



THE 7TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

From Representation to Participation: A More Democratic European Union?

Marcela Monica Stoica¹

Abstract: The present paper analyzes the evolution and characteristics of the democratic process in the European Union from the perspective of political science using the recent theories in this field. Following the entry into force, the Treaty of Lisbon establishes the principle of participatory democracy that puts the focus of the European citizen, a citizen who is actively involved in European Union life, strengthening EU - citizen relationship. The essence of participatory democracy is the destruction of political apathy and the maximizing of active participation of citizens in the democratic tasks. So, the basic principle of the participatory democracy is solidarity. The results of this analysis show that although participatory democracy is established in the European law, citizens are less involved in the decision-making in EU and are more and more individual, contradicting thus the very foundations of this type of democracy.

Keywords: representation; participatory democracy; European citizens; civic culture; dialogue

1. Introduction

Ideals have occupied an important place in the arguments of the European construction promoters.

Democratic ideals were those that gave life to the dream of the founding fathers who wanted an European area of security, prosperity and human rights. Founding treaties proclaimed the will of states to establish and develop the economic prosperity and to strengthen peace and freedom.

Often, democracy was considered rather an ideal than a form of government which should have a specific structure (Ball and Dagger, 2000, p. 51) or according to other opinions, "democracy has come to designate a civilization or, better said, a political purpose (current) of Western civilization" (Sartori, 1999, p. 31).

Democracy has become the fundamental standard of political legitimacy in our time.

The organizing and functioning of democracy can be done in many ways. Generally, democracy is the governance of the people and the representative democracy is realized through the people's elected representatives.

But if we start from the definition of democracy as "governing by the people and for the people" we have the key word "people", so we can talk, in this respect, about two models of democracy: of majority and consensual. In the democracy of majority, the people are governing for its own interest because the governing is done by the majority according to its will. The consensual democracy involves broad participation in government, is not focused on a majority (Lijphart, 2000: 26).

The rule of the government by the majority is exclusive, competitive and antagonistic, while the model of consensual democracy is characterized by inclusiveness, consensus, negotiation and compromise. For this reason, consensual democracy can be called "negotiation democracy" and is more democratic than the democracy of majority (Lijphart, 2000, p. 39).

¹Senior Lecturer, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Romania, Address: Splaiul Unirii, Bucharest 030134, Romania, Tel. +4021.330.87.20; Fax: +4 021.330.87.74, Corresponding author: stoica1234marcela@yahoo.com.

But, it must be emphasized that even the language of theory creates the situation when some key terms, such as the political participation, representation, possibility for citizens to choose freely, can produce ambiguous meanings or conflicting interpretations.

In the same time, the history of political institutions of democracy shows the fragility and vulnerability of the democratic order.

This situation can be found also in analyzing the European Union's democracy. Thus, the EU institutions as the European Parliament, Commission and Council have often sparked confusion, because its government affects the balance between legislative and executive bodies as they are perceived at the state level. In this regard, the EU is a construction completely and totally original, and the European Parliament, is part of this model, even though over the years a gradual raise occurred in its formal powers. It evolved from an institution representing the interests of the peoples of member states to an institution of European citizens.

So, in terms of EU-citizens relationship, the Union has undergone a process of democratization from a democracy of elites (as founders) to a representative democracy, the people choosing their representatives in Parliament, and, today, by the expressed provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, the participatory democracy was established having in its center the European citizens with a civic culture (based on dialogue among the parts involved).

2. Democracy as a Political Regime

In this part of the paper, it is analysed the democracy as a political regime with its specific characteristics in order to find out whether this model can be applied in the EU case.

Democracy is an alternative to a political governance of a society, in addition to many other political regimes. Depending on all these variables, there are many theories of democracy that try to provide answers to various challenges of the political field.

Democracy can be defined on a series of concepts that are unique to this system, such as: political leaders, citizens, political competition, elections, the will of the majority, cooperation and representation.

Leaders and the way they come to power are important because these aspects give the legitimacy to a democracy and distinguishes democracy from other forms of political organization. The leaders must come to power through free competition and free elections and exercise their mandate on transparency.

Only the presence of citizens makes a political system to be democratic or not and in contemporary democracies there is no restriction on the rights of a citizen. The concept of citizenship is intrinsic to the notion of democracy (Schmitter, Lynn Karl, 1991, p. 77).

One of the characteristics of democratic elections is the cyclicity, thus giving citizens the opportunity to maintain or change the political elites at a period of time.

The will of the majority is another element in defining democracy and what makes a political system to be a democracy is a majority that takes into account the aggregate of minority interests and desires.

