

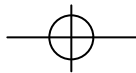
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The Democratic Legitimation of European Institutions

Gianfranco Pasquino*

To represent with competence, to decide with accountability (taking into account/being accountable): these are the objectives that a good institutional design should try to achieve. But a good institutional design is not only brought about by patient, knowledgeable, and competent work; it's also the result of a constant capacity for intervention, improvement, redesign. Until now, the European Union and the democratic legitimation of its institutions have lacked an overall – architectural – design (attempted only once in 1984 with the Draft Treaty for a Closer European Union, strongly urged by Altiero Spinelli). Nor have they ever been redesigned: no intergovernmental conference has ever displayed any institutional imagination, carried out any minute examination of the matter or surgically operated point by point. Now, the Convention on the Future of Europe provides an important, comprehensive and promising opportunity, as long as... as long as the institutional and constitutional issues are dealt with in a straightforward manner and looking beyond contingencies to the institutions that Europe – heading for its geographic “completion” – needs.

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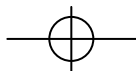
The problem of democratic deficit

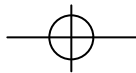
Any discussion of the democratic legitimation of European institutions must start out from a clear and agreed definition of democratic legitimation and an equally clear and agreed analysis of the so-called democratic deficit. An institution achieves democratic legitimation through elections carried out according to precisely defined procedures, repeated at substantially predictable times, aimed at achieving desired objectives and whose results are respected by all. Nevertheless, democracy is not just a set of rules and electoral procedures. It also provides a precise definition of the relations between the various institutions and their tasks and the possibility of assessing the effectiveness of the political system. In a broader, more articulate and certainly more complex view, it can be maintained that a democracy functions when those elected represent with competence and decide with responsibility.¹

This is where the matter of the democratic deficit of European institutions comes in, with reference not only to each individual institution, but also to the institutional circuit as a whole and to the relations between European institutions and European citizens/voters. The criticism is sufficiently clear, even if it seems that it often underestimates or even overlooks one important factor: the European Union is an "unfinished" political system – in fieri/in progress – and inevitably destined to be transformed over time. Therefore, instead of considering it a consolidated democracy, it would be more productive to follow its institutional vicissitudes as if it were a democracy still under construction, that is, with the democratisation process still going on, and – and this is actually the case – still undergoing a transition from a certainly imperfect democratic regime to another, but equally certainly improvable, but preferable, regime. Analogies with the many other democratisation processes that have taken place in the second half of the twentieth century would probably help to clarify the evolution of the EU's political system and some kind of study in the field should be encouraged.

This article will examine the criticism put forward by those who lament the democratic deficit in European institutions. In order, it will look at the Council, the Commission, and the European Parliament (EP). The European Court of Justice will not be considered in that it cannot suffer a democratic deficit because it responds to criteria other than those of democraticness and can – and actually has – favoured processes of democratisation in a number

¹ Responsibility means taking citizens' preferences into account and being accountable to citizens for the public policies chosen; see G. Pasquino, "Deficit democratico e leadership dell'Unione europea" *Teoria Politica*, vol. XVI, no. 1, 2000, pp. 3-23.





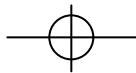
of ways. Assessment of the EU's democratic deficit will be based as much as possible on the characterisation of democracy as a regime in which the elected represent competently and decide responsibly.

Democratise the European Council?

A body like the European Council, composed of the heads of state or government of EU member states, cannot be automatically considered lacking in democratic legitimacy. In fact, each head of state or government enjoys the electoral legitimacy without which s/he would not be able to sit in the Council. In some way, s/he has won a national election, represents the majority of his/her country's voters, has the confidence of the national parliament. Those who believe that the heads of state and government and the body to which they belong suffer a democratic deficit must offer more precise and convincing arguments: In fact, democratic deficit does not mean the total absence of democratic legitimacy of the heads of state and government and the Council, who have after all been democratically elected, but relates on the one hand to European policies and on the other to the relation between each head of state or government and his/her national electorate. This is the "accountability" aspect of the democratic circuit mentioned above.

