

"Babeş-Bolyai" University Cluj-Napoca

Faculty of History and Philosophy

Doctoral School of International Relations and European Studies

PhD Thesis

**The Influence of Electoral Systems on
Democracy in the European Union**

Supervisor:

Prof. Univ. Dr. Vasile Vese

PhD Candidate:

Claudiu Marian

Cluj-Napoca

2011

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction 4

CHAPTER 2

European Union player in the International System 14

Introduction 14

From nation-states to a supranational arrangement 16

Post-Lisbon EU 19

Influence and consistency 26

Internal influence 32

External influence 33

Weaknesses of the EU - Internal problems 34

EU-German relations in the context of the Greek crisis 42

Where will the EU enlargement stop? 45

Conclusions 49

CHAPTER 3

The European Union as a democratic political system 52

Democracy and its principles 53

Separation of powers vs. quadripartite structure 58

The quadripartite structure at European level 63

The EU Council 66

The functions, structure and preparation of Council deliberations bodies 69

The European Commission vs. National Executive 73

National executives 73

The European Commission 75

The European Parliament vs. national legislature 81

National legislature 81

The European Parliament 83

The European Court of Justice 92

Additional institutions in the Community 93

The European Parliament elections and democratic deficit 96

CHAPTER 4

Electoral systems in democratic political systems 106

I. The importance of elections and electoral systems for the existence of a democratic system
108

II. Electoral systems - components and concepts 111

1. The constituency 112

2. The district magnitude 114

3. The structure of the ballot 117

4. Assembly Size 118

5. The threshold 120

6. The electoral Formula 123

III. Electoral systems used in the European Parliament elections in the 27 EU Member States
151

IV. Conclusion 162

CHAPTER 5

The democratic deficit – experiences in consolidated democracies and possible solutions for
the European Union 165

Operationalizing the democratic deficit 168

Justification of assumptions 175

Research design: cases, method, data, questions, variables 178

Operationalisation of variables 181

Democratic Satisfaction: national vs. Europe 185

Discussions about politics 196

Confidence in Institutions 202

Determinants of democratic satisfaction 214

Model 1: The dynamics at the individual level 214

Activity in the European Parliament and democratic satisfaction 224

The presence in Parliament 225

The degree of cohesion 228

Loyalty of MEPs towards their country 232

Activity in the EP and satisfaction with democracy 234

Conclusions 237

CONCLUSIONS 240

BIBLIOGRAPHY 246

Key words:

European Union, democratic deficit, electoral systems, elections, European elections, democracy, Romania, European Parliament, participation, democratic satisfaction, international relations, magnitude, district, electoral formula, electoral threshold.

The importance of the electoral process for a democratic political system is essential. We cannot talk about democracy in the absence of free and fair elections in which voters can choose between real competing options. This last element makes the difference between totalitarian systems, many of which organize regular purely formal elections, with the winners known before, and democratic systems. In classical political theory, the concept of political system is almost perfectly overlapped with the state in its modern sense. We illustrate various elements of a political system and their relations between them by looking at the head of a state, the relations between parliaments and governments, the types of parties and their behavior, electoral systems in their constitutions or legal systems. The second half of the XXI century has brought, however, two apparently contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, modern states gained strength and have become ever more relevant, as colonial empires and the powers that persisted even after the First World War disappeared. On the other hand, supranational structures, which have arisen as a result of voluntary actions of sovereign states, have become increasingly common worldwide, with a predominant regional character. The best known and most important structure of this kind is the European Union. Founded after the Second World War, aimed at creating a climate conducive to cooperation among Western European powers and to prevent another devastating conflict between them, the Union has reached today, after more than 50 years of existence, a degree of integration unprecedented for another organization of such kind. Similar organizations in other regions exist: the African Union, ASEAN or NAFTA, but all of them are either at the beginning of their development or have maintained a purely economic nature. The European Union differs from them by the incomparable degree political integration within it, the European institutional framework being unique due to the depth of issues addressed by many institutions and their functions.

Given these factors, which will later be detailed, it seems appropriate, during this thesis, to treat the EU as a political system in itself. One of the key elements that determine this approach is the existence of the European Parliament, directly elected by citizens of member states since 1979. Although the powers of the European Parliament, in comparison with other crucial decision-making institutions of the Union – the European Commission and the Council of the European Union - were lower, they have steadily increased with the evolution of the EU's institutional framework, namely with each new EU treaty adopted; thus, under the auspices of the Lisbon Treaty, which is now the basis for its operation, the powers of Parliament have reached an unprecedented level. One might even say without exaggeration that the role of the European Parliament is now comparable to the fundamental role that

parliaments play in any democratic political system combined with a modern state. In this context, beyond its decision-making powers, the Parliament's symbolic value as an expression of democracy in the European political system is truly significant. Moreover, the way the representatives of citizens are elected in this forum becomes crucial in making it a topic worthy of substantial research.

