Matthijs and Berman on the other.

It could be the case, of course, that whereas the people's representatives have disagreed about how to make the EU more democratic, the people itself is united. What's the direct evidence for how the public thinks about the EU's (il)legitimacy? In their study of France, Germany and the UK, Markus Jachtenfuchs, Thomas Diez and Sabine Jung (1998) find that national political parties cluster around four different "polity-ideas" or understandings about what makes the EU legitimate. Each polity-idea – federal state, intergovernmental cooperation, economic community and network polity – envision different processes of legitimation and are rooted in different national and ideological traditions. For Jachtenfuchs and his co-authors this means the public uses very different normative criteria for evaluating the EU and any future developments. More recently, Mónica Ferrín and Hanspeter Kriesi and contributors to a volume on how Europeans view and evaluate democracy conclude that overall Europeans share a common frame of liberal democracy – largely consisting of equality before the law and fair and free elections – but they disagree about non-procedural elements, like protection against poverty (Ferrin and Kriesi 2016).

Follesdal and Hix are right: there is no single account of the EU's democratic deficit. This is because there is no single account of Euro-democracy. EU citizens and their representatives hold

conflicting ideas about what makes and what could make the EU more democratically legitimate. Democratizing the EU will not satisfy the public because Europeans disagree about how it should be made more democratic.

4.3. Democracy and stability

Writing in 1970, Carole Pateman argued that Schumpeterian conceptions of democracy misunderstood the normative content of democracy. The same critique can be repeated about neo-Schumpeterian prescriptions for a democratic EU.

It is true, of course, that normative democratic theorists have defended a variegated set of principles to justify democracy (Held 2006). These include better policies (Arneson 2004; Williams 2000), better citizens (Pateman 1970; Rousseau 1987), respecting human dignity (Waldron 1999) or some combination of these (Anderson 2010; Gutmann and Thompson 2004). While democratic theorists have at times worried about stabilizing democracy (Tocqueville), no theorist has argued that stability itself is a primary value. Indeed, those political thinkers who worried most about political stability have usually been its most trenchant critics (Plato 1992). The normative problem with the argument that democratic reforms are justified to stabilize the EU is that stability per se is not a value of democracy. From the perspective of democratic theory, advocates of a more democratic EU have made a category mistake, ascribing a value to democracy it was never intended to bear.

There is, of course, a deep irony in advocating greater democracy in the EU and that democratic reforms should be a force for stability. After all, if democracy means providing new

opportunities for popular participation and input, greater control and accountability by the people and their representatives over policy, appointments and spending, then democratic politics is by definition destabilizing. It opens up the political decision-making system to different policies, appointments and budget priorities, ones previous decision-makers have avoided, blocked or ignored. Some astute viewers of the EU have made this connection (Dennison and Zerka 2019), and because they are committed to some version of business as usual, they ineluctably draw the conclusion that democracy may not be such a great thing after all.

The problem is not that many would-be democratic reformers are also committed Europeanists. After all, a complete political theory requires one to both have a theory of outcomes and a theory of authority (Waldron 1998). The problem, to invoke Schmitter and Karl, is that they think all good things can more or less go together. This has led to the untenable position that enhancing democracy would and should stabilize the EU.

Conclusion

In 1941, Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi argued that European integration could not be successful at overcoming its history of war and destruction unless it proceeded on a democratic basis (Rossi and Spinelli 1941). Their federalist vision of Europe has long been cast aside as a utopian vision, unhinged from the exigencies of politics. A striking conclusion one draws from surveying proposals to make the EU more democratic is the way large numbers of academics, observers and politicians have been converted to the federalist position: European integration cannot continue or continue well without making it more democratic. They may disagree what *form* democracy they want, but democratizing the EU is understood as essential to stabilizing the

EU. But as I've argued in this article, this view is wrong. Firstly, public opposition to the EU is based on policy as much as polity disagreements. For many citizens a more democratic Europe would not necessarily deliver a better set of European policies. Second, political elites and EU citizens disagree about how to make the EU more democratic. Reforms which might appease certain groups will inevitably alienate others. And third, while democracy and stability might both be worthy goals, they are different goals. To portray democracy as a means to achieve stability is not only empirically misguided, it also misunderstands what is unique and valuable about democracy.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Elizabeth. 2010. *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Arneson, Richard. 2004. "Democracy Is Not Inherently Just." In *Justice & Democracy*, edited by Keith Dowding, Robert E. Goodin, and Carole Pateman, 40–58. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bell, Daniel. 2015. *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Berman, Sheri. 2017. "Populism Is a Problem. Elitist Technocrats Aren't the Solution." *Foreign Policy*. December 20, 2017. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/20/populism-is-a-problem-elitist-technocrats-arent-the-solution/>.
- . 2018. "Against the Technocrats." *Dissent* 65 (1): 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2018.0014>.
- Bevir, Mark, and Ryan Phillips. 2017. "EU Democracy and the Treaty of Lisbon." *Comparative European Politics* 15 (5): 705–28.
- Boujou, Antoine. 2018. "Manifesto for the Democratization of Europe." Manifesto for the Democratisation of Europe. September 18, 2018. <http://tdem.eu/en/manifesto/>.
- Brennan, Jason. 2017. *Against Democracy*. Paperback edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bulmer, Simon. 2014. "Germany and the Eurozone Crisis: Between Hegemony and Domestic Politics." *West European Politics* 37 (6): 1244–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.929333>.
- Dennison, Susi, and Paweł Zerka. 2019. "The 2019 Election: How Anti-Europeans Plan to Wreck Europe and What Can Be Done to Stop It." The European Council on Foreign Relations.
- Ferrin, Monica, and Hanspeter Kriesi. 2016. *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis F. Thompson. 2004. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hall, Peter A. 2014. "Varieties of Capitalism and the Euro Crisis." *West European Politics* 37 (6): 1223–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.929352>.
- Held, David. 2006. *Models of Democracy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hobolt, Sara B., and James Tilley. 2016. "Fleeing the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro Crisis." *West European Politics* 39 (5): 971–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1181871>.

