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**EU democratisation:  
From patchy democracy to party democracy**

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**Abstract**

The paper is divided in six sections. First section shortly reviews the debate on democratisation as the unifying issue of different sub-disciplines of political science. Second section draws attention on an explanatory scheme of the European

integration as a process prompted also by democratic aims and bound to democracy. Third section is concerned with the formation of the common political identity of the Europeans as the condition for the operation of common democratic institutions and processes. In section four, the past experience, present situation and possible evolution of party politics in the European Union is examined because the paper argues that political parties are still essential actors of democracy. Fifth section examines and criticises the hypothesis of forwarding the role of the national parliaments to reduce the democratic deficit of Community decision-making. Since the paper argues that parliamentary institutions are important to democracy, the final section proposes to revitalise party politics and integration in the European Union by assigning the European Parliament and the national parliaments the fundamental power of selecting the Commission President in collaboration with the Euro and national parties and the national governments.

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Democratisation is important in contemporary world and attractive to political scientists. Following to the fall of the Berlin wall, political scientists quickly started to study the problem of the transition of Eastern Europe to democracy. The subject fascinated political scientists more than the uncertain democratisation of Latin America in the years before. In the same time, democratisation became an object of study of the specialists of International Relations. A passionate debate opened on the relation between domestic democracy and international peace. Research was originally aimed to assess whether democratic and undemocratic regimes are differently war- and peace-prone. In those years, Robert Dahl (1994) and David Held (1987) made distinct appeals to consider with attention the crisis of contemporary democracy. Because internationalisation and globalisation are removing fundamental decisions from the capacity of accountable national decision-makers, democracy is in jeopardy even in well-configured democratic countries. Insistently Held (1995) has been drawing attention to the fact that, while the "third wave" of democratisation (Huntington, 1993) has been making democracies more numerous, globalisation has been making decisions less democratic. Finally, students of the European Union (EU) and practitioners of EU politics have come to the front and shout that democracy is tremendously curbed with regard to making common decisions for the Europeans, the longest democracy accustomed people, along with the North Americans, in the world.

All such scientific interests show that democratisation can be the unifying issue of political science today. It cuts across sub-discipline division lines and appeals to specialists of national, comparative and international politics. At the same time, interconnection of domestic and international issues indicates that the most unknown dimension of democracy - i.e. democracy at the inter- and supra-national level - is tremendously important today and its importance will grow in the years to come. The "fourth wave" of democratisation should be the wave of democracy beyond the nation-state. However, democracy beyond the state cannot be separated from democracy in the state and democratisation beyond the state is conditioned by democratisation within the state.

This paper is inspired by the idea that the attempt to forward democracy in the constitution and practice of the European Community/Union is the earliest attempt to draw a group of states into that "fourth wave". Such a process started in the early 1970s with the budget treaties<sup>1</sup> and continued up to the reforms of the 1990s, which are explicitly concerned with the problem of making the EU policy-makers accountable to the people or, at least, more accountable than they have been up to the present.

The paper is divided in six sections. First section shortly reviews the "great debate" on democratisation as the unifying issue of the different sub-disciplines of political science.

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<sup>1</sup> On April 1970 the Council of Ministers decided to regularise Community's budgetary procedures and to issue a *Treaty amending certain budgetary provisions of the Treaties*. Signed on July 1975, the treaty increased the European Parliament's powers in budget approval.

Second section draws attention on an explanatory scheme of the European integration as a process prompted also by democratic aims and bound to democracy. Third section is concerned with the formation of the common political identity of the Europeans as the condition for the operation of common democratic institutions and processes. In section four, the past experience, present situation and possible evolution of party politics in the European Union is examined because political parties are essential actors of democracy. Fifth section examines and criticises the hypothesis of forwarding the role of the national parliaments to reduce the democratic deficit of Community decision-making. Since the paper argues that parliamentary institutions are important to democracy, the final section proposes to revitalise party politics and integration in the European Union by assigning the European Parliament and the national parliaments the fundamental power of selecting the Commission President in collaboration with the Euro and national parties and the national governments.

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#### **DEMOCRATISATION AND THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY: AN OVERVIEW**

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The introduction of direct suffrage is a fundamental step of democratisation as they are the introduction of measures of real protection of a variety of human rights and the accomplishment of transformations in many socio-economic, institutional and cultural attributes of a political system. Once created and consolidated, democratic regimes are challenged along the way. They are continuously forced to make adjustments to update their democratic assets. In fact, the challenge of technological and economic transformations imposes the simultaneous increase of “technical” regulations, decentralised government and global governance that put democracy under stress. For this reason, democratisation is important today also for the Europeans

The research on domestic democratisation deals with the preconditions, process and results of moving from an authoritarian rule of law to a system of representative government accountable to a mass electorate. According to Lipset (1959), wealth and modernisation are preconditions to democracy. Moore (1966), instead, discovered the conditions for democracy in the social structure. Countries with strong middle classes, industrial bourgeoisie and workers are more favoured to get democracy than countries with different social classes on the front. Also conditions like the domestic political culture, and external conditions like the control of foreign powers are considered important on how single countries or groups of countries are changed into democracies (Maravall; Whithead). Authors like Rustow (1970), Linz (1990), O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) have variously explained the different phases of the transition process from authoritarian to democratic regime, the role of distinct social, political and institutional actors, the coalitions and negotiations formed during the transition period. Regarding consequences, Georg Sorensen (1993, ch. 3) has reviewed one of the major points under debate, that regarding democracy as the starting point of economic growth. But the results of democracy do not concern the domestic domain alone; they concern also the external system. On this regard, attention has been drawn to the influence the increase of the number of democracies in contemporary world has on the nature of the international system.

The 'democracy-peace' dyad is the subject of an important line of research in the discipline of International Relations. Another important line of research in the same discipline is concerned with the introduction of democratic mechanisms in the governance of the international system. The line of research on democracy and international peace has been filled with quantitative analyses (Gaubatz; Oneal and Russett; Petter Gleditsch; Rummel), though not exclusively with such analysis (Risse-Kappen; Russett; Russett et al.; Thompson; Weede). The line of research on the democratisation of international governance, instead, has been filled with theoretical reasoning (Archibugi and Held; Bonanate; Held 1995; Huntley), prescriptive studies (Falk; Papisca) and few empirical analyses (Rourke, Hiskes, Zirakzadeh).

