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Dimensions of the Democratic Deficit in the European Union

The EU's Post-Lisbon Path to Democracy

ABSTRACT – While the European Union is attempting to overcome the obstacles of the various crises which plague the institution, it is of the utmost importance to address the underlying problems of democracy. The Lisbon Treaty has made necessary and valuable changes to the democratic model of the EU, but has not gone far enough. As the analysis in this thesis demonstrates, there are still various dimensions of democratic deficit in the EU which need to be resolved. Further democratization and deeper integration, as is argued in this work, would be able to solve many of the identified deficits.

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1. Introduction

The multiple crises which have been facing the European Union since the initial outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008 have created a new layer of obstacles for the world's largest project of regional integration. Previously existing problems, furthermore, have been sidelined and in many cases deepened. One of the – if not *the* – most important pre-2008 problem is the democratic deficit within the European Union. In order to overcome all the current obstacles for European integration, this problem – which has been both overshadowed and enhanced by the eurocrisis – must be adequately addressed.

The extent of the democratic deficit has been extensively researched and its underlying causes have partially been addressed with the Treaty of Lisbon. This treaty, for the first time in the history of the EU, clearly makes democratic provisions in its title. Moreover, the main institutional changes made by the treaty encompass an increase of capabilities of the European Parliament (EP) and national parliaments, and introduces European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) (Mayoral, 2011). The Treaty aims at improving both the participatory and representative democratic value of the Union. To what extent these changes have improved democratization within the EU remains a major point of debate.

I will address this fundamental question of European integration by addressing the question: 'How has the Lisbon Treaty affected the various dimensions of the democratic deficit within the European Union, and how can this deficit be resolved effectively?' To answer this question, the extent of the democratic deficit in the European Union and its causes will first be discussed. Moreover, there will be a focus on the necessary EU strategies and policies to generate tangible and extensive democratization of the EU. This, first and foremost, is grounded in the institutional changes made by the Lisbon Treaty, and also includes the current endeavors to overcome the ongoing eurocrisis. In its foundation, this work will research the progress made in democratizing the EU by testing the organization's performance on the different dimensions of its democratic deficit. Moreover, I will outline a counterfactual analysis theorizing on the possible effects of further integration. On the basis of the findings, I will consequently reflect on the possible solutions to the democratic deficit. Further integration has turned out to be a key indicator in this regard.

It is important to consider that a democratic deficit is not the only challenge facing further European integration. Crises, just as wars, fundamentally disrupt the *status quo*, and bring opportunities for change which in normal times is hardly possible; crises, furthermore, arrive because challenges are not adequately met (Fischer, 2012: 1). The eurocrisis may, therefore, form an excellent opportunity to comprehensively address the broader problems in

the European Union. Filling the democratic deficit is an important part of any comprehensive solution.

2. The Democratic Deficit in the EU

The democratic deficit within the European Union has been the topic of extensive and often parallel debates. Differences in opinions and types of debate go back to the core understanding of democracy. Those who value liberal democracy tend to put the emphasis on representation through voting, and are more skeptical about the EU's democratic deficit (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2007: 2). Scholars who put more focus on deliberative democracy value political communication within civil society and the emergence of autonomous public spheres. In this light it's often argued that the unique nature of the European Union, as a step away from the nation-state, warrants a new form of democracy (Moravcsik, 2004).

These debates, more widely analyzed, fit into the growing discussion about the democratic deficit in world politics in general (Moravcsik, 2004: 337). Within international, intergovernmental and supranational organizations there generally exists a smaller emphasis on democracy. Moravcsik (2004) contests that international organization – among which the European Union – can become an ideal democratic system. An approximation of this 'real world' democracy, therefore, should be the goal. This contention holds that there might not be a democratic deficit in the EU due to its unique nature. However, when following the general opinion that there is a democratic deficit: which forms does this deficit take?

2.1. Five Claims about the Democratic Deficit

There are five main claims regarding the democratic deficit in the European Union. The majority of powers in the EU, first, lies with the executive on national and European level, and the actions of these executive agents at the European level are beyond the control of national parliaments (Follesdal & Hix, 2006: 535). This suggests that the influence of voters is less substantial. As a consequence of this, second, the European Parliament is too weak: even though the powers of the EP have grown in several reform attempts, such as the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, and most recently with the Lisbon Treaty, the institution is still less powerful than its peers (mainly the Commission). Third, EU politics are too distant from its citizens: a complex and abstract policy process, in combination with a lack of elected leadership facilitates a growing disconnect between citizen and governor (Hix, 2008).

Fourth, there are no real European elections: national governments are elected, as well as the European Parliament, but these elections are mainly decided on national issues instead of on the European policy debate; they are 'second-order national contests' (Follesdal & Hix, 2006: 535-536; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). This has two core consequences: (1) elections are regarded as less important, which decreases the turnout, and (2) national factors, such as discontent with the incumbent government, play a large role, leading to more votes for small and main opposition parties. Lastly, related to the third point, there is a major 'policy drift' after EP elections: EU policies do not reflect the wishes and preferences of the majority of the voters. The direct link between what people vote for, and what actually happens on a policy level is vague to say the least.

Andrew Moravcsik (2004) counters these critical claims by, first, pointing to the power held by national governments: the majority of decisions are still taken by the Member States' governments, and they are elected democratically. Second, the European Parliament has received significant increases in capabilities in the last decades. This has continued with the changes made by the Lisbon Treaty. In sum: 'because the governments run the EU and there is 'hard bargaining' in the adoption of all EU policies, the EU is unlikely to adopt anything which negatively affects an important national interest or social group' (Follesdal & Hix, 2006: 541). This observation does, however, strike upon a core reason of dissatisfaction with the EU: its inability to autonomously make effective decisions on important topics.

2.2. Democracy in the European Union

There are various philosophical conceptions of democracy the EU could aim developing towards. Andrew Moravcsik (2004) has chosen the following four from which the EU has been criticized the most: libertarian, pluralist, social democratic and deliberative democracy. He concludes that 'though centralized electoral control and collective deliberation remain relatively weak and diffuse, constitutional and material restrictions on the EU's mandate, inter-institutional checks and balances, indirect democratic control via national governments, and the modest but increasing powers of the European Parliament are more than sufficient to assure that in most of what it does, EU policy-making is generally clean, transparent, effective and politically responsive to the demands of Europeans' (Moravcsik, 2004: 338-339). Even though the 'effective' part of this argument is disputed, it remains an interesting way of looking at democracy in an international context.

This extent of the democratic deficit can be empirically analyzed by taking a look at the turnout figures for the elections for the European Parliament. Since elections for the

European Parliament were first held in 1979, the turnout for the elections has dropped significantly every time elections were held. The latest elections in 2009 formed the new low-point with an abstention rate of 57% (European Parliament, 2009: 3). The European Parliament, in its survey on the outcomes of the elections, emphasizes that the continual increase in abstention is slowing down. However, some increase can be seen in the newer Member States – where the turnout is still very low – while in the member states which have been part of the EU since the initial vote in 1979, the turnout is still shrinking dramatically (European Parliament, 2009: 2-4). This drop, however, can partially be explained by a process of depoliticization (Mair, 2005; Mair, 2007).

Even for those who opt the EU constitutes a new form of democracy, like Moravcsik, it is difficult to argue that the European Union currently operates without a democratic deficit. The idea of deliberative democracy requires widespread public awareness and public support for European integration. Although according to the European Committee (EC) support for the crisis measures are strong, the resistance within Member States and the emergence of anti-European sentiments in many EU countries demonstrates this support is not that widespread. Only 40% of EU citizens support the strategy to counter the crisis, 52% of Europeans are still positive towards the common currency, and the support for further integration is expected to be even lower (European Commission, 2012). The recent crises have only exacerbated the pre-existing anti-European sentiments. The large costs which accompany the strategy to get the European Union to emerge stronger out of the crisis are a major problem for most citizens.

Whether or not there is an actual democratic deficit in the way the European Union functions is, as counterintuitive as it sounds, irrelevant. Citizens in national member states often blame the incumbent government when something goes wrong. They are, consequently, motivated to vote in order to support regime change. This is inherent to a democratic system. In the European Union, however, a downturn in any form alienates voters from the entire conception of the European Union. This is due to the fact that most citizens do not perceive a European government which they can oppose against. Therefore, they oppose to the entire system of the EU (Hix, 2008: 68-69). The perception of an undemocratic EU is enough to cause some form of democratic deficit.

In time of crisis, citizens of a nation-state generally feel some form of national solidarity towards the weaker regions of a country and are often prepared to sacrifice their own interests for the common good (Buruma, 2011). This has turned out not to be the case in Europe: citizens of rich northern European countries are not willing to assist the south, even though it's in the interest of the 'common' (European) good. Because of the low levels

of public support for spending further resources on solving the eurocrisis, the EU countries have chosen for austerity as a crisis strategy. Austerity has, according to many, only exacerbated the problems (Fischer, 2012). The ongoing crisis, in turn, has further decreased popular support; this has become **the vicious circle of the eurocrisis**.

Besides this lack of a sense of solidarity, the democratic deficit can partially be explained by the indirect way citizens affect the European policy-making, and the relatively limited concrete ways in which Europe is perceived to influence most people's daily lives (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2007: 4-6). Moreover, the electorate often takes what European integration has brought for granted: peace, convenience, stability and prosperity are important products of European integration. These issues should be highlighted by creating awareness about what Europe has brought. A directly elected leader, furthermore, might help improve legitimacy (Hix, 2011: 81). It adds to the democratic deficit, however, when large scale reform of European integration is made without popular support. This then contributes to the abovementioned vicious circle: European integration cannot continue because people do not support it, and people do not support it, because they do not fully understand it, and they do not grasp to what extent European policies shape all our lives.

3. Why We Want a More Democratic EU and How to Get There

During the ongoing and multifaceted eurocrisis, euro skeptics have argued for the dissolution of the European Union and a return to national sovereignty based on the nation state. Since for various reasons – including the benefits of a large and diversified economy, a key role in the global balance of power, and various other economic, social and political benefits brought by the EU (Hix, 2008: 25) – the dissolution of the EU is not an option for most of its Member States, the multitude of challenges for European integration must be resolved. One of the most important of these challenges is the democratic deficit. Improving the quality of the EU's democracy relies upon many factors; these factors will be explored in this section. The recurring core component of these factors is further European integration through transferring more decision-making power to the EU and instituting democratic reforms.

3.1. Why More Democracy in the EU?

One of the core notions of democracy is the contestation over political office. Even though this notion was purposely limited in the European Union model by its founding fathers because they saw national rivalries and ideological conflicts as the root causes of war and economic destruction, the current wish for democracy requires conflicting politics. When, however, the decision to establish a less democratic EU is viewed in its historical context, it makes complete sense: besides the obvious reasons of peace and stability, the EU was meant to set up basic guidelines and regulations that benefited all. Political competition over office would have inherently induced interest blocks, lobbying, and some of the less productive 'side-effects' of a democratic system. Democracy was not the main priority during the polity-building and market-creating stages of the European integration project (Hix, 2008: 90-91). Combined with the consensual nature of the EU's decision-making process, it has been extremely difficult to realize democratic change (Hix, 2008: 96). This technocratic model has, however, in our modern-day society, brought along the disconnect which is at the heart of the democratic deficit discussed here.

