

Course: GV251

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Week 10: The 'Democratic Deficit' debate

PART I) Debate

Motion: “This house believes that there is a serious democratic deficit in the EU”.

(a) While listening to the speakers, please note down the main arguments that you hear in support of and against the ‘democratic deficit’ thesis. Which additional arguments would you bring up?

Arguments in favour of the ‘deficit’ thesis	Arguments against the ‘deficit’ thesis

(b) Your reaction to the debate:

- 1. What did you think of each team's argumentation in favour of the position that they had to defend? Is there anything else that you would have brought up?**

- 2. What did you think of each team's responses to the points made by the other side? Is there anything else that you would have added?**

- 3. In the end, do you think that there is a "serious democratic deficit" in the EU?**

PART II) Gobbets

Consider the following extracts from different texts about the democratic deficit, and answer questions (a) and (b) for each of the extracts.

- (a) Try to identify the author of the extract among the options listed in the box at the bottom of the exercise.**
- (b) How would the author of the extract respond to the particular question raised above the extract? What are your own views on this question?**

- 1. In the absence of a European *demos*, can the EU ever be democratic?**

"The preamble to the US Constitution of 1787 opens with the celebrated lines: 'We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union... do ordain and establish this

Constitution for the United States of America. At that time, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the former English colonies considered themselves, first and foremost, Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, or New Englanders. Madison's 'invention' of an American People, distinct from, and superior to, the peoples of the separate thirteen states, was a decisive conceptual innovation in the struggle to replace the Articles of Confederation by a strong federal constitution. [...]

To many of Madison's contemporaries, the idea of an American People to whom belonged the constituent power appeared a myth contrived for political purposes. At least, the myth had some plausibility: a common language; legal systems derived from, and still very much influenced by, English common law; similar political and administrative systems at state level; a fairly homogeneous population, largely of English, Scottish, or Irish stock; above all, a war fought together for eight years against the former colonial power.

None of these conditions is even remotely approached in contemporary Europe. [...] Whether we like it or not, the EU remains, to speak with Madison, a 'government over governments, a legislation for communities'. In such a system, the notions of popular sovereignty and popular representation, and hence the idea of direct democratic legitimation, are highly problematic."

Author: _____

2. Does the system of *Spitzenkandidaten* have the potential to transform European Parliament elections into genuinely European contests?

2(i) "Democratic contestation, in terms of trans-national alignments and coalitions along left-right lines have started to emerge in both the EU Council and the EP. What is still missing, though, is the connection between these developments and the divisions in the EU's society at large, in terms of the potential winners and losers of potential policy agendas. This may not even require fundamental reform of the EU treaties. All that may be needed is for the political elites to make a commitment to open the door to more politicization of the EU agenda, for example via a battle for the Commission President, with governments and national and European parties backing different candidates and policy platforms."

2(ii) "The deliberative democratic critique of the EU rests on the curious premise that the creation of more opportunities for direct participation or public deliberation would automatically generate a deeper sense of political community in Europe. [...]"

Even if increased participation were desirable, it is unlikely to occur. European voters do not fully exploit their current opportunities to participate in existing European elections. Research suggests that this is not, as the deliberative critique implies, because they believe that their

participation is ineffective or that institutions like the EP are unimportant. Institutions are not the problem. One is forced to conclude that it is because they do not care. Why are they apathetic? The most plausible reason for apathy is that the scope of EU regulatory activity tends to be inversely correlated with the importance of issues in the minds of European voters.

To transform the EU into an active participatory democracy, it would be necessary to give Europeans a far greater stake in creating new political cleavages based on self-interest, as occurred historically in past episodes of democratisation. Amongst the most plausible proposals of this kind is that by Philippe Schmitter of the European University Institute, who proposes that agricultural support and structural funds should be replaced with a guaranteed minimum income for the poorest third of EU citizens, a reform of welfare systems so as not to privilege the elderly, and a shift in power from national citizens to immigrants. [...] Such schemes would surely succeed in 'democratising' the EU, but only at the expense of its further existence."

Author of extract 2(i): _____

Author of extract 2(ii): _____

3. Does the democratic deficit lie at the root of the EU's crisis of legitimacy?

"Democratic political competition can produce a mandate for policy change. A mandate involves the public recognition of the winners of a political contest. On the one hand, the politician or political coalition that emerges victorious from a contest is recognized by the public as having the right to try their policy agenda. On the other hand, the politicians and their supporters on the losing side accept that they have lost, for the time being, and so are willing to allow the other side to govern. This is crucial for what political scientists call 'losers' consent': where the losers of a political contest peacefully accept the outcome rather than engaging in obstruction, protest, or even violence. Without a mandate, the losers of a contest or from a particular set of policies have an incentive to challenge the outcome. But, if a mandate does emerge, any challenge by the losers is deemed illegitimate and will cost them popular support."

Author: _____

4. Would a politicisation of the Commission affect its ability to act credibly as ‘Guardian of the Treaties’?

“In fact, many European parliamentarians [...] continue to believe that the Commission should be a neutral institution, and that the members of the college should forget their party affiliations, if any. This belief was apparently shared by Commission President Romano Prodi when he presented his new team to the Parliament on July 21, 1999. On this occasion he said: ‘This new college... provides a fair balance between the political complexion of the national governments and the European Parliament, and I welcome this. But let us be clear. The Commission does not function along party lines. The Commission is a college and Commissioners are no more extensions of political groups than they are representatives of national governments.’ Although this statement is actually contradicted by the increasing politicization of the Commission, it does represent an orthodox interpretation of the original Community model.”

Author: _____

- I. **Giandomenico Majone** (2005). *Dilemmas of European integration: the ambiguities and pitfalls of integration by stealth*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. (2 extracts)
- II. **A. Follesdal and S. Hix** (2006). “Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik”. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44(3)./ **S. Hix and B. Høyland** (2011). *The Political System of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (2 extracts)
- III. **A. Moravcsik** (2008). “The European Constitutional Settlement”. *The World Economy* 31(1). (1 extract)