Political power in today world is dispersed among actors of different kind and is not centralised in the state as it has been for the last centuries. Politics in contemporary world is figured with the concept of multi-level governance. Authoritative decisions are made by different kinds of actors able to impose rules on one or more levels (the local, state, multi-state or region, and world level) mostly in co-operation, sometime in reciprocal competition. Multi-level governance is a controversial concept. Great controversy exists also on the chance of implanting democracy into multi-level governance because the actors of multi-level systems do not have the same obligation to democracy. The state, regional and local levels have (or should have) democratic obligations. Supra-state levels, instead, are populated with actors not obliged to have democratic decision-making regimes. State and local governments undergo democratic political control because their authorities account (or should account) to the electorate while such control cannot be put on all the actors of the multi-level governance system. The common belief is that international institutions (like the International Monetary Fund) and multi-state regional institutions (like the EU) cannot undergo democratic control because the political system of the supra-state level is neither ordered according to equalitarian principles nor rooted in the common identity of the subjects (Chrysochoou 1995). Briefly, globalisation makes multi-level governance inevitable and democratisation impossible

Such a way of reasoning mainly pertains to scholars with a strong background in political economy and public policy analysis (Majone; Scharpf) while other political scientists are not all that pessimistic. They concede that globalisation is a strong process of the current capitalist economy and it is almost impossible to stop it. Tough national governments have been forced to adapt to globalisation, they are not completely powerless. Through a process of "trial and error" future generations will democratise the supra-state political layer.

The creation of the European Union, the North America Free Trade Agreement and alike institutions is the best way to adapt to globalisation. Contiguous states join together in multi-state systems. Such multi-state systems allow the members to carry out traditional functions otherwise impossible to carry out. The economic growth functions of the state are the most visible functions endangered by the globalisation process and restored by multi-state system co-operation. But also foreign security is a function lost and restored to the state by such international structures as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - whose

present nature is very far from the international alliance property NATO originally had. Since organised crime today is mostly international crime, also the function of protecting individuals from law-breaking organisations is going to be a lost function of the state. Only the attribution of police and judicial powers to multi-state systems can satisfactorily restore such a function to the states that accept to pool police and judicial powers within multi-state systems (Attinà 1997 b).

Forced to adapt to the globalisation process and to make policies and rules within multi-level multi-state systems, states have four options to hold up with the requisites of democracy: (i) to constrain the current process of transferring powers to institutions, regimes and actors above the state; (ii) to control the supra-national institutions with the means of national democratic control; (iii) to build up new, specific mechanisms of democratic control for the supra-national level; (iv) to implant in multi-level multi-state systems the same kind of democratic mechanisms used within the state. Each option has advocates and critics. The first one, however, is not realistic and can be left aside. Second option has many, sometimes vociferous, advocates in the European Union. They propose, for examples, to give national parliaments direct access to the supra-state level of decision-making. Such a proposal will be reviewed in the second part of this paper. Third option has been the main road of democratisation of the European Union up to now and the most favoured solution today. Different types of institutional actors, provided with their own legitimacy, are differently admitted to the process of decision-making and to control the production, execution and implementation of norms. The creation of the co-operation and co-decision procedures, the rotating mechanism of the Presidency, the creation of the European Ombudsman, the revision of the budget procedure, the rules of transparency of the Council meetings are examples of the measures to build a multi-state democracy of its own. Finally, democracy cannot be invented at once when democratic states create a multi-state political system but those states have an experience of democracy that cannot be put aside. Therefore, fourth option of democratisation beyond the state demands the transposition of traditional democratic mechanisms from the involved states to the multi-state system. To put it on reverse, it implies the convergence of the multi-state system on the same kind of mechanisms of the state level by embedding those mechanisms to the new multi-state environment.

According with the fourth option, the solution of the legitimacy problem of the European Union must take into account the tradition of democracy of the European states. Such a tradition is *first and foremost party government* and implies two things: “that electoral politics will focus upon the political parties forming a party system” and “that government formation is to a considerable extent controlled by the parties, making various kinds of coalitions” (Lane and Ersson, p.10).

The long-time effort to bring democracy to the European Union has certainly benefited political parties. Their role has been promoted by such reforms as the introduction of the co-operation and co-decision procedure and the Maastricht Treaty article no. 158 on the Parliament vote of approval of the new Commission nominated by the President who, on his turn, is nominated by the national governments by common accord and after consulting

the European Parliament. Are such reforms inspired by a clear constitutional strategy aimed to forward political parties as the building bloc of EU democracy? Or are they “patches” as others of different quality and substance to mend the holes of EU democracy here and there? First option is not excluded but second option seems to have been prevalent up to now.

Democracy and accountability are an indivisible dyad. But the means to make political authorities account to the citizens are many and they result from different historical processes and practical decisions. In such a perspective, EU democratisation must be closely linked to the democratic quality of the political systems of the member countries. Since democracy in the member countries is party democracy, the development of party politics in the European Union political system is of fundamental importance to the democratic evolution of the Union. New (semi-)public and not democratically accountable institutions, networks and agencies with great independence from governments are not excluded as fundamental elements of policy-making in the contemporary “regulatory” state (Andersen and Burns; Caporaso; Majone). But the role of political parties to make the European Union more democratic cannot be under-estimated. Political parties are still the only collective actors to assemble the interests of different social groups into single and coherent programmes and compete to gain institutional power to convert that programmes into concrete political agendas. In the last twenty years, regulation has been larger than redistribution in EC/EU legislation but redistribution has never been absent and will be present in EU legislation in the near future even more than it has been in the past. If it is agreed that regulatory policies have less impact on the social dynamics than redistributive policies and do not require the degree of democratic accountability and legitimacy that redistributive policies require, it is also agreed that the present production of EU legislation on economic, monetary and fiscal issues will raise resentment and political alienation if not made within the frame of competitive and, where possible, participatory democracy.

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#### **EXPLAINING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS DEMOCRATISATION**

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The European integration process is a multi-dimensional process. Its origin and development has been influenced by many factors. Almost all studies regard it as a peculiar European process but this is partially true. Europe has given its own specific answers to changes and transformations that occur all around the world and not in the European region alone. Democratisation is one of such world transformations (Telo).

Globalisation analyses make us aware of the shrinking of the world, the lowering of state borders and the rising of demands to adapt the state to the great changes of the period. Changes can be summarised in two groups: changes caused by material and economic factors and changes caused by political and ideological factors. The progress of communication and transportation technology and the consequent globalisation of the economic market represent the former factors. They have been largely studied and are known better than the others. The political and ideological factors – barely considered also by political scientists - are mainly represented by the fact that the respect of human rights and democratic principles are considered the only title to legitimate political power in all

the corners of the world. All these factors have been present in world history since long time. The appearance of material and economic factors can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and even further. Political and ideological factors, instead, have a long lineage Revolution (Modelski 1995; 1996) but have been strongly thrown into world history by the French.