Having a democratic EU has become more important in recent years because of the changing nature of issues the EU deals with. From regulating the internal market, setting up trading benefits and other policies for the common benefit, EU politics has developed a more political and conflicting side. These common-good policies have been complemented by political issues such as social and economic policies for the international market and the question of how the European economy must be reformed (Hix, 2008: 98). This last point

gained incredible importance with the current eurocrisis. Moreover, policy debates such as liberalization versus regulation of the internal market, carbon emissions and other environmental policies, immigration policies, and economic models (to name a few), have placed citizens, interest groups, political parties and government on opposite sides of various policy debates (Hix, 2008: 99).

This trend of increased politicization of EU policies calls for more democratic policy-making in the EU to ensure that the institution will go into the direction its citizens want it to go. Political conflict is inescapable in this evolving policy-environment; the EU must engage its citizens by giving them a direct vote for political office. Ensuring the important policy dilemma's are the centre of any election is necessary to accomplish this.

Schuck et al. (2011: 43) find that political contestation would increase the salience of elections. Without political contestation, and the personalization of political debate and decisions, the European Union remains a faceless institution in which the political accountability remains invisible (Schuck et al., 2011: 43). Visibility of elections would also be increased by contestation because: 'news media tend to focus on stories where there is conflict – where two sides can be pitted against one another' (Schuck et al., 2011: 43). By increasing the salience and visibility of European elections, this step would further democratize the EU by narrowing the gap between the EU and its citizens.

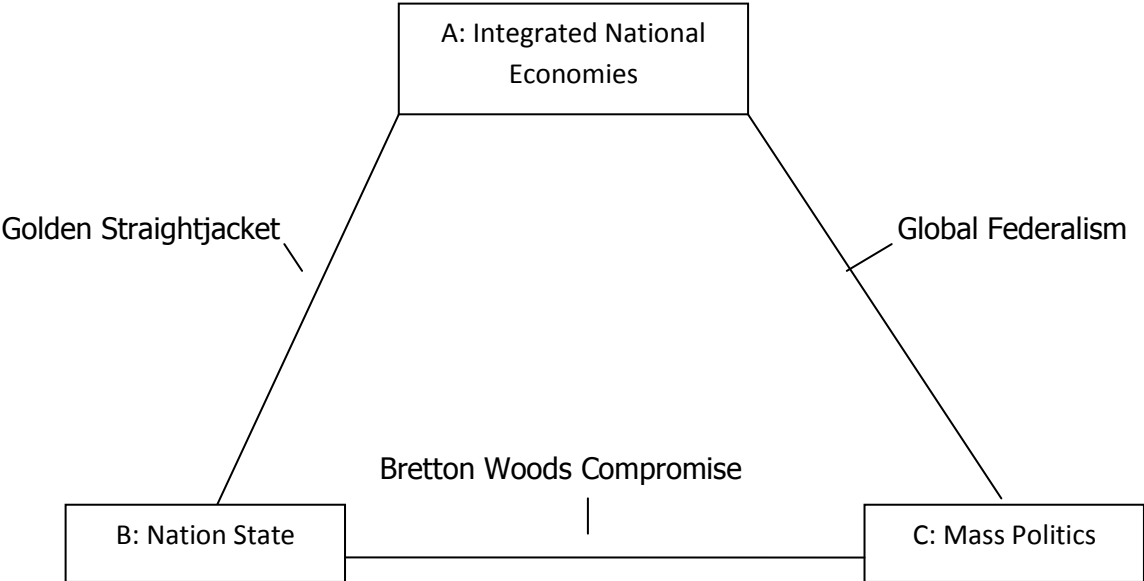
Legitimacy, furthermore, is a key concept in this discussion. With all the speculation of the EU's democratic deficit, put together with the fact that the most powerful EU leaders are appointed, creates a problem of input legitimacy. This (perception of) a lack of legitimacy, in combination with the consensual European policy-making process, make controversial reform near to impossible. As a consequence, some political or controversial, but necessary decisions are not being made by the EU, simply because it does not have the legitimacy to make these difficult decisions. More voter input in the European system would address this problem by legitimizing European leaders to make tough but necessary decisions in order to keep the EU from staying a static and old-fashioned institution (DeBardeleben & Hurrelmann, 2007).

3.2. How to Facilitate EU Democratization

An interesting theory on why the European Union has since long lacked democratic legitimacy is provided by Dani Rodrik's political trilemma of the world economy (see Figure 1) (Rodrik, 2000: 181). This trilemma states that there can only be two of the following policy goals simultaneously: (a) integration of national economies, (b) nation states, and (c) mass

politics (Rodrik, 2000: 180-182). For the example of European integration, Rodrik poses that (a) can be seen as further European integration, (b) as national sovereignty, and (c) as democratic legitimacy. The presence of (a) and (b) Rodrik calls the Golden Straightjacket, (b) and (c) constitute the Bretton Woods compromise, and (a) and (c) equals global federalism (Rodrik, 2000: 181). History has proven that the simultaneous existence of all three is impossible. The Golden Straightjacket can push for economic integration without democracy, and the Bretton Woods paradigm does not allow for deep economic integration. Democratic economic integration is only possible when a step is made away from national sovereignty; this move would start to resemble global federalism (Rodrik, 2000: 184). The European Union has reached the limit in how all three can be combined, and has lately seen a decrease in democratic legitimacy. When democracy is highly valued and integrations is inescapable, the only option is to move away from national sovereignty.

Figure 1. Rodrik’s Political Trilemma of the World Economy (Rodrik, 2000: 181).



According to this trilemma, the realization of economic integration in a democratically legitimate way requires sacrifices on national sovereignty (Rodrik, 2000: 183). The only way, therefore, the European Union can even start to gain true democratic legitimacy is by further integration towards a fiscal or political union. This new system would more reflect the U.S. federal system, according to Rodrik. In this way, sovereignty is transferred from the national level to the European level, creating an opportunity for democratic legitimacy to further

develop. 'National governments would not necessarily disappear, but their powers would be severely circumscribed by supranational legislative, executive, and judicial authorities' (Rodrik, 2000: 182).

The shape this further integration should take is – in line with many core issues of EU studies – subject to widespread debate. Amidst this severe crisis, talk of radical acceleration of integration is not in order. However, the major reason why careful further integration could lead to a more democratic system deals with the engagement of citizens in the political process. Further integration, paradoxically, even though it might be in contrast with the current popular demands, would resolve many of the abovementioned factors contributing to the existing deficit. If European politics would become center-stage and EU decisions, instead of national decisions, would have the most direct impact on people's lives, the problems of 'second order elections', the disconnect, policy drift, and the lack of input legitimacy within the EU would – at least partially - resolve themselves (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). It would, furthermore, also be likely that direct competition for the highest offices would be established. In sum, European politics as primary politics for EU citizens would contribute to further democratizing the EU.

As Simon Hix argues in his well-known work 'What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix it' (2008), further integration is likely to lead to a better functioning European Union. Both in breadth as well as depth there are opportunities for improvements. Hix recommends broader integration in the service sector to maximize opportunities in the fastest growing economies, as well as the energy market, where energy dependency on non-EU states should be decreased (Hix, 2008: 27). There are also more opportunities to develop integration on security and foreign policy. In depth, Hix suggests to inject more political competition into EU political processes. Creating a federal union – the notion of a United States of Europe – goes substantially too far, but further integration developing 'limited democratic politics' is a core step towards fixing the EU's democratic deficit (Hix, 2008: 86).

To facilitate democratic reform in a complex, bureaucratic and consensual institution as the EU, the institution requires various changes. Firstly, as Hix points out, EU politics must be based on political contestation, since: 'a contest for control of political authority and over the direction of the policy agenda forces the elites to reveal their policy agenda for the public and encourages leaders to engage in policy innovations and joined-up thinking across a range of policy issues' (Hix, 2008: 90). Such a contest would ensure that politicians 'think outside the box' and stay on their toes in order to remain in the public's good graces. Moreover, when under political contestation, politicians are under more substantial media

scrutiny and general pressure to perform. With the potential of competing politicians offering alternative agendas, Europe's leaders are more likely to stay innovative (Hix, 2008: 99).

4. Methodological Framework

The methodological foundation of this research - after the establishment of the research question, core hypotheses, conceptualization and operationalization - consists of two connected sections. First, the various dimensions of the democratic deficit will be evaluated in light of the changes made by the Lisbon Treaty. This will consist of a 'before-and-after' comparison of the three dimensions of democratic deficit as conceptualized below. An analysis of these dimensions will allow us to assess the improvements that have been made and the fields in which further development is required. The second part of the analysis consists of a idiographic counterfactual analysis of how further integration would have affected the various dimensions of the democratic deficit. The main argument in this section is that a path of slowly further integrating and democratizing the EU is the best remedy for the democratic deficit. In the discussion section, the main findings of the analysis and its implications will be discussed.

4.1. Research Question and Hypotheses

The considerations above generate many questions about the role of democracy within the EU and the possibilities for improvement within the reach of a European framework. Even though much is still under severe debate, there is consensus that democracy in Europe is flawed. With every new treaty attempts are made to improve the functioning of the EU. Although this has been proven tremendously difficult, the Lisbon Treaty has made some important changes to the institutional set-up of the Union. But how exactly have the changes made by the Lisbon Treaty affected the democratization of the European Union?

Even though some improvements have been observed, the democratic value of the EU is still imperfect. There is much debate regarding the democratic possibilities for the EU: to what extent can a unique institution as the EU conform to pre-existing considerations of democracy? How can, within the framework of the EU, the abovementioned claims about the democratic deficit be resolved most effectively?

These two essential themes of the study of the European Union have led me to adopt the following research question: 'How has the Lisbon Treaty affected the various dimensions of the democratic deficit within the European Union, and how can this deficit be resolved effectively?' Stemming from the theoretical framework above, expectation would suggest

that further integration would have led to a decrease in the democratic deficit in the European Union. The core methodological aim of this thesis is to test the empirical and theoretical validity of this assumption.

The expectation is that the Lisbon Treaty has positively altered the democratic value of the inter-institutional balance of power and the democratic functioning of the EU by strengthening the European Parliament at the expense of the European Commission. However, it does not realize the limited effect the watered-down constitutional treaty might have had on the disconnect and public trust. Even though democratic measures, such as the citizens initiatives, were meant as a building block for the creation of the European public sphere, more far-reaching steps are necessary to substantially influence these deficits. Because of the increased importance of the EP, the disconnect between the citizens and the EU is expected to have decreased marginally. Trust and identity, thirdly, are expected not to have been affected, especially in light of the effects of the eurocrisis. These general expectations will now be translated into testable hypotheses.