- Jachtenfuchs, Markus, Thomas Diez, and Sabine Jung. 1998. "Which Europe? Conflicting Models of a Legitimate European Political Order." *European Journal of International Relations* 4 (4): 409–45.
- Mair, Peter. 2007. "Political Opposition and the European Union." *Government and Opposition* 42 (1): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00209.x>.
- Majone, Giandomenico. 1998. "Europe's 'Democratic Deficit': The Question of Standards." *European Law Journal* 4 (1): 5–28.
- Matthijs, Matthias. 2017. "Europe After Brexit: A Less Perfect Union." *Foreign Affairs*, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2016-12-12/europe-after-brexit>.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 2002. "In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit': Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (4): 603–24.
- Nancy, Jacques. 2016. "Parlemeter 2016 Analytical Overview: Special Eurobarometer of the European Parliament." Public Opinion Monitoring Series Directorate-General for Communication. European Parliament. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2016/parlemetre/eb86_1_parlemeter_synthesis_en.pdf.
- Pateman, Carole. 1970. *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press.
- Piketty, Thomas, and Antoine Vauchez. 2018. "Manifesto for the Democratization of Europe." *Social Europe*. *Social Europe* (blog). December 11, 2018. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/manifesto-for-the-democratization-of-europe>.
- Plato. 1992. *Republic*. Edited by G. M. A. Grube. Hackett Publishing.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1999. "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense." In *The Democracy Sourcebook*, edited by Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Antonio Cheibub, 12–17. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rittberger, Berthold. 2005. *Building Europe's Parliament: Democratic Representation Beyond the Nation State*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rohrschneider, Robert. 2002. "The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-Wide Government." *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (2): 463–75. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088389>.
- Rohrschneider, Robert, and Matthew Loveless. 2010. "Macro Salience: How Economic and Political Contexts Mediate Popular Evaluations of the Democracy Deficit in the European Union." *The Journal of Politics* 72 (4): 1029–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381610000514>.
- Rossi, Ernesto, and Altiero Spinelli. 1941. "The Manifesto of Ventotene." The Altiero Spinelli Institute for Federalist Studies.

- http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_manifesto_of_ventotene_1941-en-316aa96c-e7ff-4b9e-b43a-958e96afbecc.html.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1987. "On the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right." In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*, translated by Donald A. Cress, 141–227. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Schrag Sternberg, Claudia. 2013. *The Struggle for EU Legitimacy: Public Contestation, 1950s–2005*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Stoeckel, Florian. 2013. "Ambivalent or Indifferent? Reconsidering the Structure of EU Public Opinion." *European Union Politics* 14 (1): 23–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116512460736>.
- Thompson, Helen. 2017. "Inevitability and Contingency: The Political Economy of Brexit." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (3): 434–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117710431>.
- Vries, Catherine de. 2018. *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*. Oxford University Press.
- Vries, Catherine de, and Isabell Hoffmann. 2015. "What Do the People Want? Opinions, Moods and Preferences of European Citizens." #2015/1. Eupinions. Bertelsmann Stiftung.
<https://eupinions.eu/de/text/what-do-the-people-want/>.
- Vries, Catherine De, and Kathleen R. McNamara. 2018. "How Choice Can Save Europe." *Foreign Affairs*, May 14, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2018-05-14/how-choice-can-save-europe>.
- Vries, Catherine E. de. 2013. "Ambivalent Europeans? Public Support for European Integration in East and West." *Government and Opposition* 48 (3): 434–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.15>.
- Waldron, Jeremy. 1998. "Participation: The Right of Rights." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 98 (January): 307–37.
- . 1999. *The Dignity of Legislation*. John Robert Seeley Lectures 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wallace, William, and Julie Smith. 1995. "Democracy or Technocracy? European Integration and the Problem of Popular Consent." *West European Politics* 18 (3): 137–157.
- Wiesner, Claudia. 2019. *Inventing the EU as a Democratic Polity: Concepts, Actors and Controversies*. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Science and Business Media : Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, Melissa S. 2000. *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation*. Princeton University Press.