As for the "representation" aspect, from what we know, it seems very unlikely that the heads of states or government campaigned for their citizens' votes by referring to European policies, a national action plan at the European level or a specifically European point of view. Even if it were appropriate to speak of a "mandate", no national head of state or government has asked the voters for a mandate for European policies. Therefore, at least partially, there is an incoming democratic deficit: the citizens/voters of each member state have not been called upon to decide which leader, party or coalition has the most preferable European programme. They have not been able to confer a "European" mandate upon their national leaders because the leaders, parties and coalitions have not asked for it, often – and sometimes quite rightly (as unexpected issues often come up in the European Union) – the latter prefer exactly the opposite in order to have a free rein. If there is a deficit, it is mainly a political deficit of underestimation, marginalisation, subordination of European issues to specifically national issues, even if, paradoxically, almost all scholars and even politicians agree that there are not many issues left that still exclusively involve national decision-making processes.

If there is a democratic deficit on the input side, it is not surprising that there's one on the output side as well. More precisely, this deficit takes two



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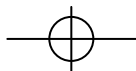
forms. On the one hand, the members of government of the member states and their parties do not take responsibility for the public policies they formulate and approve in the Council and do not refer to their European successes during election campaigns. Indeed, the only ones, if any, who do use European issues in their campaigns, taking advantage of the empty niche, are those who oppose Europe. On the other hand, however, the deficit also depends on the behaviour of the opinion-makers, the mass media, and the citizens themselves – who fail to raise the political debate in specifically European fora to the level required to challenge those in government to answer for what they've done, done wrong or not done at all with respect to European policies.

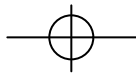
In conclusion, if the Council suffers a democratic deficit – and to some extent it does – the way to remedy it is not only through intelligent institutional reform of the Council itself, in particular, regarding voting procedures and relations with the Commission and the EP (a number of interesting and useful proposals in this direction have been put forward²). Instead, the remedies lie upstream, and involve the ways in which national election campaigns are carried out, and downstream, in the assessment of the work of national governments on the European scene. What could be instrumental in solving this kind of deficit – much more than institutional mechanisms, which can nevertheless be improved – are the people working in the field of political information, interest groups, public opinion, and naturally the citizens/voters. Obviously, transforming the Council into the EU's Upper Chamber, as part of a very ambitious prospect for reform in the medium term (to be hoped for and which could be practicable especially in a systemic context), would reduce or even eliminate the democratic deficit.

Democratic legitimation of the Commission

As for the Commission, if democratic deficit is measured by the sole criterion of an electoral mandate, it is surely the body that comes out looking the worst. Recalling the words Gen. De Gaulle used to play down the Commission's importance, one could say that the Commission is statutorily and deliberately composed of "technocrates apatrides et irresponsables". If this were true – and the composition of the Commission often comes close to this definition – it would be a boast, but it would obviously leave the entire debate and evaluation of democratic deficit wide open. We know that the Commissioners are mainly more or less long-term

² See P. Schmitter, *How to democratise the European Union - and why bother?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).





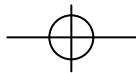
politicians but with technical/scientific specialisations much like those of technocrats. Incidentally, it is odd that De Gaulle, who showed a certain inclination towards technocrats in recruiting his ministers and collaborators, would consider this a negative quality at the European level. Then, pursuant to the treaties, the commissioners are obliged to shed their national affiliation in their activities, evaluations and decisions, and therefore, as long as they maintain their posts, should indeed consider themselves “without a homeland”. Finally, there is the point about irresponsibility, which is the most complex and important in identifying and assessing the democratic deficit.

In order to radically overcome the democratic deficit in the Commission, what is needed is an institutional model that calls for the composition of the Commission to be decided by an – in turn – “democratised” European Parliament (in what way will be seen further ahead) or through some kind of direct election of the Commission’s president (presidentialist model) or even of her/his entire team (an unprecedented institutional model based in some ways on the Italian regional procedure³). In all cases, the Commission would take on the title and power of a real European government.⁴ In the meantime, in spite of a few measures taken to reduce the democratic deficit, we are still far from having a Commission that governs the Union and equally far from having European citizens in a position to influence its composition. On the contrary, more often than not, the Commission looks like a technical body, a high level study centre with considerable capabilities but very limited political autonomy.