The core hypotheses for this research, therefore, would predict that:

- (1) the Lisbon Treaty has had a modestly positive effect on the democratic workings of the European Union (first dimension),
- (2) the Lisbon Treaty has made EU citizens slightly more engaged with European Parliament elections because of its growing role and importance (second dimension),
- (3) the Lisbon Treaty has not had a positive effect on trust in the EU and European identity (third dimension),
- (4) a more substantive step in European integration would have a positive effect on decreasing the democratic deficit (counterfactual analysis).

In the conceptualization the specific dimensions of the democratic deficit will be further explained. The operationalization, moreover, will explain how the four hypotheses will be theoretically tested on the basis of institutional changes made by the Lisbon Treaty, as well as empirically tested through a comparison of European Parliament election news coverage in 2004 and 2009, and levels of trust in, support for, and citizenship of the EU through Eurobarometer statistics.

4.2. Conceptualization: the Dimensions of the Democratic Deficit

In order to test the extent of democratization in the EU after the Lisbon Treaty, the performance will be tested by means of dimensions of the democratic deficit. Follesdal and Hix (2006: 536) identify the abovementioned five core claims about the democratic deficit in the EU: (1) increase in executive power vis-à-vis national parliamentary control, (2) the European Parliament (EP) is too weak, (3) there are no 'European' elections, (4) the EU is institutionally and psychologically too distant from the voters, and (5) European integration produces policy drift from voters' preferences (Follesdal & Hix, 2006: 535).

It is possible to derive three different dimensions of the democratic deficit from these general claims about its nature. First, factors 1 and 2 are linked with **the EU's inter-institutional balance of power and the institutions' democratic functioning**. This is the first dimension in this analysis, and deals with the institutional functioning of the Union. The second dimension consists of considerations from claim 3 and 5: the fact that national elections do not deal with European issues, and European elections often turn out to be 'second-order national contests' (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), a policy drift develops between voters preferences expressed in the voting booth, and action taken on a European level. **This disconnect** is the second dimension of the deficit. Lastly, claim 4 refers to the problems of the lack of a European identity and citizenship, and general lack of support for and trust in the EU. This **public opinion problem** is the third and final dimension of the democratic deficit in this research.

4.3. Operationalization

To measure, first, the effect the changes of the Lisbon Treaty have had on the democratic deficit, all three dimensions will be measured on the basis of changes made by the Lisbon Treaty to test the hypotheses. Here, the elections from 2004 and 2009 will be the main point of comparison for turnout and news coverage. For symmetry reasons, measurements of trust and identity will also be taken from these intervals. The first dimension of the deficit, the democratic functioning of the EU institutions, is easily measured: the number of capabilities and responsibilities obtained by each institution creates the amount of influence these institutions have. An analysis of changes made to the capabilities of these institutions, coupled with the simple premise that some institutions are democratic and others are not, will demonstrate the changes made by the Lisbon Treaty.

The second dimension, the disconnect between elections and policy issues on the European level, is more complex to operationalize. To measure which issues are of primary importance for certain elections, news coverage of the European elections in all Member States will be analyzed. An analysis of the visibility, tone, and core actors and issues in the 25 Member States (circa 2004) before and after the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty (again 2004 and 2009) will illustrate any possible shift made. De Vreese et al. (2006) and Schuck et al. (2011) have researched news coverage of the 2004 and 2009 European Parliament elections in the 25 – and 27 in 2009 - EU members. Both findings will be extensively compared on the basis of the saliency of the EP elections.

Thirdly, the dimension dealing with the European public opinion deficit – feelings of European identity and citizenship, trust in the European Union, and support for further integration - can be operationalized by analyzing Eurobarometer data from before and after the establishment of the Lisbon Treaty. Turnout rates, levels of trust and support, and measurements of European identity and citizenship, compared between 2004 and 2009 – with an additional point of measurement more recently in 2012 because public opinion does not change overnight - can determine the possible effect the Lisbon Treaty has had. The question 'Generally speaking, do you think (your country's) membership of the European Community/Union is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, or don't know?', which has been used in every Eurobarometer since its establishment, will be used to compare support for the EU (Eurobarometer, 2004, 2009 and 2012). More specific questions regarding trust, identity and citizenship will also be compared. In this analysis, the so-called 'fair-weather phenomenon' must be taken into account: when the EU is doing well economically, support is high, but as soon as there are difficulties, support drops (Hix, 2008: 52). The current economic crisis can therefore be an important intervening variable in this analysis.

With regard to the fourth hypothesis, that a more substantive step forward in European integration and democratization would have (had) a positive effect on democracy in the EU, a counterfactual analysis will be made. To determine how further integration would have affected the different dimensions of deficit, a theoretical analysis of the possible effects will be hypothesized. In relation to all three dimensions, as will be argued in the thesis, deeper and more democratic integration would positively affect the democratic deficit.

5. Core Analysis: Lisbon and the Democratic Deficit

In this section, the core analysis regarding the extent of the abovementioned dimensions of the democratic deficit will be made. By making a comparison on the indicated measurements of the three dimensions, a picture will be painted of the impact of the Lisbon Treaty. First, a theoretical comparison regarding the first dimension – the EU's institutions and their democratic functioning – is expected to show the most significant impact. Moreover, an empirical analysis regarding the news coverage of the 2004 and 2009 European parliamentary elections will uncover any change in national perception of the EU, and the disconnect which is often discussed. Lastly, a comparison of Eurobarometer data of 2004, 2009 and 2012 will determine how European identity and trust in the EU have been affected in recent years.

5.1. Dimension 1: The EU's Institutions and their Democratic Functioning

The Lisbon Treaty has made substantial changes in the capabilities held by the different EU institutions. One of the most important goals of the Lisbon Treaty was to address the growing consensus that the European Union was facing a democratic deficit. Various policies have been implemented to ensure a more democratic functioning of the Union. Most notably, the Lisbon Treaty includes specific provisions on democratic principles in its Title 2 (Mayoral, 2011). Article 10 of the current Treaty on the European Union (TEU) holds most of the provisions on improving the democratic standing of the institution. The most extensive changes made by the treaty, in short, were that European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs) were introduced, democracy became even more central in the EU philosophy, and the most democratic EU institution - the European Parliament - was given further competencies (Mayoral, 2011). This section will first give a comprehensive overview of all the relevant changes made by the treaty, after which the implications for the various institutions will be analyzed. After giving a short overview of the main changes made by Lisbon, the most important changes will be elaborated upon in more detail. The mechanisms which influence the democratic functioning of the EU will then also be analyzed. In conclusion, the effect these changes have had on (1) the inter-institutional balance of power, and (2) the democratic functioning of the EU institutions will be outlined. These two are related but not identical. The balance of power partially talks about democracy, but also about other capabilities; the democratic functioning is to a large degree based on the capabilities of the institutions, but goes beyond that.

5.1.1. Major Changes Made by Lisbon

First and foremost, one of the most important changes made by the Lisbon Treaty vis-à-vis the institutions is the increase of capabilities of the European Parliament at the expense of the European Commission (Monar, 2011: 14). The European Council's capabilities, moreover, have also grown substantially: the EC gained decision-making capabilities as opposed to advisory and deliberative powers. These increases in capabilities has caused a marginal decrease of powers held by the Council of Ministers. A four-polar balance of power has been established within the European Union's institutional framework with the official recognition of the European Council's as EU institution (Monar, 2011: 3).

What has changed regarding democratization with the Lisbon Treaty? The treaty aimed at closing the gap between the citizens and the institutions by increasing the participation of Europeans, and the influence they can exert on the policy making (Mayoral, 2011). More structurally, the treaty actively focused on three principles of democratic governance in the European Union: (1) democratic equality, (2) representative democracy, and (3) participatory democracy (European Union, 2013). The first principle simply entails that all institutions must give equal attention to all citizens, therewith countering regional or social-economic exclusion. Representative democracy, secondly, is strengthened by the abovementioned increase in capabilities held by the European Parliament. The third principle was operationalized by the citizens' initiatives and other measures to narrow the gap between Europe and its inhabitants. One of the most important inclusive measures, a directly elected leadership – as we will see - is still lacking.

5.1.2. Representation: The European and National Parliaments

The increase of the EP's capabilities is one of the – if not *the* – most important development of the Lisbon Treaty. Every major treaty has strengthened the EP in some regard, but Lisbon's changes are extensive. The changes made can be categorized in three fields: legislative, budgetary, and regarding international agreements (European Union, 2013). These changes make that the European Parliament gained influence over a wide variety of policy fields, both internal and external. Moreover, the EP can make budgetary demands and has a role to play in generally all lawmaking (Mayoral, 2011).

The parliament's legislative capabilities, first, have been increased with the extension of the co-decision procedure – and its name-change to the 'ordinary legislative procedure'

(Treaty of Lisbon, 2007: Art 14.1). Where the co-decision procedure, which has been used and extended in order to increase the EP's influence, was limited to fewer policy fields, the newly formed 'ordinary legislative procedure' expands these competencies to areas such as legal immigration, alignment of prison standards, trade and agriculture, and police cooperation (Mayoral, 2011: 4). This procedure, as well as Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) is more widely applied by the Council, increasing the capabilities of the EP to exert its influence. Regarding the third point of the EP's increase in capabilities: the parliament's permission is now required on any international agreements made in the policy fields falling under the 'ordinary legislative procedure' (TEU, 2007). This also includes the obligation of the Council to consult the EP on matters regarding the functioning of the European External Action Service (TEU, 2007: Art 27.3).

On budgetary matters, the European Parliament is now on equal footing with the Council in determining and approving the European budget. The pre-existing practice of a multiannual financial framework is confirmed by the Lisbon Treaty. This framework requires the EP's approval, which adds to its growing capabilities. On top of this, the distinction between 'compulsory' and 'non-compulsory' expenditure is abolished, giving the EP jurisdiction to approve all budgetary expenditure (TEU, 2007: Art 16.1).

Moreover, the EP now has the authority to establish temporary committees of inquiry, and it can vote on a motion of censure about the resignation of the Commission (which is responsible to the EP) (Mayoral, 2011: 3). More symbolically, the Lisbon Treaty redefines what a Member of Parliament (MEP) is from 'representatives of the peoples of the States brought together in the Community' to 'representatives of the Union's citizens' (Mayoral, 2011: 3; Lisbon Treaty, 2007: Art. 14.2).

The Lisbon Treaty also assisted the EP in its jurisdiction squabbles with the Commission and the Council on the comitology process (Mayoral, 2011: 4). Even more technical, the EP must now be consulted by the Council regarding legal acts on the basis of the 'flexibility clause'. It also has the ability to submit proposals to the Council regarding the amendment of the treaties, and it needs to give consent in the eventuality of a withdrawal request by one of the Member States (Mayoral, 2011: 5).

National parliaments, moreover, also have been given an increased role by the Treaty of Lisbon. A new clause is added to the TEU expressing the desire to 'encourage greater involvement of national Parliaments in the activities of the European Union and to enhance their ability to express their views on draft legislative acts of the European Union as well as on other matters which may be of particular interest to them' (TEU, 2007: Art 7). The fields in which the national parliaments are more encouraged to participate in the EU policy

process are the evaluation of policies in fields such as security and freedom, their right to information, and most interestingly the power to endorse subsidiarity (TEU, 2007).