Cooperation is another key concept for definition of democracy because the political forces should take decisions together, and policies resulting from these decisions must have a unitary character.

Uniqueness of politics in a democracy is given by the way how elites cooperate in decision making process. Cooperation is an important concept for modern democracies because is extended also on the body of citizens not only of the leaders. Taking part into elections, the citizens have the opportunity to maintain or to change the elected representatives. Citizens have the right to influence the political decision, or cyclically through elections or randomly through political participation.

Thus, cooperation is carried out on three levels: 1. between the various political parties or organizations that want to govern in a democracy; 2. between parties and citizens - to acquire political legitimacy (for the parties) and interests' representation (for the citizens); 3. cooperation among citizens in order to aggregate interests.

Representativeness is the feature offering the unique character to democracies (Schmitter, Lynn Karl, 1991, p. 79). The body of representatives is composed of professional politicians who make from the political decisions making a job, a profession.

If we analyze the above mentioned concepts, we can assert that in the EU, the key concepts are: leaders, citizenship, elections, cooperation, representativeness.

The leaders have all the time a decisive role in democracy building in EU. The elites were, at first, the founders of the first European Community and later the protagonists of the process of negotiation and cooperation and the decision makers. Today, the Treaty of Lisbon, explicitly, promoted a European leadership having a President as a leader of European Union.

As time went by, the treaties moved the interest from the people to the citizens. As it is known, the European citizen, legally, came later, with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993.

The concept of EU citizen had a special development. The European Parliament represented, initially, the interests of peoples and those who voted were citizens of the nations of member states (national citizens).

Elections for the European Parliament were held since 1979 and the cooperation between political parties and leaders was presented all the time, being a *sine qua non* condition in the foundation of the democracy, at the beginning, and of the representative democracy, subsequently.

Representativeness appears together with the elections and the cooperation and all these were circumscribed to citizens and leaders.

So, the understanding of democracy and its institutions must be done in the frame of a certain theory of democracy.

3. Participatory Democracy

Contemporary literature identifies four major theories about democracy: liberal democracy, classic pluralism, deliberative democracy and participatory democracy.

The participative democracy alleged to other forms of democracy a high political apathy and inactivity of citizens. Thus, the essence of participative democracy is the destruction of political apathy. This means to maximize the active participation of citizens in democratic tasks and the basic principle of this democracy is solidarity. Citizen participation in decision making is essential for many states and the governments are useful only to implement the decisions of the body of citizens. From this joint participation of citizens in decision making appears the theory of participative democracy.

From participation point of view, democracy is the control that citizens exercised when it comes to solving problems of concern to them. Of course, it takes the presence of a legislative body to address these problems. So, there is a continuous relationship between citizens and the legislative body. This relationship is through negotiation and contract and may be dissolved when citizens feel that their interests are not represented by this political body.

Another specific element of participatory democracy is the relationship of identity between state and civil society. In such a democracy there is no dividing line between people who make decisions and civil society citizens covered by these decisions.

As such, it reaffirmed the Rousseau's view that there is only one contract in a democracy - between citizens and governments, and governments are always identified with the governed (Cunningham, 2002, p. 102).

Most criticism of participatory democracy has been linked to availability of citizens to devote time and attention to public issues. To disprove this criticism, proponents of participatory democracy bring to their support empirical evidence obtained from specific studies of Almond and Verba. According to these studies, reluctance to involve citizens in solving public problems is the prerogative of inefficient institutions to allow free access of citizens in decision making process (Almond and Verba, 1965: 39).

3.1 Participatory Democracy and the Problems of Democracy

The Oppression. Participative democracy is particularly critical to the vote, which is strictly an instrument of oppression of the citizens, since they can not control the political activities of those who elected them only in a limited intervals of time (from a electoral choice to another). The solution offered by participative democracy in order to deal with oppression is political participation, initially, to a reduce scale, at the level of the community where the citizen is part of.

Active political participation is the only way that can break the vicious circle of political passivity and of undisputed subordination to an authority (Cunninghan, 2002 p. 134).

Irrationality. According to proponents of participatory democracy, the political expression that equates democracy with voting is irrational. The explanation is simple: once you have voted for a particular government and become passive politically is completely unreasonable to expect that government to solve your problems (Cunninghan, 2002, p. 143). Once installed, the government has no incentive selective basis to address the problems that citizens gave him a vote of confidence, at least until the next election. The solution to this problem lies in transforming the mentality of citizens, in the awareness that he/she is part of civil society and that democracy is not only vote but active political participation. Political apathy of citizens is the result of representative democracy, which depoliticized the individual, creating the image of a government watches to solve all the citizens problems. The sole responsibility of the citizens of such democracies is to move up to the polling station and put the stamp on a party or on a politician. On long term, the result of such a representative democracy is the emergence of a political culture of conflict, since politicians are nothing but people competing for votes and to maintain constantly in power (Cunninghan, 2002, p. 143).