Then again, even if the European Parliament must be consulted for the appointment of the Commission president and must approve/reject the president and the individual Commission members – subjected to long and sometimes acrimonious hearings – and could at any time withdraw its confidence from the Commission or its president, the democratic deficit from the input side remains. It is robust and visible upstream because it is the heads of state and government in the Council that first appoint the president and then, in presumable agreement with her/him, appoint the one or two (France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain) commissioners to which each country is entitled. Naturally, although names and candidatures circulate, government leaders are loath to expose or commit themselves to

³ In the Italian regional elections, the candidates for president are at the top of the regional lists of candidates. The coalition parties that have supported the candidate (for president) who obtains the most votes are given a bonus of approximately 20% of the seats and therefore have a secure majority.

⁴ Sandro Gozi has a more articulated vision of this “government”. See S. Gozi, *Il governo dell’Europa* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2001).



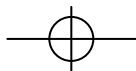
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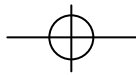
any specific nomination in front of their electorate. Thus, the very important decisions that lead to the formation of the Commission are entirely in the hands, minds, and willingness of the heads of state and government. The Commission's legitimacy derives from a body that has not been mandated to do so and is not bound by any commitments taken on with its electorate. Yet *ex titulo* legitimacy is one thing (and the Commission has it, even if not with the hoped for characteristics of democracy), and *quoad exercitium* legitimacy, that is, legitimacy based on the way the Commission functions and the way most of its members interpret their role most of the time, is another. This is the situation initially defined as being significantly democratic, "represent competently; decide responsibly", as long as both activities are interpreted creatively.

Since the competence of most of the commissioners can be taken for granted most of the time (and if this were not the case, the blame would rest with the heads of government who appointed them more than with the individual commissioners themselves and, after Amsterdam, with the president of the Commission who did not vigorously oppose their appointment), the problem is one of assessing their representativeness. The traditional criteria – political and national representativeness – cannot and must not enter into play here. They are definitely inadequate since, to the extent that the commissioners are meant to represent anything, what they should represent is the programme of the Commission in its entirety as formulated by the president to the EP (and approved by it) – a programme that is generally in line with the desiderata of the Council. Above and beyond these rather precise aims, the commissioners could work towards representing, personally or in groups, a certain idea of Europe, more or less supranational/federal, more or less directed from above or decentralised, more or less capable of subsidiarity.

As regards responsibility, that particular kind of responsibility that can be referred to as democratic legitimation from the output side, it is known that the Commission generally takes responsibility in its entirety for its decisions and policies, but the commissioners also have some personal responsibility. To some extent, the EP can identify and eventually look into these responsibilities. Sometimes, at least in principle, the government leader who appointed a commissioner may ask for her/his removal. This has never occurred however; the very few commissioners who have resigned have not done so out of personal ideas of responsibility, but for other reasons.

What is certain is that there is no real, institutionally verifiable political responsibility for the Commission and the commissioners. Even if there were, it would come up against the downstream democratic deficit. The commissioners are not in a position to ask for a renewal of their mandate on





the basis of their expressed or verified capacities, what they've done and how they've done it. Nor are European or national voters called upon to assess whether or not their commissioners have taken account of their preferences and have tried to account for what they've done. Nevertheless, at least judging from what former commissioners have written and current commissioners say, all feel some kind of responsibility. Without over-emphasising, this responsibility is not real political responsibility, but in some ways an "ideal" or "historical" responsibility. It is formulated and felt towards a certain idea of Europe.

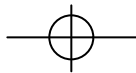
Finally, however, the Commission suffers from a democratic deficit which it can try to reduce by exercising its technical capabilities and by interpreting its role in an original and advanced way but which, in the absence of an incisive reform, cannot be eliminated. And even if such a reform were proposed, without the support of a good number of governments, it would come to naught. Furthermore, it would have to introduce the direct popular election of the president of the Commission (who would then have a certain degree of discretionality in choosing her/his team) or of both the president and the entire team, in the unusual institutional version mentioned earlier.

Naturally, if collegiality continues to be valued by the commissioners, then the joint election of the president and his/her entire team would seem to be preferable. Undoubtedly, such a reform would put into place the entire circuit of representativeness-decision-making capacity-accountability that would eliminate the democratic deficit at the roots. Consequently, it would call for a suitable and balanced reform of the powers and functions of the Council and the European Parliament.

Does more power to the European Parliament mean more democratic legitimacy?

Generally, public opinion seems to think that the European Parliament is the EU institution that has the least democratic deficit, indeed, has no democratic deficit at all. In fact, the members of the EP are elected by voters according to democratic procedures. It cannot – at least not formally – not be considered representative. It cannot – at least formally – not be considered responsible, in the sense that its members take account of the needs and preferences of their voters and try as much as possible to be accountable to them for what they do in Parliament. Although this assessment seems plausible and therefore, in principle, positive, the democratic deficit re-emerges when we turn from principles to substance.