Subsidiarity deals with the scope of issues the European Union deals with. Whenever the EU has exclusive powers, it will deal with issues on the European level. Whenever powers or competencies are shared, the EU will only take action when this would be more effective on the European level than on the national level. When national parliaments feel that this principle is not abided by, they can initiate a two-stage procedure: (1) when over 33% of national parliaments objects to a proposal, on the basis it does not comply with subsidiarity, the Commission is required to re-evaluate the proposal (yellow card), and (2) when over 50% of national parliaments object (orange card), and the Commission does not change its proposal, the EP and Council are tasked to decide on the issue (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).

As can be concluded from the abovementioned discussion of the changes made to the capabilities of the European Parliament and the national parliaments, the Treaty of Lisbon has enabled more power for directly elected institutions. The increased powers given to the European Parliament are generally regarded as extensive. This, ergo, constitutes an improvement of the democratic functioning of the EU policy-making process.

5.1.3. Participation: the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and Beyond

The Treaty of Lisbon aimed not only to increase the representative democracy in the EU, but also the participation of its citizens in the decision-making process. The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is one of the most important attempts made by the Lisbon Treaty to try and improve the participation of citizens and close the growing disconnect between the institution and its subjects. Article 11.4 of the current TEU gives some insight into the workings of the ECI: 'not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties' (TEU, 2007: Art. 11.4). The ECI puts citizens on an equal footing with the European Parliament and the Council by giving them the right to request the Commission for legislative action.

There are quite a number of strict bureaucratic requirements in order to successfully qualify for an ECI: one million signatories are required from at least 25% of the EU Member States (seven countries minimum), a citizens' committee of at least seven citizens from

seven different countries must initiate and submit the ECI, and the signatures must accede the minimum requirement per member state (number of MEPs times 750) (Mayoral, 2011: 6). When these demands have been met, the Commission must decide whether or not to take action on the basis of the ECI, and give its answer to the organizers, the EP and the Council. The organizers of the ECI have the right to hold a public hearing organized by the Commission and EP, in which they can present their ECI (Mayoral, 2011).

The ECI was first officially implemented on Europe Day (May 9) 2012 with the adoption of the first ECI, *Fraternité 2020* (Fraternité 2020, 2012). This initiative was set up to encourage cultural exchanges such as the Erasmus Program and the European Voluntary Service (EVS). Since this initial ECI, around nine initiatives have been completed (European Commission, 2013). An ongoing Dutch citizens' initiative – with the intention of developing to an ECI - is demonstrating the degree of the democratic deficit by calling for an immediate halt of any form of new competencies for the EU without a national referendum (Burgerforum EU, 2013). Over 55.000 signatures have been collected in support of this initiative, which is almost three times the national threshold.

Besides the ECI, the Lisbon Treaty has implemented other policies in order to more fully engage European civil society and citizens in the decision-making process. The Lisbon Treaty emphasizes the importance of cooperation with the variety of representative civil society organizations and adequately informing them. The main aim is to ensure that the EU's actions are coherent and transparent (TEU, Art. 11). Moreover, the Treaty promotes open dialogue and public debate between the EU institutions and civil society (TFEU, 15-16),

Besides all these amendments, the Lisbon Treaty set further specific objectives for the individual institutions. They specifically focus on the manners in which the institutions will inform and engage the public in its decision-making process and strive for transparency. An increasing amount of documents are made public for all citizens, and citizens are allowed to petition (Mayoral, 2011). Even though the effectiveness of all these measures has yet to be fully measured in practice, in theory there have been a number of positive steps towards engaging citizens in the European decision-making process.

5.1.4. Implications for Democracy in Europe

So what do these changes practically mean for the first dimension of the democratic deficit? The consensus dictates that although Lisbon is a step in the right direction, the changes do not address some core issues of the deficit. These issues predominantly encompass the election of European leaders and executive officials (Commissioners).

Engaging the European citizens in the policy-making process without giving them a direct vote to elect their leaders can be a dangerous thing. As can be seen from the anti-European initiative initiated in the Netherlands, this kind of half-measures can give people who feel alienated from the process the opportunity to sabotage European integration. However, because the Lisbon Treaty has made the European Parliament substantially more powerful and important in the EU's institutional balance of power, the expectation is that EU citizens should be more inclined to engage with and vote for the EP elections.

5.2. Dimension 2: the Disconnect between the National and European Level

This inclination to engage with EP elections is what this next section will address. The core focus is to determine how preferences, policy ideas and issues that concern European citizens are reflected in the European policy. The two core claims about the democratic deficit – the disconnect between voters and the EU, and the 'policy drift' after elections – have been operationalized by the measurement of news coverage during European parliamentary elections. News coverage is a relevant proxy for the second dimension of the democratic deficit, because both the policy drift – national issues in European elections – and the 'second-rate national contest'-phenomenon – persistence of national issues plus the lack of visibility – are measured by the news coverage analysis.

First the news coverage of the 2004 European parliamentary elections will be analyzed in the basis of a content analysis encompassing the then 25 Member States and the coverage of the EP elections in both print-media and on television (De Vreese et al., 2006a). A similar research was done into the salience of the 2009 EP elections through a content analysis of news coverage in 27 Member States, also in newspapers and on television (Schuck et al., 2011). The visibility of the elections in the news coverage, the issues that are portrayed in that coverage, the tone of the coverage, and the actors which are discussed form the main points of analysis for both elections and can easily be compared. The findings of news coverage in both elections, based on a comparative analysis of these works, including additional findings by Banducci et al. (2004), Kovar & Kovar (2012), and De Vreese et al. (2006b), will thereafter deduce any possible changes before and after the Lisbon Treaty went into force.

5.2.1. News Coverage in the 2004 EP Elections

During the 2004 election campaign for the European Parliament the news coverage of the EU and its elections were analyzed by De Vreese et al. (2006). Regarding the visibility of the EP elections in the news coverage, there is quite some variation between different Member States. Overall 9.8% of the total news coverage on TV and in the newspapers in the three weeks leading up to the election regarded the EU or the EP elections specifically. Between countries, however, this number varied from around 3% in Germany to 21% in Greece (see Figure 2) (De Vreese et al., 2006: 487-488). These figures show a quite substantial increase from the previous elections in 1999, when only 6.6% of news coverage dealt with the EU and its elections (De Vreese et al., 2006: 488). This increase, however, can be largely explained by the additional of the ten new Member States, in which the attention for their first elections as EU Member States, naturally, was quite high.

Figure 2: TV News Coverage in 2004 EP Elections (De Vreese et al., 2006: 488)

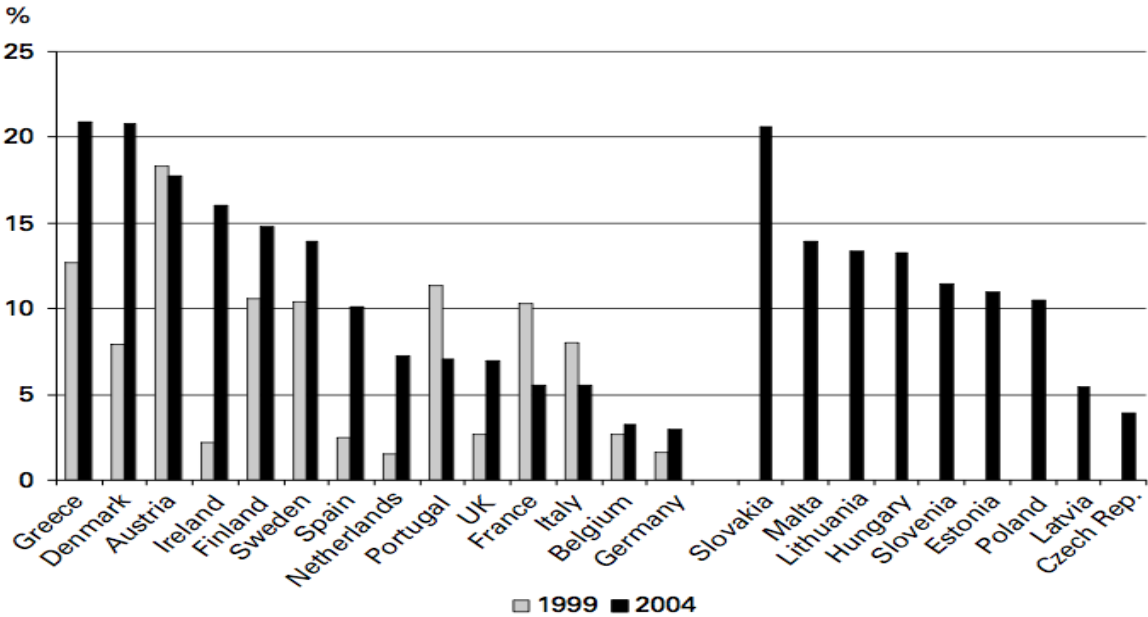


Figure 1 Visibility of EU news in television newscasts, 1999 and 2004.
Notes: Values are length-based percentages within the countries and election periods. All stories in television newscasts were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. 1999: *n* = 4781; 2004: *n* = 9339.

The choice is made here to compare the news coverage of the EP elections on television news. The figures for print media are similar, but vary largely between countries. Developments with print-media, including the decreasing numbers of readers, as well as the fact that 79.5% of the EU news was on television, make TV news a better indicator of

visibility. An expected but convincing variation, furthermore, is found in comparing news coverage between commercial and public networks: public networks put substantially more emphasis on elections as compared to their commercial counterparts (De Vreese et al., 2006: 489).

The second unit of analysis reflect on the actors portrayed in the EU news coverage. The main question here is whether or not the national political parties or the European actors take center-stage during the campaign. In 2004, continuing the trend of 1999, the domestic political actors dominate the coverage of the EP elections. The dominance of national actors did slightly decrease compared to 1999 (De Vreese et al., 2006: 491). This is an indication that the second-rate national election phenomenon discussed above is still salient in EP elections. In total, over 50% of the main actors portrayed in EP news coverage were national actors, around 25% were EU level actors. The Netherlands was the only country where more focus was put on EU level actors than on national actors (De Vreese et al., 2006: 492). More EU representatives were present in those countries which had EP elections for the first or second time, so a further decrease in EU level visibility can be expected for later elections.

The prevalence of national actors in news coverage already indicates that the majority of the issues discussed on the news were national. In 2004, the recent EU enlargement was one of the core European issues, but the most attention was given to the national political parties, and their issues (Kovar & Kovar, 2012; De Vreese et al., 2006a). The fact that opposition parties generally perform better in EP elections than incumbent parties is testament to this. When issues are European, moreover, they regularly encompass a general anti-European attitude. Whether or not this makes for a European issues, however, is debatable.