Effects of globalisation on economy and society and on the state and international system have been largely analysed in recent past years (see, for example, Camilleri and Falk; Chase-Dunn; Cox; Kennedy; Stopford and Strange) and also the dependence of the European integration process on the process of globalisation has been acknowledged (Attinà 1997 a; Wallace and Wallace). The European Communities - as they have been shaped since the 1950s by national governments under the pressure of national economic actors - have been recognised as means to adapt the European states to the problem of responding to social demands in a world deeply changed under the effect of technological transformations. Underestimated (but see Attinà 1997 a; Weiler), instead, is the effect of political and ideological factors on the European Community and on international organised co-operation in general.

At the time of the acceleration of the political and institutional development of the European Community in the 1980s, Bulmer and Wessels (1987) signalled that the European Community was based on the "pooling and mixing" of state sovereignty that was caused by the need of national governments to hold up with welfare policies in a period of economic crisis. The need of stable economic co-operation, however, was not limited to this goal. In that time, regionalism was permeating the world economy. National economies were put under stress by trade and monetary problems. It was recognised that the advantage of the European firms was attainable in the world economic competition only by enlarging the European market. At the same time, political consensus in the European states was linked to welfare policies as well as to the continuous effort of the government to control economic growth. Therefore, the socio-economic requisites of the political pact and consensus in the European democracies depended, and continue to depend, on the existence of domestic economic policies based on solidly organised trans-national economic co-operation.

Not only economic and social security have been demanding the deepening of European integration. In the 1970s and early 1980s co-operation on foreign and security policy was taken into serious consideration. The European Political Co-operation (EPC) cannot be underestimated because of the still weak results of the successor Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). EPC was a formidable instrument to stand as a single entity in the international political system and distinguish the European position from the American position on issues such as the Middle East conflict, the oil trade and the boycotting of Soviet plans like the Siberian gas pipeline project (See Attinà, forthcoming a). The fall of the Soviet Union caused a silent revision of the relations between Europe and the United States. This was the cause of the crisis and revision of the foreign policy co-operation of the EU countries, which has not been accomplished yet. As already said, also internal security, not only foreign security, prompts co-operation at the supra-state level and the

making of common regulation and policies. Trans-national terrorism in the 1970s, international crime in the 1980s and illegal immigration in the 1990s have made inadequate the national government to give citizens the public good of physical security it is requested to give. Remedy is in the enlargement of organised co-operation. For the first time in Europe, harmonisation and convergence of national legislation are practised also in the area of home and justice affairs.

Organised co-operation aimed at the formulation of common policies not only in the field of economy and trade but also in the field of internal and external security, implies the creation of common institutions to make common policies on a stable basis. Accordingly, in the last forty-five years Western Europe governments bound themselves together in a new multi-state multi-level political system: a system made of states, which do not want to dismantle themselves, and of different governments (national, supra-national and sub-national) which want to act together.

Sub-national levels of government are created by decentralising and moving down government powers to institutions that normally (though not necessarily) have representative and participatory properties. Decentralisation is normally a strategy for making government authorities and the citizens closer to one another. Therefore, it is a democratisation act. But also the decision to create supra-national institutions of government can be a democratisation act. *Indirectly* it is a choice for democracy in as much as that creation gives the citizens goods that a democratic government has to give (like economic growth, public security and foreign consideration) and is unable to do by its own. But supra-national institutions must account to the people and their representatives. When government is moved a level up, the participation of the citizens must be moved a level up too.

The growth of interdependence and globalisation, the increase of state border permeation and the rise of demands for collective decisions on economic affairs advance international co-operation and collaboration to help national governments to carry out political functions. Such co-operation may have either the form of the international regimes with a large membership of states, the form of specific agreements among small groups of states or the form of the constitution of multi-state multi-level political systems, as the European Union. In Europe, the concentration of political and economic developed countries in a relatively small and isolated geographical space has not created a simple inter-governmental structure of bargaining and decision-making. It has framed and constrained inter-governmental decision-making in a real political system fitted with executive institutions (the Council and the Commission), political and interest representation institutions (the Parliament, the Economic and Social Commission, the Committee of Regions and many committees and working groups) and legal and budget control institutions (Court of Justice, Court of Auditors). Almost all such institutions were set up at the time of the creation of the Communities. Therefore, the EC/EU has always been more democratic than other forms of international organised co-operation fitted with inter-governmental institutions alone. However, the combination of supra-national and inter-governmental elements in the EC/EU decision-making system results in a highly



complex system of governance in which “*in the course of the policy-making cycle responsibilities and competencies shift and with them actor constellations and the rules of the game*” (Kohler-Koch).

Undoubtedly, the multi-level organisation of government (or multi-level governance) discloses many delicate constitutional and political problems. From a constitutional law perspective, for example, a clear choice must be made on how to distribute to the different levels of government competence and power to make decisions. Power may be distributed according to either exclusive or various forms of concurrent arrangements. From a political point of view, the major problem is to make the multi-state multi-level structure compatible with the requisites of political representation and accountability that a democratic system must have. This problem is not new because states with different levels of government – that is federations – have always existed. The evolution of the structure of the European Union allows us to compare it with such political systems (Hix 1994; Sbragia)<sup>2</sup> although the crucial issue raised on this point is the difference between the European Union and the federal states in terms of the identity of the people (or *demos*). Opinions are changing on the issue and the analysts increasingly acknowledge the occurrence of a process of transnational *demos*-formation (Chrysochou 1996).

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### THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL IDENTITY

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At the core of the discourse it is the distinction between national identity and political identity. Political identity is grounded on the satisfaction the citizens of a state and even of different nations have for how the political institutions of the state work. It can be defined as sharing with citizens of a state (the reference group) the same attachment to the legal and political values of the state. The national identity, instead, can be defined as sharing with the member of a nation (the reference group) the same attachment to the ethnic and cultural properties of the nation. Therefore, national identity and political identity coincide when all the citizens of a state have the same political identity and, being also members of the same nation, have a single national identity.