Here, too, it seems important to start out from the democratic procedures



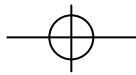
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as seen from the input side. These procedures have been criticised for three reasons. The first regards the very nature of the European Parliament elections: they are second-class elections, not to be confused with indirect elections. To give one important example, the European Parliament is not the German Bundesrat, that is, it is not chosen by national governmental majorities, but by the voters. Yet, in a technical sense, according to most experts the European elections are second class elections because the members of the European Parliament are elected in national elections, rarely do the parties campaign on European issues; rarely do the European voters choose the parties and candidates that show the greatest European capabilities or the best credentials.

The second criticism concerns responsibility: rarely are the parties' and candidates' campaigns based on an evaluation or an account of their activity in the European Parliament. Then again, the political careers of the majority of members of (and candidates for) the European Parliament do not depend on this kind of responsibility which links promises to proposals and performance and which can be held up during an election campaign. In a certain sense, even the European political/parliamentary career is a second class career.

Finally, the third criticism regards the limited turnout for EP elections, which reached an all-time low in June 1999 with a European average of less than 50 percent.⁵ Naturally, any elected assembly maintains its democratic legitimacy, regardless of voter turnout. In this case, however, the low turnout indicates that the voters are not particularly convinced of the importance of the European Parliament. The parties themselves are probably not very convinced either since they are reluctant to put much money into the campaigns or much energy into mobilising voters. They do not do so because their realistic – although perhaps slightly anachronistic – evaluation is that, in spite of the reforms introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam, the EP still does not have enough power to deserve a substantial and sustained investment of energy, political personnel, and financial resources. It might be said, therefore, that to some extent the European Parliament suffers a democratic deficit of a political nature, that is, caused by the choices of the parties and the voters (a kind of democratic deficit that can be remedied), but that to a greater extent it suffers from a democratic deficit of an institutional nature, deriving from its functions, powers and relations with the other institutions. Hence a problem that can no longer be put off is to formulate a uniform electoral law, evidently of a proportional nature, the

⁵ For an excellent analysis of these complaints, see J. Blondel, R. Sinnott and P. Svenson, *People and Parliament in the European Union. Participation, Democracy and Legitimacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

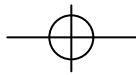


main pillars of which would be substantially the same in all countries.

Moreover, the political democratic deficit is somehow related to the institutional one and can probably be reduced by solving the latter. In fact, if the European Parliament were to have more of a say in the relations with the Council and the Commission and in producing public policies that are valid for all member states, then surely parties and candidates would invest more money and energy in European election campaigns, the voters would be kept more informed and would inform themselves more and there would be a greater turnout at the European elections.

Before suggesting what reforms might reduce the EP's institutional democratic deficit, it should be noted that two major lines of reform are currently being put forward and that they are incompatible with one another. Preference for one or the other obviously depends on the type of political unification desired. If the goal sought for the future of the European Union is supranational political unification and the institutional model preferred is the neo-parliamentary one, then the main factor in any kind of reform aimed at reducing the EP's institutional democratic deficit must be based on establishing a relationship of confidence between the EP and the Commission. If, on the other hand, the model desired is what can vaguely be defined as neo-presidential, then the main factor is the direct popular legitimation of the executive, either the president alone or the entire team.

In the best case hypothesis, if the Commission were to emerge from an agreement of a coalition of parties in the EP united by a political/institutional programme and then brought in and supported by an explicit vote of confidence, it would become the real government of Europe. The institutional dialectic could be completed, on the one hand, by transforming the Council into an Upper Chamber for representation of the member states, endowed with significant powers over legislative procedures and perhaps, on the other hand, by giving the head of the European government the power to dissolve parliament. In this hypothesis, the European government would be empowered to do so by the fact that it had been elected by a parliamentary majority. Institutional logic demands that, if that majority were to fail, everyone – both the government and the parliament – would return to the ballot to receive a verdict on what they had done and to ask for a new mandate. It should also be noted that if the head of the European government were not granted the power to dissolve parliament, a multinational, multiparty, multicultural parliament like the EP could be buffeted by the diverse pressures and inclinations of the assembly, clientelism and transformism which would certainly not help reduce the institutional democratic deficit. Quite the contrary, the instability of the government, frequent reshuffles and shifting majorities would all contribute



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to further alienating the already Eurosceptic/wait-and-see European voters.