Regarding the tone of EP coverage in the different Member States, a surprising percentage of coverage employed a neutral tone (84%). Of the remaining 16%, a scale ranging from -1 (consistently negative evaluations) to +1 (consistently positive evaluations) demonstrates that the coverage was marginally negative (-0.03) (De Vreese et al., 2006: 493). The tone of coverage ranges from positive in Cyprus (+0.10) and Malta (+0.11) to negative in countries such as Greece and Portugal (-0.20), the UK (-0.18) and the Netherlands (-0.17). A significant variation became apparent between the old and the new Member States: in the new member states, news coverage was substantially more positive (De Vreese et al., 2006: 493).

News coverage of the 2004 EP elections, even though they were more visible and centered more EU actors than in 1999, remain mostly focused on national actors and issues.

The visibility of the elections significantly increased. This is in line with expectations surrounding the increased importance of the European Parliament. If this notion holds true, we should be able to extend this trend to the 2009 EP elections in which the EP gained even further importance due to the Lisbon Treaty.

5.2.2. News Coverage in the 2009 EP Elections

Compared to 2004, the EP elections in 2009 indeed showed substantially more visibility both in newspapers as well as on television. In the three weeks leading up to the elections in 2009, over the spectrum of all 27 Member States, 20.16% of all TV news coverage was dealing with the EU or even with the EP elections specifically; for print media this figure was slightly lower. Between the Member States, this coverage varied from a minimum of 8.47% in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium, to up to 57.09% in Greece (see Figure 3) (Schuck, 2011: 46). Only in Denmark, Slovakia and Lithuania visibility decreased as compared to 2004. Variation in visibility has been country-specific, and there has been no clear East-West or North-South divide (Schuck et al., 2011: 47). This not only supports a positive effect by the Lisbon Treaty regarding the visibility of the EU, but also substantiates the notion that direct influence of EU policies on the citizens’ lives – as is most clearly the case in Greece – leads to more engagement in the society.

Figure 3: TV News Coverage in 2009 EP Elections (Schuck et al., 2011: 46)

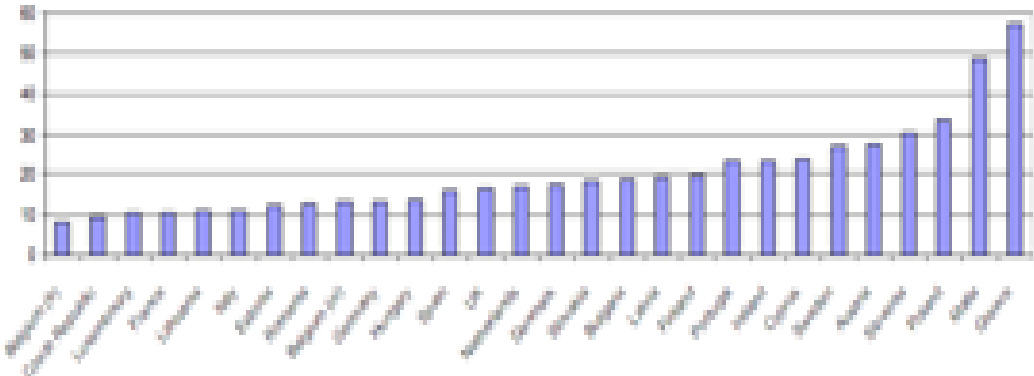


Fig. 3. Visibility of EU news in television newscasts. Note: Percentage of EU and EU election news of overall TV news in all 27 EU member countries (time-based).

The actors that were portrayed in the news coverage of the European elections in 2009 were still mostly national like in 2004. However, there have been increases in the discussion of EU level actors in the coverage as well. In contrast to one country in 2004, ten countries in 2009 demonstrate more attention to EU level actors than to national actors

(Schuck et al., 2011: 48). In general, however, the presence of EU level actors in the news coverage on the EP elections is still lower than can be expected. The phenomenon of second-rate national elections, therefore, even though there is a slight decline, is still prevalent.

In Lithuania, the presence of EU level actors – with 55% - is the highest (Schuck et al., 2011: 48). This high number can be attributed to the fact that many prominent Lithuanian politicians were candidates for the EP. This, therefore, should signify the importance of well-known national politicians choosing the European Union for their political careers (something which is currently very uncommon). A possible increase in high-level politicians – such as possibly Nicolas Sarkozy - choosing to take on the European cause, would strongly support the visibility of and connectedness with the EU.

Regarding the issues that are discussed during the news coverage, the predominant focus – much like in 2004 – is still on national issues. However, there has been a significant increase of European issues on the agenda. This is, however, mostly attributable to the concern about the European economy, which is the most notable European issue (Schuck et al., 2011: 48). Besides the European economy (15.6% of the total coverage), issues such as EU external relations (7.8%), EU enlargement with Turkey (5.2%), and the EU's political system (5.1%) were quite often portrayed in news coverage (Schuck et al., 2011: 47).

5.2.3. Developments since the Lisbon Treaty

The increase in the visibility of the EP elections since 2004 is unmistakable: TV coverage increased from 9.8% in 2004 to 20.16% in 2009 (De Vreese et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011). Unlike the smaller increase made between 1999 and 2004, this increase cannot be explained by the introduction of new Member States (Bulgaria and Romania both scored below average). This, therefore, indicates a clear increase in attention for the EP elections after the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty. The start of the economic crisis, and the effects this had on the EU, has probably attributed to this surge in attention, but this is unlikely to explain the entire variation.

In total, a significant increase in saliency of EP elections has been perceived. The number of news items regarding the EP elections rose dramatically, the actors portrayed in this coverage are increasingly EU level, and the issues are also more European than before. These findings, even though they cannot be directly attributed to the Lisbon Treaty, would support the hypothesis that through the increase of the importance of the European Parliament, the EU citizens feel slightly more engaged with the EU politics.

However, the fact that national issues and actors remain dominant in the coverage of European elections, in combination with still decreasing turnout rates, demonstrates that there is still a disconnect. European politics are still subordinate to national actors and issues. National political parties are judged in these elections in terms of their performance on the national levels. But what can be done about this? As discussed above, familiar faces from national politics on the European stage would increase the connectivity citizens feel towards the EP. The salience of EP elections in Greece is testament to this.

The issue of contestation, both between parties for the EP and between individuals for possible contested EU leadership, would increase the salience of the EP elections dramatically (Schuck et al., 2011: 50). Even though parties at first might try to keep these issues of contestation out of the media, when contestation surpasses a certain point, an increase in salience – and therewith a decrease in the disconnect – will be unavoidable (Schuck et al., 2011: 50). Prominent European politicians should start feeling a sense of obligation to apply their potential in order to improve the European Union.

5.3. Dimension 3: The Public Opinion Problem

The third dimension of the democratic deficit as defined in this analysis deals with issues of public opinion: trust in the European institutions, support for further integration, and the levels of European identity and citizenship. An initial comparison between these values in 2004 and 2009 will be made in order to indicate the variation between the two points of measurement. Trust and expectations for the are researched in the biannual standard Eurobarometer report. For measuring identity and citizenship some other research will also be applied. An overview of these main figures will indicate to what extent public opinion vis-à-vis the EU has changed with the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty. To follow the trend to a more recent stage, the Eurobarometer measures from the Fall of 2012 will also be incorporated into the analysis.

5.3.1. Trust in and Support for the EU

The Fall 2004 Eurobarometer measured the amount of trust European citizens had in the Union on the basis of trust in various institutions. At the point of measurement in June 2004, 52% of citizens had trust in the European Commission and 57% in the European Parliament (Eurobarometer 62, 2004). These figures both constituted increases in trust from the previous measurement (an increase of 4 and 3 points respectively). Among the Member

States there is significant variation regarding trust: the spectrum goes from the United Kingdom (less than 40% trust in both institutions) to Belgium, Ireland and Luxembourg with level of trust far exceeding the Union's average (Eurobarometer 62,2004).

In 2009 the EU already faced some economic hardship. The question arose whether trust in the European institutions would decrease in light of the economic turmoil, or whether the crisis would unite Europeans behind the institutions. Even though both trust in the European Commission and the European Parliament rose from the previous year, there is a notable decrease in trust from our starting point in 2004. In 2009 50% of the Union's citizens had trust in the EP, while only 46% trusted the Commission (Eurobarometer 72, 2009). The explanation that this decrease is attributable to the economic crisis is more plausible than that the Lisbon Treaty was responsible: the low-point of trust in the European institutions was in 2008, at the start of the global financial crisis (Eurobarometer 72, 2009).

The country with the highest trust in the European Parliament in 2009 was Slovakia (71%), which is surprising because the country had the lowest turnout rate in the EP elections that same year (Eurobarometer 72, 2009). This demonstrates that trust and engagement does not necessarily equal high turnout for elections. Support in the United Kingdom dropped even further to 25% in the EP and 21% trust in the Commission. In the Czech Republic, Luxembourg and Portugal trust in the EP increased substantially (Eurobarometer 72, 2009).

In 2012 these trends have strongly accelerated: since the abovementioned Eurobarometer 72 in 2009, trust in the European Union has almost continually declined. In 2012 only 33% of EU citizens exclaim their trust in the Union's institutions. In the most recent poll in the Fall of 2012, the first (small) increase in trust can be observed (Eurobarometer 78, 2012). Figure 4 shows how the perception of the European Union by its citizens has been negatively affected in recent years. This trend is worrying, but has been, in light of the ongoing concerns regarding the eurocrisis, predicted.