Different identities easily and indefinitely cohabit in the heart of the individuals in peaceful and normal times but they are rank-ordered in time of “war” - inverted commas are used to mean very serious, not necessarily military, conflict. In such a time the reference groups of the individual’s identities collide and, therefore, values associated with different

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<sup>2</sup> Thirty years ago, international law scientists rejected the hypothesis of interpreting the EEC as something more than an international organisation. Political scientists (at that time, mainly the members of the neo-functional school) were criticised for representing the EEC as something more than an inter-governmental organisation. The situation is completely inverted today. Lawyers admit that the European Union has almost lost its international properties. On the contrary, political scientists are strongly reticent on the federal nature of the EU. They continue to disregard EU political processes and institutions as part of a unitary system. International relations specialists have almost reverted - with respectable exceptions - from the supra-national interpretation of the neo-functional approach to the interpretation of the EU as a bunch of co-operative regimes, more efficient than other universal or regional regimes but absolutely international in character. Other considerations aside, such an interpretation rejects the fact that everywhere the division line between internal and international politics is less strong today than it was yesterday and it ignores that in Europe a deliberate re-organisation is occurring to face the unsustainable division between international and internal politics.

identities are put under stress. The most fundamental values and the most fundamental identity prevail over the others (Waever). This is true, but it is also true that serious conflicts and wars are not fortuitous events. They result from a specific combination of distinct factors and conditions. Scientists have compiled lists of factors and conditions leading to war although it is hard to exactly forecast the combination of factors bursting "war" in a specific circumstance. It is also true that, as "war" is caused by a combination of identified factors, a combination of opposed factors will have the opposite result, i.e. will lessen rather than heighten tension, help mutual understanding rather than misunderstanding and favour co-existence rather than division. Such "opposed" factors include social and political institutions which, when established and operating in the right direction, make "war" an unlikely accident (Deutsch). Such institutions can be identified as

- social and cultural institutions of communication and dialogue which favour mutual understanding and avoid misperceptions regarding the fundamental values of the interacting partners;
- institutions of representation of the interests and values of the social and political groups of all the interacting partners;
- governmental institutions able to make decisions respectful of the interests and values of all the nations and social groups.

The more efficaciously such institutions operate, the more unlikely "war" between concerned people is. The less likely it is, the less "war" is the rank-ordering mechanism of the multiple identities of concerned people(s).

In such a perspective, is it right to say that forty years of policy-making by Community institutions have had no influence on the political identity of the Europeans? Undoubtedly, their life has been extensively affected by the decisions of the European Community. People may be unable to distinguish how they are affected by decisions made in Brussels but they comply with such decisions acknowledged, on the whole, as advantageous to them. A few social groups and small territorial communities suffer heavy losses in their standard of life for EC norms and policies, but they are told that no other norms and policies are available.

With positive legislation and negative measures (abolition of obstacles and restraints) EU institutions have reached good results in the areas of their remits. At the same time, the system of inter-institutional checks and balances has been in a constant process of adjustment. Treaties and practice have also created a patchwork of methodologies to match the administrative organisations, political traditions and national cultures of the member states. Without such a patchwork of methodologies - which are not perfect and even partially inadequate - national differences could not be transformed into common decisions and policies.

The principle of differentiation and the principle of diversity are example of such methodologies. The former applies to the Union procedures for taking common decisions; the latter to the state procedures for executing common decisions. Treaties have given the EU institutions the power to intervene in almost all policy sectors, but the member states have different sensibilities and attitudes towards distinct policy sectors. For this reason, the

simple consultative procedure of the original Treaties has been replaced with panoply of procedures. Formally regulated or informally agreed upon, such different procedures allow the making of decisions in the different sectors with respect for different national views. The principle of diversity, instead, originates in the power of the national governments to execute Community norms. Although the power of the Commission to intervene in the execution phase is growing in order to improve the homogeneous implementation of specific common policies, diversity in the execution is common practice. The more the EU enlarges its membership and the more heterogeneous the members are, the more they must be given the option of temporary exception and temporary opting-out.

The EU software for balancing unity and heterogeneity is well represented also by operational concepts like *acquis communautaire*, harmonisation, and subsidiarity. The content of such concepts is sufficiently clear and definite to favour the convergence of all the actors involved in the decision-making process. At the same time, it is not definitively stated. It can be adapted to changed conditions. The *acquis communautaire*, for example, is an obligation and, at the same time, a public declaration of the fact that the agreement between all parties concerned is not based only on the treaties, but also on changing practice.

Another EU institutional software is the “*check, reform and expand*” software. It takes two forms: Summits, which have evolved into European Councils; and Inter-Governmental Conferences. The former, on a regular basis, and the latter, on an *ad hoc* basis, examine the state of the Union, re-allocate powers and make plans for the future.

Another fundamental choice of the EU is the gradual institutionalisation of the European Parliament as a real partner in the EU decision-making process and as a real actor in bridging the gap between the people and the supra-state level. In fact, the last two treaties (the SEA and the TEU) created the right to make petitions to the European Parliament and gave it the function of Mediator (Ombudsman) between the citizens and the EU institutions. These are not all powerful *software*; however they help to increase legitimacy and identity.

The positive evaluation of the EU mechanisms to assist the meeting of different state organisations and people interests and cultures does not mean that we are involved in an easy and fast process of union building and multiple identity formation. Many people perceive their national and European identities as conflicting ones. However, Duverger (1994) reminds that when nationalism became a force after the French Revolution, people assumed national identity without losing the municipal one even though towns had lost importance well before the French Revolution.

When the French Revolution launched the principle of the nation-state and the programme of nationalism, the nation-state became the successful model in Europe and the influence of nationalism on the masses was considered inevitable. Multi-nation states were present in the European political landscape but, despite Switzerland, the multi-nation state did not become the example to follow. A similar situation occurs today in Europe. Integration is not the only possible choice, but it is the only attractive model. All around

Europe, people and governments think that they can either protract the state as it is today for as long as they can or they join the European Union as soon as possible and adapt to conceding areas of power to that supra-state level of government. For this reason, first of all, they turn to Europeanise the economy. But they also realise that they face the dilemma between retaining their dominant political identity with the centralised nation-state and shifting to europeanism<sup>3</sup> and a multi-level system of government. At the same time, they also feel compelled to develop their ability to have different political identities with the different political systems in which they are compelled to live. Supports for the nation-state, regional and inferior levels of government and support for the Union, far from being incompatible, are consistent and equally needed because none of these levels of government can carry out its political functions without co-ordination with the others. Europe can neither be divided only into states based on the size of the nations nor can it be divided into political systems based on the size of the states. States and nations must adapt themselves to the new conditions that lead to the formation of co-ordinated political systems built around government institutions with different territorial ranges.

Having made clear the nature of the multi-state multi-level political system of the European Union and the effects it has on people identities, it is time to examine the party predicament of that system.

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### MULTI-LEVEL PARTY STRUCTURES

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The European multi-level structure of government is composed of representative institutions, i.e. elections and parliamentary assemblies. Such a composition has many consequences. Students and practitioners are well aware of some and not of other consequences. For example, the electoral systems of the representative assemblies of the different levels (the European Parliament, the national parliament, the regional assembly and the city council) are different from one another. Electoral systems have important consequences on the forming of the lists of candidates and on the organisation and conduct of the political parties. In multi-party systems they influence party preferences on coalition partners and political adversaries. In general, in multi-level systems elections are rank ordered and in most of the cases national elections are first-order elections. However, political parties have to adapt to the different elections systems of the different levels of government. If they do not, they are pushed in an uncomfortable situation as Pedersen (1996) has shown for the political parties of Denmark.