Yet, increasing the EP's role in forming (or dissolving) the European government, even in a neo-parliamentary model, is not enough to reduce its democratic deficit. The EP also needs to be given a greater role in EU decision-making procedures. However, in this context it must be said that the authoritativeness, the degree of democracy and even the power of a parliament should never be measured by the number of laws it passes or by its prerogative to pass laws at all. In fact, those in favour of the neo-parliamentary model should have a slightly more refined and updated idea of the function of modern parliaments. Laws are the instruments through which governments implement their programmes and it is therefore democratically more correct for governments to make laws. Parliaments should, on the one hand, collaborate in a number of ways in forming them, not least by amending and coordinating, but the most important function of a parliament that aspires to reduce its deficit of democratic legitimation (which incidentally is a problem in many national parliaments) is to monitor and control all government activities, revising laws that have not achieved their objective, inspecting the behaviour of the ministers and, in the specific case of the EP, providing an operational and fruitful link with national parliaments.

Naturally, if the EP were to develop a bipolar dialectic, as is to be hoped for and likely, then it could also become that place in which eminent men and women carry out the function, as Walter Bagehot announced,⁶ of informing and educating citizens which, along with the criticism and counterproposals of the opposition, prepares changes in the government, in the way of governing and in public policies.

True, much of what is demanded of the EP to bridge its gap of democratic legitimacy depends on the set-up of the party system and its dynamics. The two factors interact and affect each other. The election of the European government by the European Parliament would oblige the parties, first, to group together in Parliament and, then, to organise in society and would rapidly create a virtuous circle, activating associations, groups and citizens.

Towards European neo-presidentialism

Those not in favour of a neo-parliamentary system, which is but one of the plausible institutional options, could prefer a presidential system, which indeed seems to be the prevalent institutional model for federal states. It

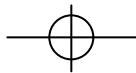
⁶ The English Constitution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1867 and 1872).

calls for some consistent choices, in particular, direct election by the people of the President of Europe, the separation of the institutions of president and parliament, cooperative decision-making between the president and parliament, replacement of the Commission with a team nominated by the President of Europe and the transformation of the Council into the Upper Chamber for territorial representation of the member states (according to the German model of the Bundesrat or the US model of the Senate).

Since the central issue here is the "democratic legitimation of European institutions", it seems evident that, starting with the last of the necessary choices, it would be preferable to have a Council/Upper Chamber modelled on the US Senate, that is, with the same number of representatives (from two to four – no more – for reasons of functionality) elected at large in their respective political systems. Open for debate is whether a special majority, referring not only to votes, but also to popular representation, could be required for especially important decisions. As for cooperation in decision-making between the president and parliament, special reference must be made here to split governments in the US: it may not be a bad thing for president and parliament to have to cooperate on decisions. While some fear stalemate and paralysis, others maintain that "divided" governments produce moderation and negotiation. This means that many interests of the states, associations and citizens might actually be taken more seriously. Nevertheless, there is a very substantial difference between US presidentialism and a hypothetical European presidentialism. In the United States, the system is two-party, even if there is a relatively low – though growing – party voting and behavioural discipline. In European presidentialism, not only would the president be beholden for her/his election to the coalition of parties that nominated and supported her/him and mobilised enough people to conduct an evidently very complex, multi-national and multi-lingual campaign, but s/he would have to keep in close and constant contact with the various reference parties since the EP system would continue to be multi-party for an indefinite period of time. This would oblige the president to look for points of equilibrium closer to the preferences of the large majority of European voters.

Numerous proposals for systems with which to elect the President of Europe have been put forward and must be considered with attention.⁷ Technicalities will not be considered here, except for one. That is not to say that technicalities are not important, on the contrary, but with respect to the democratic legitimation of EU institutions, one seems to be of particular, if

⁷ Such as those proposed by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Fischer and by the former President of the European Commission Jacques Delors

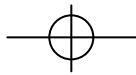


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not decisive importance, and is related to the involvement of citizens through political parties. The technicality concerns the presentation of candidates. Simon Hix has written about this with considerable and much appreciated institutional imagination and it is on his observations that the following comments are based.⁸ In order to avoid folkloristic candidatures, the European electoral law should establish that candidates must have the support of at least five parties present in five different EU countries. To avoid the risk of populism – which may be slightly exaggerated – the electoral system should be a simple, but decisive two-round competition as in France: the first round can be won with 50 percent plus one vote of the popular vote, but if no candidate achieves this, only the two candidates with the most votes go on to the second round so that the winner receives a majority of the popular vote in any case. Furthermore, as the recent upheaval in the French elections showed, this system makes it possible to remedy situations produced by party leaders and voters and gives the latter the time to reflect and effectively cast a strategic vote.