Figure 4: Perception of the European Union 2006-2012 (Eurobarometer 78, 2012)

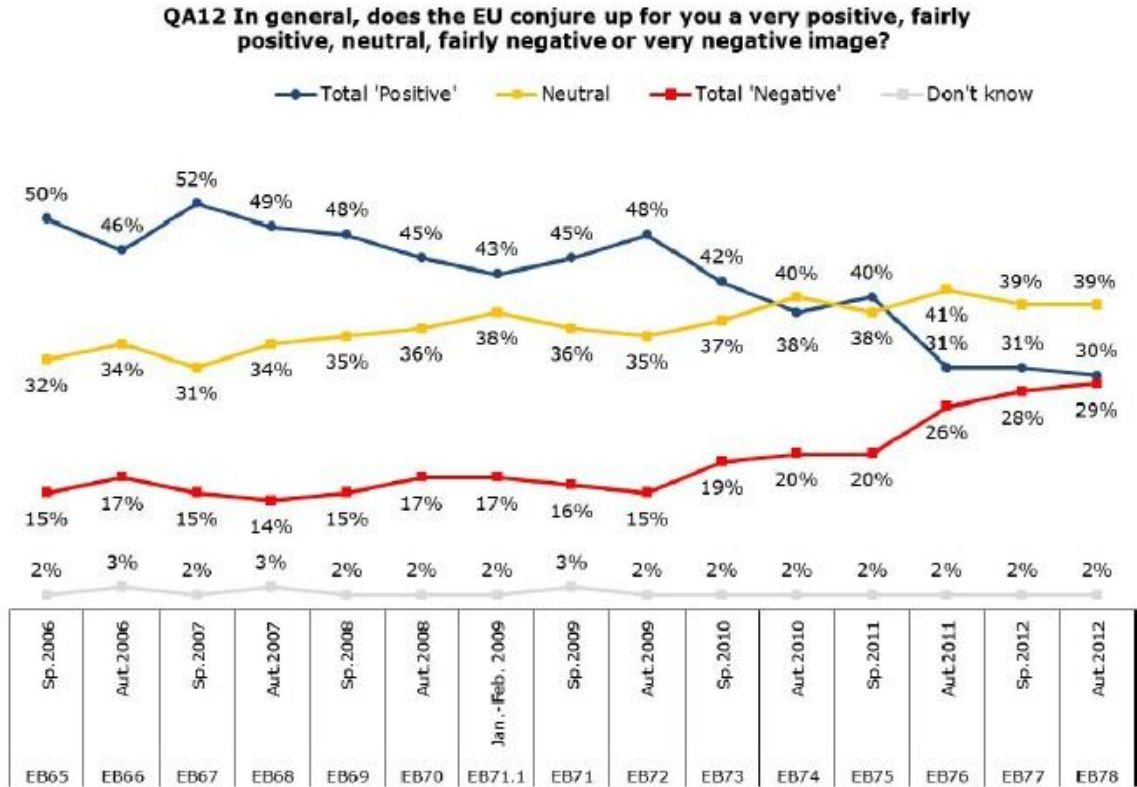
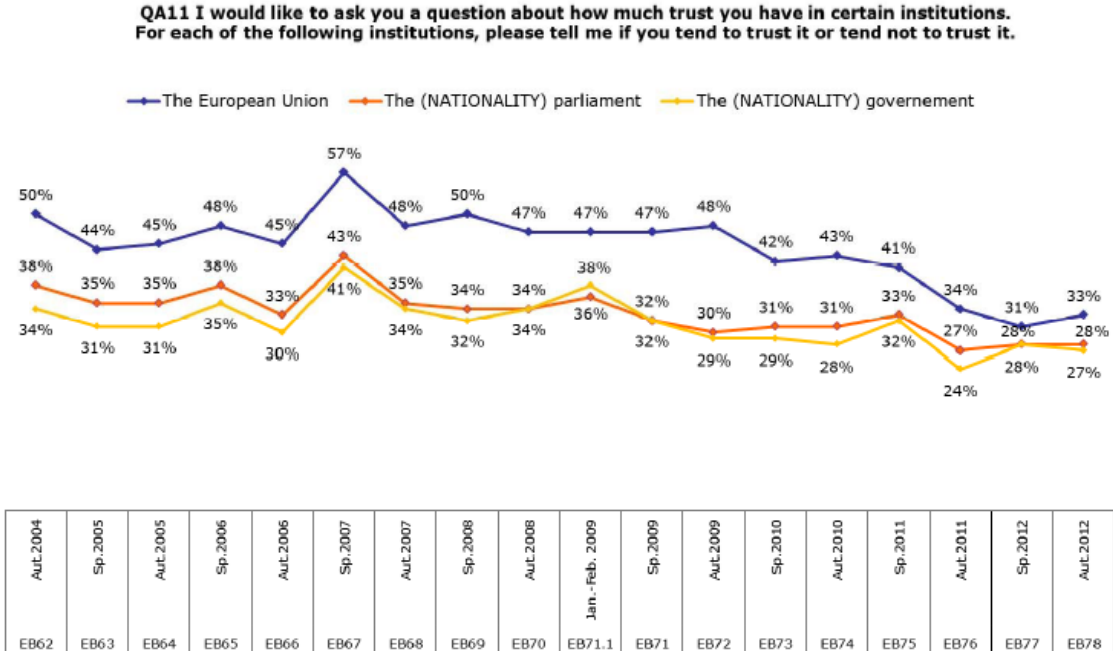


Figure 4 demonstrates how the perception of the European Union has declined over the last six years. The starting point of the positive perception of the EU is similar to the figures in 2004 discussed above. Already before the start of the global financial crisis a downward trend can be observed in the percentage of people with a positive perception of the EU. The trend does show a logical correlation between the crisis and the perception of the EU as a whole: as the crisis worsened, the perception declined. As we stand now, more people have a neutral perception of the EU than a positive perception, and the prevalence of negative perceptions has doubled and basically equals the positive perceptions (Eurobarometer 78, 2012).

This raises the question whether there has been a downward trend in perceiving and trusting the European Union specifically, or government institutions more generally. A similar analysis by Eurobarometer demonstrates interesting and hopeful figures for the EU. Figure 5 portrays the amount of trust citizens have in the EU as an institution, their national parliaments, and their national governments. As can be deduced from this graph, the trust in the European Union has continually exceeded trust in national institutions. Even though there has been a steep decline in trust in governments across the board, the EU has not been more negatively affected than national institutions (Eurobarometer 78, 2012). Even

though the advantageous position of the EU has decreased, the trend seems more congruent with the notion of increasing depoliticization, and clears the EU of unilateral blame.

Figure 5: Trust in EU and National Institutions (Eurobarometer 78, 2012):



In levels of support for membership of the European Union, as similar trend is visible. The question whether or not the citizen’s country’s membership is a good thing, figures dropped from a slight majority in 2004, to not even 50% in 2012. In 2004, after the enlargement of the EU with ten countries, 56% of citizens thought their country’s membership of the EU was a good thing (Eurobarometer 62, 2004). Luxembourg again constitutes the personification of ‘Europeanness’ with 85% support; the United Kingdom is again the predictable critic (38%) (Eurobarometer 62, 2004).

In 2009, this support for membership had declined to 53%, which further decreased to below 50% in 2012 (Eurobarometer 78, 2012). Between different Member States the distribution of support remained similar, with widespread decreases in support (Eurobarometer 72, 2009). This does signify a clear deterioration of trust in and support for the European Union. This might not come as a surprise to most, but even further contributes to the existence of a public support crisis in the Union.

5.3.2. European Identity and Citizenship

The concept of identity is complex and subject to an entire body of literature. In order to stay on track, the general line followed by the European Commission will be adopted here as well. The main question in this sense is to what extent people living in the European Union identify themselves with, first and foremost, their nationality or with their European identity. The variation in the extent to which Europeans feel European compared between 2004 and 2012¹ will be the main focus of this section.

The European Commission focuses its conception of identity on some core questions and factors they feel best define the concept. These questions include whether or not there is a real European identity, with which factors citizens identify, and whether European Union nationals are aware of their own citizenship (Eurobarometer 62, 2004). Moreover, issues such as recognition of the European flag, attachment with geographical entities, and national and European pride are encompassed in their analysis (Eurobarometer 62, 2004).

So to what extent is there a European identity, and how has this developed over time? The most straightforward question linked with the existence and prevalence of a European identity is 'In the near future do you see yourself...? Nationality only, Nationality and European, European and Nationality, or European only?' In 2004, 47% of citizens see themselves as both national and European, while 41% considers themselves solely national citizens. Moreover, around 7% chose 'European and National' and a marginal 3% sees themselves only as European (Eurobarometer 62, 2004). Countries in which European identity is most prevalent include the island states of Malta and Cyprus (57 and 59% respectively), and Luxembourg (where 17% considers themselves only European). Among euro skeptic countries in this regard Hungarians (67%) see themselves most nationally (Eurobarometer 62, 2004).

Following the trend of European identity to the latest point in 2012, through the years of severe crisis, a surprising increase in European identity becomes apparent. In 2012, 60% of Europeans regard themselves also as European citizens, and 38% see themselves purely as national citizens (Eurobarometer 77, 2012). Luxembourg again demonstrates the most prevalent European identity (85%), followed by Denmark (75%) and Germany (74%). The United Kingdom (with 42%) is one of three countries where the majority does not share this sentiment (Eurobarometer 77, 2012).

¹ 2012 is chosen here instead of 2009 because identity is a concept which does not develop overnight and needs considerable time to grow.

This variation constitutes a 13 point increase of the prevalence of some sense of European identity and citizenship, and a 3 point decrease in purely nationalistic identities. Especially with the crisis in mind, this seems like a substantial development. When over 60% of Europeans regard themselves as European, at least to a certain extent, even in this time of crisis, there is hope for the future of the European Union. A note has to be made about the measurements adopted by the Eurobarometer: the Commission changed the formulation of their measurement to 'citizenship' instead of the abovementioned question format. This might have skewed the results, because respondents can more clearly say they feel European citizens when questions are phrased without comparison to their national identities.

A socio-demographic analysis of these results demonstrate that: young people, highly educated people, people with more 'left-wing' political beliefs, and people who know more about the European Union tend to see themselves as more European than the opposites in those cohorts (Eurobarometer 62, 2004). The age, education, and knowledge components of this analysis are hopeful for the future of public opinion regarding European identity. Public education on the EU comes out as an important strategy.

5.3.3. The State of the Union and its Implications

So where does the European Union stand now in terms of public opinion? As is quite apparent from just watching national news in most European countries, the EU has not gained any popularity in their tough task of combating the crisis. This is empirically confirmed by severely decreasing levels of trust, and a more negative perception of the EU. The levels of European identity and citizenship, in stark contrast, have positively developed (Eurobarometer 72, 2009; Eurobarometer 78, 2012). In this regard, most aspects have not only not improved with the attempts made by the Lisbon Treaty, they have even further deteriorated. There is, since the deterioration accelerated after 2008, an unmistakable connection between this deterioration and the ongoing problems associated with the eurocrisis.

There are, however, glimpses of light at the end of the public opinion tunnel: the trust EU citizens have in the Union still exceeds their trust in national parliaments and governments. This would indicate there might still be hope for the EU: citizens inherently complain about, and are mistrusting of, their governments. This trend is widespread and quite evident. The EU has, moreover, the opportunity to still develop towards something more trustworthy. Furthermore, the ideas and perceptions of the EU are not as deeply

entrenched as those about our national government. There is still some cause for optimism. If the EU can manage to include more citizens into the electoral process, educate its citizens about the benefits of the EU, can increase transparency even further, and can establish thorough and efficient decision-making, the possibilities of decreasing the democratic deficit can be taken advantage of.

The most common values on which the feeling of European citizenship and identity are based predominantly include freedom of movement and the common currency (Eurobarometer, 2012). The practicality of these issues demonstrates the need to emphasize the practical advantages of being part of the EU to the citizens. Theoretical explanations such as the importance of coherence for the global balance of power, and the shared cultural and societal traditions do not affect public opinion as strongly as tangible and practical advantages. To win over European citizens for the European cause, they need to enjoy more practical advantages and be made aware that the origin of these advantages lies in Brussels.

The top three objectives of European integration, as measured from the perception and desires of EU citizens, are: (1) boosting of economic growth, (2) increasing the standard of living of all Europeans, and (3) maintaining peace and security (Eurobarometer 78, 2012). These public opinions are congruent with the basic EU policy objectives, and should therefore form the center of European policies. However, public opinion generally 'wants to have their cake and eat it too'. Sometimes difficult decisions need to be made in order to achieve the set objectives. If these three objectives are most important to European citizens, a more empowered EU would be better able to achieve them.