The adaptation of political parties to the multi-level structure of the present arenas of competition and action is tremendously important to the European integration process and to the politics of the member countries. Delaying decisions and actions necessary to make such an adaptation is one of the aspects of the crisis faced by political parties in

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<sup>3</sup> Alongside the concept of nationalism as the programme of mobilisation of symbolic, human and material resources for the defence of the nation and the attainment of the political sovereignty, and alongside the definition of the European Union of the previous section of this paper, the concept of Europeanism should be used to indicate the programme of mobilisation to achieve the formation of a multi-layered network of government institutions and the inculcation of feelings of loyalty towards it.

contemporary Europe. As remarked (Mair), since the decay of the '*the golden age*' of the mass party, political parties have been in a process of great change and adaptation to new circumstances. The time of the decay of the mass party is also the time of the rising of globalisation and the time of the building of multi-state multi-level Europe.

While in Europe all the subjects of the nation state (governments, enterprises, interest and promotion groups) are increasingly jolting to form trans-national entities responsible for the formulation of major objectives and strategies, political parties seem to renounce to the challenge of organising and formulating political objectives and strategies at the trans-national level. To be recognised as legitimate political actors, they have to overcome the national formulation of political objectives to which they are presently limiting their action. As Mair signals (pp.18-19), parties are *increasingly state-oriented, and are correspondingly less firmly tied to civil society*. So doing – he says - they keep power privileges and feel *self-sufficient* but are, indeed, *less legitimate*. To cope with civil societies that accept crosscutting ties and layer interpenetration<sup>4</sup>, political parties have to cope with the trans-national organisation of interests and the multi-level organisation of government.

Analyses on the crisis of political parties in contemporary Western democracies agree that parties are vulnerable because they are unable to rely on collective social incentives in a time in which social groups have no clear boundaries as they had in the mass party era. Deschouwer (1996) believes that parties have encouraged a model of democracy in which support is mainly deserved in exchange of specific outputs and also adapted themselves to this model. Such a change has many consequences. Two are particularly important to our analysis. First, parties *do not any more - or not to the same extent as before – aggregate demands* (Deschouwer, p. 276). Second, governing is extremely important and winning office is crucial to political parties (Katz and Mair).

However, democracy cannot exist without appropriate and legitimate mechanisms for selecting some demands and rejecting others. Parliaments are the principal institutions to make such a selection and political parties are the principal collective actors to prepare such a selection and mediate among the social groups from whom the demands emanate. Other collective actors engage in these mechanisms and process but not with the mediation quality that is needed and political parties provide.

As party analysts acknowledge, the present crisis of political parties is not a step towards their dead but towards a new stage of their experience. It is to be acknowledged that the crisis of political parties is within the crisis of democracy. As such, it is conditioned by the globalisation process, not only by societal transformations as political party specialists argue. Therefore, parties come closer to the solution of their crisis as much as

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<sup>4</sup> Jachtenfuchs (1997) contends that "contrary to the far-reaching Europeanization of the economy and the legal system, politics and society largely remain organized within nation-states". My argument is that this asymmetry cannot last for long as it is today although it will never completely disappear. In the multi-state multi-layer nature of the European Union is the reason for this discontinuity which, however, is increasingly a matter of degree rather than of substance.

they come to terms also with the adaptation of the state to the current globalisation and the building of multi-state multi-level systems.

Political parties were thrown into the political arena of the European Community after the first Euro-elections of June 1979. Until the direct elections, they were passive spectators at the Bruxelles, Luxembourg and Strasbourg stages. Eight years later, in July 1987, they were given the role of co-player of the common legislative process in selected areas. The transformation came with the co-operation procedure introduced by the Single European Act (Moser). In 1993 the Parliament's role in legislation making was strengthened by the Maastricht Treaty with the right to co-decide in a new list of selected areas (Tsebelis). The Maastricht Treaty also extended the cases of the use of the assent procedure (created by the Single Act) giving the European Parliament the final power of decision on a small number of subjects. In addition, the procedure for the confirmation of the President of the Commission and the approval of the Commission nominated by the Council, also introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, gave the Euro-deputies the initial instrument of a direct political relation with the European Commission. Finally, with the right to appoint the European Ombudsman and the right to set up committees of inquiry the Parliament was given power of supervision on the implementation process of common policies.

Despite the legislative, scrutiny and supervisory role of the European Parliament has been so much increased by the reforms of the recent years, party competition - the quintessential attribute of parliamentary democracy - continues to be insignificant in the European Union. Ladrech and Brown-Pappamikail (1996) ascribe such circumstance to the *"different needs and opportunities determined by the specific institutional environment in which [parties] find themselves"* (p.268). The *"technocratic and apolitical culture permeating much of the Commission"* is also considered responsible for the hesitant party competition. However, researchers have demonstrated that the Party Groups of the European Parliament act as cohesive collective actors (Attinà, 1990; Raunio) and that a party system has finally materialised in the European Parliament (Bardi, 1996). This notwithstanding, since the creation of Party Federations and Party Groups the enormous distance separating Euro-parties from national parties has been narrowing only in small quantity.

Three federations - the Socialist (Delwit et De Waele; Featherstone), the Christian-Democrat (Hanley; Jansen; Johansson) and the Liberal-Reformist (Kirchner) - were created in the mid-1970s; a fourth one - the Green Party Federation - in 1996. The Party Groups, have been present in the European assembly since the early 1950s (Fitzmaurice; Pridham), but they have been remade after the 1979 first direct European elections (Bardi 1994). The federations have been able to provide national party leaders with communication circuits. But their role as party integration mechanism has been decisive in a couple of events, like the Maastricht Treaty ratification and the reduction of the number of Party Groups in the fourth Parliament (See Hix 1995; Johansson; Raunio). Party Groups, on their turn, have not attempted to create important relations with the national parties. However, since the Groups of the parties of the four Federations have occupied always more than 70 % of the

European Parliament seats (today about 75 %), their influence on the development of party politics in the European Union is undeniable.

Federations mainly aim to preserve the unity of the members around few common principles and values. Not to risk conflict and division, federation leaders are prudent in urging associate parties to collaborate beyond their wishes. Indeed, the present statutes of the party federations do not allow majority decisions in the internal formulation of political positions nor on those areas where the Council of Ministers decides by a majority. Albeit federations exhibit striking coherence in presenting documents on the socio-economic agenda of the Union (Hix 1995), their influence on the narrowing of the distance between the member parties can be effective only on the long term.

Party Groups aim to produce unity of the members as large as possible "on the spot": the voting and procedures of the Parliament committees and the general Parliament sessions. This reiterated event makes the influence of the Party Groups on the integration of the members not negligible. Deputies learn how to confront with different positions and how to converge on a single position with partners of the same party family and different countries. But, power distribution within the Euro-parties makes the difference. Euro-parties have two different types of power distribution: the centralised and diffuse power distribution. The latter is neutral to the distance between national parties and Euro-parties. The former, instead, has different effects on the individual party according to the position the party has in the Party Group of association.