Tyranny of the majority. This problem facing democracy is the worst for participatory democracy because it provides no plausible solution for it.

For example, the problems faced by minorities in a democracy are considered, from participation point of view, only a lack of political skills and ill-will of their minority citizens who can not reach a peaceful consensus with other citizens (Cunninghan, 2002, p. 144).

Moreover, participatory democracy ignores the concept of minority itself, since all citizens are civil society representatives and are morally bound to each other to achieve common good. For advocates of participative democracy there is no acceptance of the idea of a minority who has other interests than common good. The explanation for this lies in literature circumscribed to the theory of participative democracy offering little space for the idea of rights. When conflicts are resolved in a society via appeal to certain rights of individuals, it means (from participative perspective) that that society is not a community in the true senses in which all individuals want a common good. For Rousseau and the followers of his theory, the concept of rights is fueling the conflict in a society, individuals using these rights as weapons against other (Cunninghan, 2002, p. 144). The conclusion of discussion about the tyranny of the majority is that the individual rights of citizens remain in a state of conflict, creating an instinct of defense in exchange for cooperation that, would lead eventually, to political participation.

4. Conclusions

European Union is founded on democratic principles. Building a political Europe was an ideal and it was wanted to transform it into practice bringing in the scene those who give legitimacy to a democratic regime: the voters, (electors) and that means the citizens. Only the peoples and the citizens can assure the democratic legitimacy. The EU democratic model is hard to define because all democratic theories were developed almost exclusively in the context of state. EU had a model of democratization without complying with a state model. To be democratic must meet the characteristics of a political system: citizens, elections, cooperation, representativeness, etc. What kind of democracy is in EU? Lijphart speaks about democracy of a majority and about a democracy of consensus. For instance, Weiler says in EU is a consensus.

Looking at the EU's democratic model there are opinions which support the model of consensual democracy. The consensual democracy is not a specific institutional framework but a common effort of elites to deliberately create a stable and functional system (Weiler, 2009, p. 130).

European ideals mobilized masses by political parties which are "political consciousness" of the EU. Citizens of EU member states have become European citizens who elect their representatives in Parliament. Unfortunately, the European Parliament is weakened by its structure and by having certain powers only formal. That function of popular representation is compromised by the fact that has no effective decision (it co-legislates with the Council of Ministers). Thus, as under treaties, its powers have increased, the voter participation has declined. Currently, none of those participating in European elections has the feeling to influence political decisions taken at European level (Weiler, 2009, p. 117).

Although, we can speak of an electoral democracy, as the data show, the EU electoral power is lower in European politics. Thus, the lack of citizen involvement in EU life could compromise just the basic imperative of democracy in the Union: the need for legitimacy. C.B. Macpherson argues that participatory democracy is the key to a democratic future (Held, 2000, p. 286). Freedom and personal development can be fully realized only through direct and continuous involvement of citizens in society and the state regulation. According to Pateman, participatory democracy encourages human development emphasizes the sense of political effectiveness and contribute to a class of active citizens (Held, 2000, p. 287). If standing up for the European Parliament, legislators have set up the foundation of representative democracy, gradually, by promoting the concept of Europe of citizens, Treaty of Lisbon focus on active citizen. By introducing cooperation between the EP and national parliaments would have to increase interest in democratic participation, but the last election had the lowest participation rate. Perhaps the fact that in 2009, Europe was in crisis, and according to statements of European leaders the main cause was the lack of solidarity, and that means exactly the engine of participatory democracy.

5. References

- Ball, Terence; Dagger, Richard. (2000). *Ideologii politice și idealul democratic/Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Cunningham, Frank. (2002). *Theories of Democracy. A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Held, David. (2000). *Modele ale democrației/Models of Democracy*. Bucharest: Univers.
- Lijphart, Arend. (2000). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. (Romanian edition). Iasi: Polirom.
- Philippe, Schmitter; Terry, Lynn Karl. (1991). What Democracy Is ... and Is Not. *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 2, Number 3, Summer, pp. 75-88.
- Sartori, Giovanni (1999). *Teoria democrației reinterpretată/Theory of Democracy Reinterpreted*. Iasi: Polirom.
- Weiler, J.H.H. (2009). *Constituția Europei/The Constitution of Europe*. Iasi: Polirom.