6. Counterfactual Analysis: What Would Further Integration Bring?

What is a counterfactual analysis, and why is it useful for this study? Counterfactuals are 'subjunctive conditionals in which the antecedent is known or supposed for purposes of argument to be false' (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 4). To make a counterfactual analysis, an author can for example replace the common question of 'what happened?' with the question 'what would have happened if?' (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996). This form of hypothetical reasoning has been widely criticized for its non-empirical and speculative nature. The method, however, does have its merits: counterfactual reasoning is a prerequisite of any form of learning from history (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 2). The effects of something, or the lack of something, can only truly be assessed in comparison with an alternative or opposite scenario. Everybody employs this type of reasoning in one way or another, and choosing not to acknowledge this constitutes a concealed version of this analysis as opposed to an open version (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 2).

Figure 6: Explaining the Counterfactual Analysis (Cederman, 1996: 249):

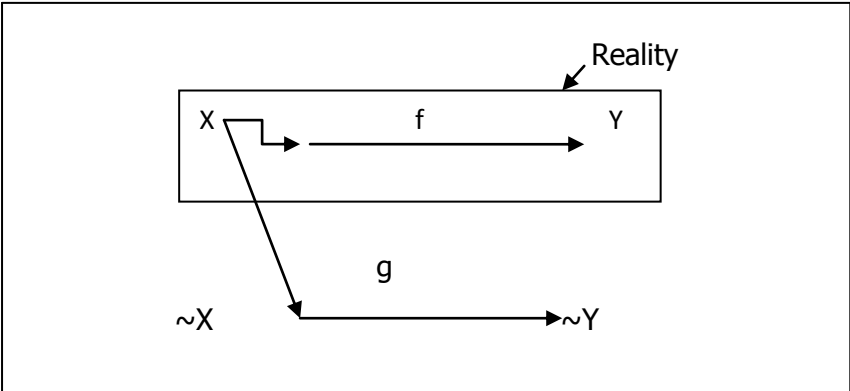


Figure 6 graphically portrays a simple counterfactual analysis. A counterfactual analysis attempts to establish causation between an independent variable X (the antecedent) and the dependent variable Y (the consequent) by showing that the real outcome Y would not have occurred without the antecedent X (Cederman, 1996: 248). An alternative and hypothetical causal path from $\sim X$ to $\sim Y$ is then constructed to establish this path. The box represents reality, and the f and g are the required causal links and processes (Cederman, 1996: 248). When the antecedent is hypothetically changed, as the counterfactual argument goes, the entire process of causation is altered as well. Hypothesizing on the path not taken is the core of the counterfactual analysis.

In light of this study, the counterfactual question of what would have happened if the EU had gained more decision-making power is quite relevant in determining the path of future European integration. If the answer to this question would be that further integration would have promoted more distributive policies strengthening regions in the EU, would have led to more capabilities to tackle problems early on, and therewith would have addressed the problems of the democratic deficit, that would have major implications for the road ahead. This section will, through the process of an idiographic case-study counterfactual (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 6), explore the question of what further and deeper integration would have brought for EU decision-making. To conclude, the implications from this analysis will be applied to the notion of 'what would happen if' these capacities were to be installed now.'

6.1. An Idiographic Case-Study Counterfactual

The ideographic case-study counterfactual is a counterfactual technique that highlights specific points of indeterminacy at particular junctures in history. The method reminds us of how things could have easily worked out differently, and of how difficult it is to apply hypothethico-deductive laws to concrete cases (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 6). The path dependency of history on certain crucial junctures is the main premise of this type of counterfactual. The question of what would have happened if a different decision was made at one of these critical junctures is central in the analysis (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996: 7-8).

The 'what would have happened' questions that can be relevant to understanding the democratic deficit and the functioning of the EU are multifold. One the one hand, the question of 'what would have happened if the EU citizens had more influence on the policy-making' - in light of the most notable empirical example of the Dutch and French 'no' in the constitutional referendums - paints a gloomy picture. On the other hand, the question of 'what would have happened if the EU had more legitimacy and decision-making capacity' would logically indicate a better capability to perform effectively, thus increasing support and trust. Moreover, the mechanisms of causation are subject to interpretation: did the democratic deficit lead to inefficient decision-making, or did inefficient decision-making lead to the democratic deficit? I am aware this section will raise more questions than it will answer, but these questions can be interesting threads for further research and debate.

Let us look to the model of counterfactual analysis in Figure 6. Applied to the scenario of European integration, the X stands for the status quo in the EU on the basis of its capabilities and democratic provisions (gradual integration until the Lisbon Treaty). The process *f* then signifies the evaluation of the functioning of the EU as followed, and Y is the

position of democratic deficit and policy gridlock the EU finds itself in today. The counterfactual analysis starts by creating the hypothetical $\sim X$ in which the EU has more authority to make decisions. This $\sim X$ will be the adoption of a substantively reform-based constitution in which political contestation of leadership is established, and further decision-making capacity was transferred to the EU level ($\sim X$). The new outcome $\sim Y$ can be deduced by logically referring the causal processes (g) this new $\sim X$ would set in motion.

So then what would have happened had the EU adopted more far-reaching democratization, such as a hypothetical far-reaching constitution, resulting in more integrated and empowered decision-making? To trace the various causal mechanisms between the extent and nature of integration and democratization and the possible effects this would have, the defined dimensions of the democratic deficit will be analyzed. The argument will be presented that further democratization through deeper integration would have had a positive effect on the democratic deficit. The development of this deficit, as will be argued, is partly explained by both the lack of democracy and the hesitation to further integrate European countries.

For the first dimension of the democratic deficit, the initial answer to this question appears to be relatively straightforward: because of increased competencies placed at the EU level and the way this can increase the EU's capabilities, factor $\sim X$ would have increased the effectiveness of the EU to take timely and decisive action. This increased capabilities would have enabled the EU to more effectively deal with the economic and financial crisis and also with the eurocrisis. This, in turn, would have swayed public opinion in the EU's favor. Moreover, when political contestation with directly elected leaders and actively campaigning European parties had been introduced into the European electoral system, the democratic validity of the EU would have definitely improved.

However, the answer to this counterfactual is more complex than that. Democratic influence into the policy-process does not guarantee more effective and decisive decision-making. Often the increase in democratic input can hinder effective decision-making through the prevalence of more contradicting opinions. Considering this would be a step away from national sovereignty, European politics would become primary politics and therefore more conflicting. A strongly empowered executive, in the form of a possible presidential system, would, however, have been able to keep this processes in check.

The second dimension of the democratic deficit, the disconnect between citizens and the EU in terms of 'policy drift' and 'second-order national contests' would have, logically, been largely resolved by $\sim X$. When European politics would have become more important and therefore more central to citizens' interest, the policies that are central in the campaigns

would have become more clearly defined. This would have been comparable to a process of national elections, in which issues are very thoroughly debated in the public sphere. The 'second-rate national contest' phenomenon would have been rendered irrelevant, because European Union elections would no longer have been of secondary importance. This would have, to a certain extent, also resolved the problems of the extremely low and still decreasing levels of turn-out for the European elections.

Regarding the third, and last, dimension of the deficit: how would further integration ($\sim X$) have affected the public opinion in terms of trust, support, identity and citizenship? This answer is more complex. Trust in European institutions, as we have seen in the analysis above, still exceeded trust in national institutions in 2012, even though no-one talks about democratic deficits on the national level. Speculating on how trust would have been affected by further integration, therefore, is extremely difficult. Regarding issues of support, citizenship and identity, the most likely consequence of $\sim X$ would have been a substantial improvement. As European politics would have increased in importance, the feelings of identity and citizenship, given that the EU decision-making would not have stagnated immensely, would most likely have steadily increased.

Contestation, more generally, would have made issues more concrete in elections and therefore would have promoted the development of cross-institutional coalitions, which in turn can overcome policy gridlock (Hix, 2008: 101). Contests, moreover, are media-friendly: when media can frame elections in as a 'horse race', this will further improve the visibility and understanding of European politics (Hix, 2008: 101-105). Political contestation would also have forced the leaders to better explain their standpoints and policies to their constituents. When a visible leader would attempt to bridge the gap between the policy-level and the voters, this would have had a beneficial effect on how voters see, understand and value the EU (Hix, 2008: 99-100). This improved communication would have promoted engagement, decreased policy drift, and contributed to building trust in the EU, as well as a European identity. In short, even though this simple change would not instantly have resolved the democratic deficit, it would have been a step in the right direction for addressing almost all claims regarding the democratic deficit.

These positive developments, however, would have been more likely to have a substantial impact on the way citizens perceive the EU, if the EU would really have become the primary political venue for all of Europe's citizens. As argued by many, among which Peter Mair (2007), there has been a gradual process of depoliticization in Western societies: citizens are less engaged with and more often alienated from the political system. To expect them to truly be engaged by a secondary political system, is unrealistic. Substantial

integration on the basis of a truly democratic system, constituting a step away from national sovereignty, would be necessary to truly resolve the democratic deficit (Y).

6.2. Relevant Implications: What Would Happen?

The analysis above demonstrated that further integration most logically would have made the European Union more stable, more democratic, and more able to tackle severe and complex problems. But speaking in hindsight is inherently easy. Would further integration, as we have discussed in the theoretical portion of this thesis, impact positively on the democratic deficit of the EU and on its functioning more generally in the current situation?

Regarding all three dimensions of the democratic deficit, including the more general effectiveness of the EU, the introduction of factor $\sim X$ - provided that reforms are implemented efficiently - would still lead to more coherent policies and support for these policies. Further integration is still likely to facilitate the abovementioned positive changes in the democratic deficit, because the right form of further integration does address most of the claims made about the democratic deficit.

The feasibility of actually implementing far-reaching reforms in the European Union constituting more capabilities for the EU and a step away from national sovereignty is, in time of severe criticism and crisis, extremely low. Public support for this kind of rigorous development would most likely be miniscule. However, citizens need to understand that the fact that the crisis has become so severe is partly due to the restraints put on the European Union. The EU is expected to deal efficiently and decisively with the crisis, while their every move in the process is questioned. Slow and difficult decision-making by national leaders, as is the main strategy at the moment, has not been very effective. Effective decision-making requires capabilities and legitimacy: as long as the EU does not receive these, the vicious cycle of the democratic deficit will be sustained.

A stronger and more democratic EU, in conclusion, would have had unmistakable positive effects on both the way the system functions - more innovation, less gridlock - as well as the perception and understanding of European politics by its citizens. Simply making the EU's leaders elected by the people is an important and, as I argue in line with Simon Hix, necessary step in bringing European integration into the twenty-first century. Hix argues for limited democratic politics in which the EU's checks-and-balances safeguard stability and there is no direct democracy (Hix, 2008: 106). Where the argument presented in this thesis goes further is that these improvements are more likely to make substantial changes when EU politics are primary politics.