Power has been always centralised in the Socialist (PES) and Christian-Democrat/Conservative party (EPP)<sup>5</sup>. In the Liberal-Reformist (ELDR) and Green (V) Euro-parties, instead, power has been always diffuse. In the Socialist Euro-party, the British Labour and the German Social Democrats have always been strong. In the Christian-Democrat/Conservative Euro-party, the distribution of power has partially changed. In the first three European Parliaments, the German delegation has been sharing the dominant position with the Italian delegation. In the present Parliament, Germans share the dominant position with the Spanish MEPs.

The MEPs, staff and leaders of the national party well positioned in the organisation of the Euro-party of affiliation are likely to prefer the deepening of integration both in party affairs and Union policies. On the contrary, national parties with no organisation power in the Euro-party machine are likely to prefer less party integration. They also disregard the extension of common policies and stronger procedures of decision-making at the Union level. Therefore, Euro-party structures, though made for more co-operation and integration of the member parties, can induce attitudes of obstruction, indifference and even disregard towards the Union level in the national party whose national staff and leaders do not see convenient conditions at the Union level. Italian political parties give indication of such a circumstance. With the re-structuring of the Italian party system in recent years, Italian

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<sup>5</sup> The parties of the European Christian-Democrat political family form the membership of the European People Party as federation, but the membership of the EPP as Party Groups includes the MEPs of the British Conservative Party as well as of centre-right parties of other countries (Johansson).

party delegations to the European Parliament have become more dispersed across the Groups. The Italian party delegations of the two largest Groups are comparatively much smaller today than the past. Accordingly, the Italian governments have become less active and effective today than they were the years, before the re-structuring of the party system, when they had the support of the largest Party Groups of the European Parliament populated with numerous Italian deputies<sup>6</sup>.

The increased fragmentation of the Party Groups and dispersion of national party delegations between different Groups in the fourth European Parliament (Attinà, forthcoming b) has increased the number of the national parties less inclined to supra-national party organisation. The situation can be worsened by the next enlargement of the Union because the new member countries are probable to send small size party delegations to the European Parliament. In the future, the number of political parties less inclined to integration could be higher and the trend to 'two-speed' party politics (Bardi, 1996) in the European Union reinforce. However, the introduction of new mechanisms in the organisation of the Euro-parties and/or appropriate institutional reforms in the Union can generate new impulse and incentive to get better party integration. The remainder of this paper is concerned with the latter condition in the conviction that past experience can be repeated again. As demonstrated (Attinà 1994), the institutional decisions and reforms concerned with the European Parliament - like the direct elections and the introduction of the absolute majority voting in the co-operation, co-decision and assent procedure - have pushed similar political parties of different countries to seek convergence and grouping in the European Parliament. Further institutional reforms will encourage the development of party grouping and call the existing Euro-parties to reform within party life and move on European pluralistic structures.

The Tsatsos Report and the following December 1996 resolution issued by the European Parliament are relevant to this subject. The Tsatsos Report is the document released by the Committee on Institutional Affairs of the European Parliament on 30 October 1996. It has been approved by the Parliament on December 1996 as *Resolution on the constitutional status of European political parties*<sup>7</sup>. The Report seeks to "set forth and clarify the 'constitutional' mission and framework defined by Article 138a of the Treaty for the emergence of European political parties and the manner in which their continued development can be encouraged by the institutions of the European Union". In many countries the central role played by the political parties in the process of the democratic formulation of objectives is recognised by the constitution, their status is governed by law, and they are entitled to contributions from public funds so that they may perform their

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6 In the 1980s and the early 1990s the Italian foreign minister Emilio Colombo and the Prime ministers Bettino Craxi and Giulio Andreotti, for example, were primary actors of the reform process of the Single European Act and the Treaty of European Union. Emilio Colombo, with the German Foreign Ministry Hans D. Genscher, inspired the Solemn Declaration on European Union that was issued at the Stuttgart European Council of June 1983 and started the reform process of the 1980s. Bettino Craxi, especially at the Milan European Council of June 1985, gave impetus to the negotiation that ended with the signature of the SEA. Giulio Andreotti spent a lot of energy of his last cabinet to foster the negotiation that ended with the signature of the TEU.

7 The Resolution reference number is EP 254.448. The "Report on the constitutional status of the European political parties" reference number is EPdoc A4-342/96.



constitutional mission. The EP Resolution sustains that, on the legal basis of Article 138a<sup>8</sup> the Union can and should regulate the legal status of the European political parties and also pass a regulation on their financial status.

In this perspective, the Resolution defines as European political party the “political association” that (a) voice an opinion on, in particular, aspects of European policy and international policy and be represented in the European Parliament or be involved in the process of expressing political will at European level in some other, comparable way; (b) be organised in a way that is likely to reflect the political will of citizens of the Union; (c) be more, in terms of goals and organisation, than a mere electioneering organisation or an organisation that merely supports a political group and parliamentary work; (d) be represented in at least one-third of the member states and be active at trans-national level.

In addition, the Resolution requires the European political parties fulfil the following obligations: (a) provide themselves with an organisational statute and a basic political programme, to which the European public has access; (b) respect the fundamental principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law; (c) word their statute so that the expression of their political will accords with democratic principles and all citizens of the Union who wishes to do so are able to express their political will in this process.

A minority of the members in the Committee on Institutional Affairs opposed the position adopted by the Report on the conviction that Article 138a of the Treaty “*makes no more than cautious reference to the action of political parties ‘at European level’ and does not mention the existence of ‘European political parties’*. It leaves the matter of their possible setting up and operation to the discretion of civil society”. The minority maintained also that political life is organised “*primarily*” within the nations, which delegate their representatives at European level. This assertion is partly true and partly wrong. Even though EU institutions do not have an existence of their own, they have a relatively independent existence (Gehring; Moravcsik). Autonomous political life is organised around them. Studies of European Union decision-making (see, for instance, Garrett and Tsebelis) show that EU decisions are far from being the mere result of the internal dynamics within the Council of Ministers. They are the products of the interactions among the Council, the Commission and the Parliament and among these institutions and several interest groups of the Union, state, meso and local level.

