

**The
importance of the Union as a peace project that led to greater justice,
democracy, cohesion, prosperity, security and peace in Europe**

The question of whether the governance of the European Union lacks democratic legitimacy has been debated since the time of the European Economic Community in the late 1970s. This led in part to an elected European Parliament being created in 1979 and given the power to approve or reject EU legislation. Since then, usage of the term has broadened to describe newer issues facing the European Union. Voter turnout at Elections to the European Parliament fell consecutively at every election from the first in 1979 up to 2014, when it hit a low of 42.54% before finally rising in 2019. The 2014 turnout figure is lower than that of any national election in the 27 countries of the European Union, where turnout at national elections averages 68% across the EU.

Opinions differ as to whether the EU has a democratic deficit or how it should be remedied if it exists. Pro-Europeans argue that the European Union should reform its institutions to make them more accountable, while Eurosceptics argue that the EU should reduce its powers and often campaign for withdrawal from the EU.

One assertion of democratic illegitimacy focuses on the role of the European Commission in initiating legislation. This criticism has, in turn, been criticised, using comparisons with the situation in national governments where few MP's bills are ever debated and "fewer than 15% are ever successfully adopted in any form", while government proposals "generally pass without substantial or substantive amendments from the legislature". The Commission is reestablished every five years. Individual members of the incoming Commission are nominated by national governments and the proposed Commission is (or is not) approved jointly and severally by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. If Parliament passes a vote of censure, the Commission must resign. Such a censure motion has been brought eight times, but never passed. In 1999, an initial censure motion against the Santer Commission was defeated, awaiting the results of an investigation. When the results of the investigation were published, the Santer Commission resigned, forestalling a second censure motion that was expected to pass with a large majority.

In an attempt to strengthen democratic legitimacy, the Treaty of Lisbon provided that the nomination of the President of the European Commission should "take account" of the result of the European parliamentary elections, interpreted by the larger parliamentary groups to mean that the European Council should nominate the candidate proposed by the dominant parliamentary group. However, this has also been criticized from the point of view of democratic legitimacy on the grounds that the European Union is not a country and the European Commission is not a government, also having a semi-judicial role that requires it to act as a "referee" or "policeman" rather than a partisan actor. The fear is that a "semi-elected" Commission president might be "too partisan to retain the trust of national leaders; too powerless to win the loyalty of citizens". This, too, is seen as a possibly insoluble problem resulting from the European Union's dual nature, partly an international organization and partly a federation.

The Electoral Reform Society observed polling evidence from Germany which showed that support for the CDU/CSU (EPP group) ahead of the 2014 European Parliament elections was higher than support for the Social Democrats (S&D group) and that there was little difference between their support in the opinion polls for national and European Parliament elections. This was despite another poll showing that S&D candidate Martin Schulz was more popular among German voters than EPP candidate Jean-Claude Juncker. They concluded that "this does not

suggest that the majority of German voters are treating the contest as a chance to choose a Commission President." However, they recommended that the candidate model be kept with "a clearer set of rules for future elections."

The main assertion of democratic illegitimacy focuses on the European Parliament lacking the power to determine the direction of EU Law, with the European Commission being "the only institution empowered to initiate legislation" and having a "near monopoly on legislative initiative" according to EU sources.

Article 225, created in the Lisbon Treaty, sought to put an end to this controversy by giving Parliament a means to request proposals to the Commission, but this puts no obligation on the Commission and is legally non-binding, with the Commission only needing to "inform the European Parliament of the reasons" for rejecting a legislative proposal.

Criticism of this alleged deficit has been countered by a number of political scientists, who have compared the systems of governance in the European Union with that of the United States, and stated that the alleged powerless or dysfunctional nature of the European Parliament is now a "myth". It is argued that there are important differences from national European parliaments, such as the role of committees, bipartisan voting, decentralized political parties, executive-legislative divide and absence of Government-opposition divide. All these traits are considered as signs of weakness or unaccountability, but as these very same traits are found in the US House of Representatives to a lesser or greater degree, the European Parliament is more appropriately compared with the US House of Representatives. In that sense, it is now a powerful parliament, as it is not controlled by a "governing majority": Majorities have to be built afresh for each item of legislation by explanation, persuasion and negotiation.

Legislative initiative in the EU rests almost entirely with the Commission, while in member states it is shared between parliament and executive. However, in national parliaments less than 15% of legislative initiatives from individual members of parliament become law in any form when they do not have the backing of the executive, while most proposals by the executive are passed without major amendments in parliament. The European Parliament, on the other hand, can only propose amendments, but these proposals are successful in more than 80% of cases, and even in controversial proposals, the success rate is almost 30%. In 2003, Liberal Democrat (ALDE) MEP Chris Davies said he had far more influence as a member of the European Parliament than he did as an opposition MP in the House of Commons. "Here I started to have an impact on day one", "And there has not been a month since when words I tabled did not end up in legislation."