As for democratic legitimation on the input side, regarding the choice of candidate(s), the electoral campaign and the gathering of votes, national and European parties will play the most important role in visibly and explicitly conferring legitimation upon the person elected and mobilizing the citizens. Attention will, therefore, have to be shifted to the parties during the long electoral period. It will have to remain fixed on them during the period of parliamentary representation and government – even in a presidential system – and go back to them and the authorities (parliament and, above all, the president) when all return to the polls. This return, which constitutes democratic legitimacy on the output side, is often underestimated. Instead, it is crucial for democratic legitimation in that it closes the circle of accountability. The members of parliament, the parties, but also and especially the elected and re-electable president must not only remember that they promised to take account of the preferences of their voters, but above all they have the duty to be accountable to their voters for what they have done, done poorly, or failed to do. Well organised, representative parties, present throughout the territory will have acted during the course of the legislature as intermediaries between an electorate that inevitably changes, even in its preferences, and its representatives and the government. This will make it easier both for the representatives and the government to account for their activity and at the same time for democratic citizens to

⁸ S. Hix, Elections, "Parties and Institutional Design: A Comparative Perspective on European Union Democracy", *West European Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1998, pp. 19-52. See also the article by Hix in this issue, p. 49.



carry out their task of assessing the system, the institutions, and the authorities.

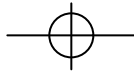
This brings us to output. There is obviously no point in undertaking reforms that may give the institutions greater democratic legitimacy if the outcome is institutions that are certainly more legitimate but unable to make those decisions that, on the one hand, increase the citizens' sense of belonging to the Union and, on the other, visibly improve the quality of their life. Since responsibility and the ability to self-regulate are two fundamental principles of democratic theory, we have to believe that, because they would be legitimated by procedures that allow for and encourage the participation and control of the electorate, the new European institutions would be able to meet voters' demands ... or would change the authorities and reform themselves and their ways of functioning.

Tentative conclusions

Any conclusion on the democratic legitimacy of the European Union cannot but be and remain tentative. In fact, much depends, on the one hand, on the political power of the institutional reformers and, on the other, on the institution from which the reform process will begin. Thus, constitutional review mechanisms will be needed that are both sufficiently rigid to prevent extemporary majorities from pushing through contingent and occasional reforms and sufficiently flexible to allow all new arrangements to be changed if they turn out to be inadequate.

But before going on, one preliminary objection that is persistently brought up must first be swept aside: the objection is that all reforms will have to go in the direction already taken. Consequently, in accordance with this objection, the intergovernmental circuit must be given priority and objectives must be limited. In a certain sense, the most limited objective would be a slow shift of powers from the Council to the EP and the Commission, with a corresponding strengthening of the relations between the Parliament and the Commission. But even in this prospect of cautious neo-parliamentarism, the measures mentioned above and, even more, the granting to the Commission of the power to dissolve parliament would imply a break with the past. Therefore, if an improvement in democratic legitimation and government powers is going to involve a break in any case, then the neo-presidential model, however conceived, seems to offer greater potential and, above all, encourages the citizens' incisive participation.

Basically, the problem underlined here is in some ways also a solution or at least the beginning of a solution. While waiting for the expansion of European public opinion to lead to the emergence of a European demos, we



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should not forget that where these processes have been successful, the political parties have always played a large, sometimes decisive role. Thus, the democratic legitimation of European institutions requires a revitalisation at the European level and an increased role for political parties, open political competition involving the citizens, and an informed and demanding citizenship that penalises and rewards according to its knowledge and preferences. There can be no doubt that the preferences of that citizenship would go towards parsimonious, transparent and sensitive institutional circuits. Such circuits seem to be easier to put in place and govern by means of a (neo-)presidential model, but the debate is still open and for some time, though not forever, should remain that way.