7. Discussion: Findings and Implications

These various analyses have had mixed results. There is clear consensus that the Lisbon Treaty has made improvements on the first dimension of the democratic deficit. However, some core progressive changes such as a directly elected president and Commission have not yet substantiated. Moreover, the analysis of European Parliament elections in 2004 and 2009 has demonstrated a more anti-European sentiment. This has gone hand-in-hand with steeply decreasing levels of public trust in and support for the EU. This decrease, however, has accelerated in the years after 2009, indicating that the eurocrisis, not the Lisbon Treaty, is the main culprit. Lastly, the counterfactual analysis, although highly speculative, has demonstrated how further integration would most likely lead to an improvement on most claims about the democratic deficit. These findings will now be discussed in more detail. The most important implications they have for the future of the EU will also be analyzed.

7.1. Main Findings

What have these analyses shown us with regard to the research question and the hypotheses? The research question, 'How has the Lisbon Treaty affected the various dimensions of the democratic deficit within the European Union, and how can this deficit be resolved effectively?', does not have one definitive answer. Regarding the general effect on the democratic deficit I feel confident making the claim that the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty have to some extent positively affected the democratic deficit of the European Union. By strengthening the European Parliament and national parliaments, and by stimulating participation through the European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs), the Lisbon Treaty has improved democratic functioning of the EU institutions (Mayoral, 2011). Moreover, the increased importance of the EP has made European elections more salient (Schuck et al., 2011).

The effect on the specific dimensions of the democratic deficit is mixed. As just mentioned, the first dimension of the deficit, the democratic functioning of the EU-institutions, has been positively affected. This is in line with the proposed first hypothesis that the Lisbon Treaty had this positive effect on this dimension of democratic deficit. The H1 phrased in section 4.1 does therefore not have to be rejected.

The second dimension, the disconnect between the citizens and the EU, has not clearly been affected one way or the other. On the one hand, the fact that salience and visibility of EP elections have increased, and that the actors and issues are increasingly

European points to a positive development since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty. On the other hand, the enduring and accelerating decrease in turnout for the EP elections would signify an opposite trend. Keeping in mind the possible explanatory effect of depoliticization for the decreased turnout, the first trend seems slightly more convincing. Further analysis is required to determine the saliency of H2.

The third dimension of the democratic deficit, which deals with public opinion, shows a very clear-cut deterioration of public support for and trust in the European Union. Even though there are slight improvements in the level of European identity and citizenship, the evidence clearly indicates that the extent of democratic deficit in this dimension has increased (Eurobarometer, 2004+2009+2012). This was in line with H3, and this hypothesis therefore does not have to be rejected.

Lastly, the counterfactual analysis has outlined the hypothetical influence of further integration and democratization of the EU. This analysis, in my opinion, has demonstrated clear positive effects of further integration on the democratic deficit. Further integration and democratization would revolve many issues on all dimensions of the democratic deficit. This step would, naturally, cause many problems of its own, and its feasibility is very questionable, but even in times of severe crisis the possibility of integrating the EU even further must not be overlooked. The H4 does not have to be rejected.

7.2. Implications for European Integration²

The project of European integration has arrived at a paradox: public support for further integration has evaporated, making integration through democracy unfeasible. On the other hand, as has also been demonstrated by this analysis, further integration would resolve many of the problems associated with the democratic deficit. What now, should – and can – the EU do when the road to democracy does not go along a purely democratic path? This is one of the fundamental questions of European integration.

Further integration has traditionally been instituted top-down, with very little regard for popular support. Because of the large consensus among the political elites, these sentiments against Europeanization have long gone unanswered. Now populist parties in many member states have voiced this disconnect with the EU, this has become a fundamental obstacle. Government has traditionally not been able to function efficiently when opposition to the government recognized the possibility of dissolving said government.

² Since implications have been discussed in many individual sections, this section will succinctly summarize to avoid unnecessary repetition.

An interesting yet somewhat far-fetched analogy can be made with the nation-building process in the United States. In some regards, the American unification process bears resemblance with the growing divide between those in favor and those against European integration. The differences between these cases, of course, are vast, but the main point I want to get across is that the US, even though there was fierce opposition against unification, is now one of the most integrated nation-states in the world. Traditionally there has always been public resistance against the development of a more abstract and higher government structure. However, through a long process of democratic transition, gradual development can bring about fully-fledged democracies. Full European integration might not be achieved in the coming years, or even decades, but I believe there will be a point when true European integration will be a reality.

Practical implications for European integration should be incremental politicization of European politics through the introduction of political contestation, an increase in capabilities of the EU, and more and better public communication from the side of the EU. Increased visibility of EP elections in Greece as a consequence of the EU's direct impact on the country, and the highest turnout rates in Lithuania because of its large number of prominent politicians running for positions in Europe, should indicate that direct influence does create engagement. If this engagement can be facilitated in line with more positive perception of EU policies, the negative public opinion regarding the Union could be addressed.

8. Scope and Limitations

I realize the scope of this research is highly limited. Because of the vast arrays of literature on the functioning of the European Union and its democratic deficit, it is difficult to contribute to the existing insights and beliefs regarding this topic. In this study the assumption is made that the dissolution of the EU, and the halt of integration, is a non-viable option. Opposing this assumption would undermine the validity of this research.

Democracy, furthermore, is a concept which is extremely difficult to measure. Moreover, it is challenging to make true causal claims about the specific effects of the Lisbon Treaty on support and trust in the European Union because of the intervening effect of, among others, the eurocrisis. It could, for example, be the case that on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty opinions vis-à-vis the EU have improved, after even more steeply deteriorating with the enduring crises in the EU. The counterfactual analysis, moreover, although I find it interesting and relevant, is highly speculative in nature.

However, this analysis does show the effect the institutional framework of the EU has on how it is perceived, and the mechanisms through which further integration can lead to more democratic support. Until now, the assumption that most EU members regard the EU as a given in international politics and will therefore continue in this institution, has survived the test of the eurocrisis. I stand by the contention that the EU will persevere. Discovering the optimal path for future European cooperation, therefore, is a dire necessity.

Even though making such a pro-European argument in these times of severe crisis will most likely be received critically, the same crisis enables a thorough re-evaluation of policies and objectives. Thinking about the future course of European integration is urgently needed to ensure the EU rises stronger from the crisis. One can only hope that certain thoughts and arguments can slightly contribute to the realization European integration is not going anywhere. It is up to us to deal with its obstacles the best way we know how.

9. Conclusions

So how has the Lisbon Treaty affected the various dimensions of the democratic deficit within the European Union, and how can this deficit be resolved effectively? The Lisbon Treaty, as has become apparent from this research, has somewhat successfully attempted to address to ongoing problems of the democratic deficit in the EU. It has been able to correct some imbalances in the institutional framework of the EU by strengthening the capabilities of the democratically elected European Parliament. Moreover, it has tried to address the disconnect between the EU and its citizens by introducing participatory policies such as the citizens' initiative (Mayoral, 2011). This has had various degrees of success depending on the different dimensions of the democratic deficit as defined in this study.

The democratic workings of the EU (H1) have been improved by the abovementioned provisions in the Lisbon Treaty. This conclusion is not very contentious. Second, there has been a slightly positive effect on the visibility of EP elections through the media, which has slightly decreased the disconnect and policy drift (H2). This trend has, however, not resulted in higher turnout rates for the EP elections. Both of the posed hypotheses do not have to be rejected, although evidence for H2 is less compelling than for H1.

With regard to the question whether or not the Lisbon Treaty positively affected public opinion (H3), inconclusive results were found in the data analysis. Both trust in the European Union, as well as support for membership have declined since 2004. On the other hand, the feeling of European citizenship has increased (Eurobarometer, 2012). This decline in popularity is largely based in the crisis, but can therefore not be convincingly linked with

the Lisbon Treaty. There might have been an initial effect, but this has not been demonstrated here. The counterfactual analysis, lastly, has attempted to demonstrate the hypothetical positive effect more democratization and empowerment would have on the democratic deficit of the EU (H4). These hypotheses, therefore, also do not have to be rejected, since the H3 did not predict an effect.

This analysis clearly demonstrates that the future of European integration faces a variety of serious challenges. The emphasis here is not on how to resolve the ongoing eurocrisis most effectively, but on how to address the older and more entrenched problem of the democratic deficit in the European Union. Rodrik's trilemma of the world economy shows that this lack of democracy is an inherent consequence of striving for economic integration while holding on to national sovereignty. Democratically supported integration on a European level is only feasible when national sovereignty is sacrificed (Rodrik, 2000: 179). A lack of awareness and involvement of European citizens further increases the democratic deficit.

Since the advantages of the European Union still outweigh the disadvantages, and the dissolution of the European Union would mean the exit of Europe from the world stage, further European integration seems to be the only viable option. A first step on this path is to address the democratic deficit by further democratizing the European decision-making structures. Introducing political contestation of leadership, both in terms of the President and Commissioners, is a necessary move.

This is, however, not enough to counter the democratic deficit: until European politics are regarded as primary politics for European citizens, there will remain a disconnect between citizens and institutions. Public engagement with politics is rare on the now primary national level, let alone on the more abstract and distant European level. Further integration of EU politics to such an extent that this becomes the primary political stage for all EU citizens is the most feasible way to solve the democratic deficit problem in the EU.

Pleading for further European integration in a time of severe crisis, enduring EU criticism, and struggling Member States might be an unpopular argument, but it is, as I have argued here, the necessary path. The project of European integration still has more advantages than disadvantages: it addresses the common European good, and can safeguard a position of power for European countries which they otherwise would not have had. The absence of empowered leadership with the legitimacy and the capabilities to make tough decisions, in combination with strict regulation is what the EU needs in order to overcome these difficulties.

There is a proverb in Dutch which states that 'gentle healers make stinking wounds.'³ This might not sound as catchy in English, but it certainly applies. Because of the consensual nature of European decision-making, together with a lack of legitimacy of its leaders and the decreasing popular support, the European elite takes compromised measures in a late stage of treatment. This has been, and will remain, an essential problem with the way the Union tackles crises such as the current eurocrisis. Capable and empowered leadership, with legitimacy through popular election, would improve the crisis management potential of the Union. Stricter regulation on national countries can, furthermore, prevent escalations such as Greece and Cyprus.

The eurocrisis, to conclude, must be seen as an opportunity to dramatically reevaluate the course the European Union is on, and to address the entrenched problems within the European Union which under normal circumstances, keeping in mind the deliberative and consensual nature of European politics, could never be improved.

Further research into the implementation of the proposed scenario of pushing for further European integration is necessary in order to assess its feasibility. Moreover, coherent strategies into combating the democratic deficit are highly in need. The European Union, with its limited decision-making capacity due to its consensual structure and lack of empowerment, has troubles enough functioning efficiently. An increasing lack of public support is something that can possibly tip the scales in favor of the prevalence of national capabilities. I can only hope this thesis has contributed to the contention that this is not a viable option.

³ The Dutch proverb: 'Zachte heelmesters maken stinkende wonden'

10. References

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