National political parties accept such a circumstance. Not all of them are inclined to consider separation and the primeness of the nations with the same accent as the minority MEPs of the Committee on Institutional Affairs. Some parties are strongly persuaded that the dominance of the state level is, will be and must be the permanent condition of the EU political system, but most of them do not have strong views on the relative independence and respective dominance of the state and union level. They show different attitudes

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<sup>8</sup> Article 138a of TEU affirms that “Political parties at European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to express the political will of the citizens of the Union”.

according to current circumstances in the national and Union arenas. When national circumstances are favourable to the party, the relative independence of the Union level is not questioned and the dominance of the state level is considered as negotiable. In such circumstances, it is not exceptional that the national party encourages co-ordination with the Euro-party, congruence of national and Union level party competition, and also co-operative links between the national and European parliaments. When circumstances are bad and tense, things go the other way round. No co-ordination and congruence in party politics is accepted and also super-position (rather than independence) of the national on the European parliament is desired and seen as possible.

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## PARLIAMENTS AND PARTIES

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Since the time of the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty, the problem of the role of the national parliaments in the political system of the European Union has been given constant attention but no sensible solution. In 1989 regular meetings of the EC committees of national parliaments along with the European Parliament, known as COSAC, were established<sup>9</sup>. In November 1990 a Conference of Parliaments was held in Rome, bringing together more than 300 members from all 20 chambers of the Parliaments of the Member States and from the European Parliament, with the aim of influencing the Intergovernmental Conference which opened the following month and which led to the Maastricht Treaty. In fact, national parliaments received official recognition in the Declaration no. 13, appended to the Treaty, on the "Role of National Parliaments in the European Union". In addition, Declaration no. 14 on the "Conference of Parliaments" invited the representatives of national parliaments and the European Parliament to meet "as necessary" and stated that the "Conference of Parliaments" will be consulted on the "main features of the European Union". But the Conference has never met since the Declaration has been issued while COSAC has continued to meet but has remained a place for exchanging information on issues of common concern, with little support for it to assume a broader, decision-making role.

To involve national parliaments in the law-making process of the European Union is considered necessary to balance the lack of effective parliamentary control on the Council, especially over certain areas like the second and third pillars and the economic and monetary union. In the context of preparations for the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference, proposals have been made, particularly emanating from the French National Assembly, for the creation of a new European parliamentary body, composed partly or entirely of national parliamentarians.

The creation of a third chamber would draw the Union away from the classical configuration of a bicameral parliament (composed of the states and people chambers

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<sup>9</sup> COSAC (French acronym for *Conférence des Organes Spécialisés dans les Affaires Communautaires* or Conference of European Affairs Committees) was first established by the French Presidency. It meets every six months in the country holding the Presidency and consists of delegations of up to six members from each member state drawn from the European Affairs Committees (of both chambers where that applies) of each parliament and six members of the EP. The delegations are not mandated and the conference proceeds always by consensus.

impersonated by the Council and the European Parliament) and make the EU institutional machinery more complex and less transparent to the people. However, the French proposal has raised more opposition and disapproval than consent. Support has come from Great Britain and Denmark with an important qualification. French proposal looks at strengthening the role of national parliaments in the European Union collectively, while the Danish and British advocates aim at strengthening individual national parliament scrutiny of Community's legislative procedures (Leicester).

In the present institutional structure, the role of the national parliaments in relation to the EU decision-making lies in scrutiny and advise and, where allowed by national laws and practice, oversight and control over the national government's action in the Council. The individual parliament exercises such a role according to the constitutional and political context of the country, but critics say that national parliaments are prevalently negligent about such a role. This criticism does not apply to all the parliaments. Parliamentary scrutiny of EU acts and procedures was rather ineffective in the past (Williams), but since Maastricht the national parliaments have been making changes to their procedures over Community issues. Some of them have turned to be very active and strong on EU affairs. The French National Assembly and the German federal parliament have their leverage on EC affairs and can pass resolutions on draft EC laws. But, the ardent defenders of the role of the national parliaments invoke the diffusion of the so-called Danish model of parliamentary oversight. As known, the Danish model gives decisive power to the European Affairs Committee of the *Folketing*. The Committee gives the national government a mandate before important decisions are taken in the Council of Ministers.

The debate on the role and involvement of the national parliaments in the decision-making process of the European Union is important because it calls attention on a critical aspect of the present discontinuity of the European political system. As multi-level system, the European Union has the problem of the relations between the governmental and political institutions of the different levels and also the problem of democracy. Federal multi-level systems use different means to regulate inter-institutional relations, give democratic legitimacy to their institutions and make democratic decisions. But certain instruments (like elections and inter-governmental procedures) work well only on the condition that existing political parties work well. In particular, the presence of trans-national or federal political parties assures integration and cohesion across the levels of the system.

The different levels of federal systems are somehow discontinuous entities and the institutions of the distinct levels are independent from one another but co-ordinated with one another. Discontinuity and independence are essential conditions to make the multi-level system works according to the requisites of the individual levels and the whole. However, also cohesion and coherence must be assured. On this regard, common identity and the will to stay together are essential components of the system. They form the ground on which the system is planted. But it is also important that collective actors bring that will to the policy-making institutions. It is the function of such collective actors - that is, of political parties - to collect different popular aspirations and needs across the levels of the

system and produce programs of coherent governmental actions to achieve the aspirations of the largest numbers of the citizens all over the system. For this reason, the decisions of the central institutions cannot be made only by the representatives of the governments of the component states for, as such, they defend territorial and individual interests. Central decisions must be made with the essential participation of the representatives of the collective actors that have elaborated unitary views after debating the problems of the different states and levels as well as the problems of the different organised and not-organised interests present in all the levels and the component states.

The Rome Treaty is clear on this point. It gives the Commission rather than the representatives of the executives of the states the task of executing the Treaty. It gives the Commission the task of initiating legislation and monitoring the implementation of Community decisions by state and sub-state administrations. Indeed, the Treaty of Rome identified an executive not coincident with the institution of the executives of the states (the Council). Since the signature of the Treaty, the control of the national governments on the Commission has been growing but has not substantially curtailed the role and power of the Commission. At the same time the representatives of the people of the member countries (i.e. the Euro-deputies) have been given the power to interact with the Commission and supervise its legislative and executive actions.

The involvement of the national parliaments in the EU decision-making process has been proposed to increase popular control on the Union decisions also against the obfuscation of the Commission to the advantage of national executives politically not responsible in their capacity of high-rank players of the EU decision-making process. But this is mending the holes of legitimacy and democracy of the European Union by a small bend rather than planning and executing an overall and coherent strategy of democratisation. Adding new actors of the inferior levels to control the decision-making process of the superior level will not make such a process more democratic but more dependent on the veto of the single unit and by far less viable. On the contrary, the need is to achieve the dual goal of strengthening the role of the collective actors of popular representation and making the institutions of the different levels of the Union co-operate to one another. In such a perspective it is not wrong to call national parliaments to a major role in the European Union, but the appropriate attribution of role is to be made.

Parliaments are multi-functional institutions. Among other functions, they make laws and control the executive. Regarding EU legislation, the formal involvement of the national parliaments in the making of norms raises important practical problems and must be excluded to avoid the risk of blocking EU decision-making on the occasion of any serious parliament conflict at the national level. Regarding control, instead, the involvement of national parliaments in the control of the Union executive can be made with important qualifications<sup>10</sup>. First, we refer to national parliaments as they are, that is individual institutions and not first-level bodies whose delegates compose a multi-state Conference of Parliaments provided with controversial mandate and uncertain legitimacy. Second, the

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<sup>10</sup> The control of the single national parliament on its own national government's action in the making of Union legislation and political decisions, instead, is given for granted.

dual executive institutions (the Commission and the Council) of today European Union cannot be put all together under the control of the national parliaments for obvious reasons. The nature of the Commission as the executive of the Union must be strengthened and, correspondingly, the executive nature of the Council gradually and further contained. What control by the national parliaments can the Commission undergo? And how?

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### **DEMOCRACY AND RESPONSABILITY**

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The treaties that reformed the original design of the Community have given the European Parliament some power to control and supervise the Commission. Such power pertains to the Parliament as the body of popular representation at the Union level. There is no reason to admit national parliaments to share all that power with the European Parliament except for the political control of primary importance which has been given to the European Parliament only in a very small (almost symbolic) size. This is the power of the Parliament to approve the Commission. Successive, appropriate steps must follow this first step and make the Commission more responsible to the Parliament than it is today. At the same time, national parliaments can be admitted to share with the European Parliament such a power of control. The rationale to join the European and national parliaments in the action of control of the Commission is primarily that of appointing the Commission with the direct participation of all the major assemblies of representation of the European people. Secondly, the goal of pushing political parties to integrate across national lines will be reached by asking them to co-ordinate the participation of the national parliaments in the control of the Commission.

Identification with the political system and support to political institutions are achieved in Europe if certain principles of democracy are properly reached: one of the most sought principles is the political responsibility of the government to the people. Therefore, democratising and legitimising the European Union means to make the executive institution of the Union responsible to the institutions of popular representation of the Union.

In the political systems of the European countries this responsibility is based on the action of political parties in the relation between the executive and the majority of the people. The executive is elected to its office by the majority and detains the office until it enjoys the consent of the majority. In the presidential or semi-presidential democracies of Finland, France and Portugal, majority is the result of the direct vote of the largest part of the population to the candidate president. In the rest of the European Union, the largest party or the largest coalition of parties makes the parliamentary majority that selects the government leader. By all means, such a model of government responsibility has the approval of the people in Europe and it is the indispensable condition of the political loyalty to the government and the common political identity of the people.

The same result can be achieved in the European Union by giving either to the European Parliament or to the people the power to select the President of the Commission by election. Such election procedures are premature, but the selection of the President of the Commission with an election procedure in two phases, one at the level of the national

parliaments the other at level of the European Parliament, can attain the goal of adding together the legitimacy of the two most important levels of popular representation, the union and the state level. Such a procedure is based also on the active and essential involvement of the political parties and the national governments. The first phase of the procedure is the designation by the national parliaments of a small number of candidates. The candidate(s) selected by the individual national parliament should be outstanding political figures of the Union; she/he/they must not be necessarily citizen(s) of the state that makes the nomination. The second phase of the formal procedure is the election of the President by the European Parliament with absolute majority voting. The EP election is made on the list of the candidates who have passed the "primaries" at the national parliamentary level.

The aim and advantage of such a parliamentary procedure is to produce an executive of the Union fully legitimated by the institutions of political representation of the national (state parliaments) and Union (the European Parliament) level. The key role in such an election procedure will be of the groups able to make a successful campaign across the government and parliament structures of the national and Union level. Such groups have to select good candidates, formulate political platforms and programmes for the five-year term of the Commission acceptable to all the member states, gain at the national level the nomination to the ballot at the European Parliament level, and finally win the election in the European Parliament. By all means, such groups will be political parties, especially those with a Europe-wide structure and organisation, acting individually or within political coalitions.

Another advantage of such procedure is to overcome the opposition of governments and parliaments in the selection of the President of the Commission. With few exceptions, due to national circumstances, the majority that sustains the national government in a national parliament will be also the majority that designates the European premier candidates to the second phase.

The reduction of discontinuity across the national and Union level will be another advantage of such a negotiation because the constitution of coincident or compatible majorities in the national and European parliaments will result from such a procedure. Finally, political competition will become more homogeneous within the European Union and, consequently, harmonisation and convergence will result in many or all the major policy areas.

Also the procedure for the replacement of the Commission should be reformed and regulated in agreement with the new selection procedure. The power to remove the President of the Commission and restart the election procedure must be assigned to the European Parliament. Also the Council will have the power to censure the Commission with a unanimous vote. This overturn of the appointment and censure procedure of the Commission on the present situation realises a more democratic institutional balance because the political control of the Union executive is given to the representatives of the people without eliminating the control of the national governments.

Is the two phases procedure difficult to carry out for the length of time needed to conduct negotiation and carry parliamentary primaries out in fifteen or more countries? Fifteen actors' negotiation is the normal condition for running the Union and electing the President of the Commissions today. Making such negotiations also between parliamentarians rather than between ministers and diplomats alone may be more complex but it will be more productive of democratic legitimacy and not necessarily longer. The one year long procedure of the primaries for the election of the President of the United States shows that a large democracy can afford an election procedure that lasts for a year. It must be recognised also that democracy beyond the nation-state cannot be achieved with simple and rapid procedures with the participation of few actors. It demands complex and long procedures with, and because of, the involvement of actors of different level and nature that must be associated to the procedures to give legitimate and democratic results.

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## CONCLUSION

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The analyses of the EU democratic deficit are numerous and those on the concrete strategies for democratisation few. Among these, important and wide-range proposals are attentive to procedural and formal aspects (Dehousse). Strategies for increasing the involvement of collective political actors that have been distant from EU politics are also important. In this paper attention has been drawn to a mechanism to improve the presence and action of political parties as well as the involvement of parliaments in the democratic process of the Union with the aim of improving the democratic yield of the Union and the whole multi-level political system. Such a proposal and the overall analysis of the European Union in this paper are based on the understanding that the Union and the states are political systems in constant and interdependent development in a multi-layered structure. In such systems, interdependence is based on a mix of continuity and discontinuity of the political process across the component systems. Such a mixture of development and interdependence require a constant dialogue between the institutions of the multi-level system that must be regulated by formal rules and procedures. At the same time, the institutions of the multi-level system cannot be vital, working and democratic without the action of specific collective actors formed by the subjects of the system that share views on the present and the future of the system and its component parts. These collective actors are either today political parties of the European Union and the member states or other associations of people that decide to act as European political parties in the years to come.

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