The role of this thesis is to explore the relationship between electoral systems and satisfaction with democracy, the discussion being transposed in the context of the European Union. Although the formal framework within the Union is democratic, the last decades have witnessed an increase in the phenomenon coined as "democratic deficit". Moreover, beyond economic issues, controversies or occasional disputes between Member States or between their leaders, the democratic deficit appears to be the main threat to the existence or at least to the European Union's development, because it erodes the very foundations on which it was built. The manifestations of the democratic deficit are increasingly numerous and obvious: the referendums on European issues - whether we are talking about adopting the Euro, the Treaty of Nice or Lisbon Constitution - which failed in the past 10 years in countries like France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Ireland are the best example, but in the same category we may include the declining turnout in the European elections. In this context, we consider electoral systems, which Sartori labeled as the most easily manipulable public policy tool, as a key element in the attempt to understand and seek solutions to the problem of democratic deficit.

To achieve the proposed objective, this research needs to achieve a high degree of complexity and consideration of a multitude of issues relevant to the existence and size of the European Union, on the one hand, and political systems in general. From this perspective, this research is found at the intersection of areas of study that are rarely touched on simultaneously in theoretical research. In a random order, without giving more importance to one over the other dimensions, this research addresses the deeper issue of electoral systems as the key to the existence of any democratic political system, thus seemingly falling more in the scope of political science, but being equally relevant for European studies, by studying in detail the EU's institutional framework, using tools of statistical analysis to identify causal links between different variables and citizen satisfaction with democracy and does not avoid any realm of international relations, discussing the importance of the European Union as a global actor. All these elements make it unique and innovative research and its results contribute to the complexity and rigor of the analysis of the European Union as a whole, to improve the

knowledge that all those interested in European issues have gained on the basis of the existing literature.

This work has the advantage of combining these different areas of social science. Using statistical tools in an analytical approach that uses concepts and approaches, in essence, a subject which is often considered to fall within the sphere of international relations, is a sign of scientific progress and the depletion of dividing lines inertly rigid and often unjustified between political science, with its technical specificities, and international relations or history, which traditionally use other methodological tools that most of the times - and because a small number of empirical cases available to researchers – are limited to case studies or descriptive analysis of theoretical inferences. Therefore, no one can argue that through the use of comparisons - both between individuals and between countries - with a large number of cases requiring the application of statistical methods of analysis, this paper no longer belongs to the sphere of international relations. Rather, the reality in today's European Union requires an approach as complex as the macro level; separating institutional decisions from Europeans, would be a mistake often made even by European elites, hence the underlying problems facing the Union today, which are the starting point of this research.

Therefore, this study is extremely appropriate if we consider the situation of the European Union today. The democratic deficit is the fundamental problem that erodes the fabric of this structure, but the institutional context is also not conducive to its smooth running. In some respects, it can be said that the Union is still looking for a stable and consistent operating framework. The unprecedented expansion in the middle of the last decade, during which the EU has almost doubled its number of members, has raised significant challenges. For example, with the growing number of members, it has become increasingly difficult to apply the rule of consensus in decision making. Part of the new institutional issues would have been resolved by the Treaty for a European Constitution, but the failed referendums in Holland and France have led to abandon the project. Thus, the institutional reform of the Union was postponed for four years until the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Leaders of EU and Member States have refused to explicitly apply the label "European constitution" to this Treaty, although its goals were essentially the same. Although it eliminates a number of issues raised by the failed project, the Treaty of Lisbon came close to a similar fate after the Irish rejected it initially, but approved it in the second attempt, after a pattern identical to the case of the Nice Treaty.

Implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009 was seen as a success of diplomacy, especially given that the Eurosceptic leaders of Poland and the Czech Republic

were convinced the last minute to ratify it. However, in the first months of its implementation, the new provisions have resulted in confusion rather than resolving things. The newly created position of president of the European Council, attributed to former Belgian Prime Minister Herman van Rompuy, was meant to facilitate consensus among the powerful leaders of the Member States and to promote the aggregation of often divergent interests. There was, however, a negative effect on European leaders and the new institutional framework. The EU suddenly had one too many leaders. A few decades after U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger addressed the famous question, "Whom do I call if I want to talk to Europe?", the answer suddenly became more complicated than before the Treaty of Lisbon, because it became unclear who actually leads the Union: the new president of the European Council, the European Commission president, leader of the country holding the rotating presidency? Failure to answer that question resulted in a first unpleasant moment in the relationship between the European Union and the United States after President Barack Obama has refused to attend a summit of the country held by the rotating presidency in the first half of 2009, Spain, because of the large number of leaders that he had to meet, according to information circulated in the international press.

Another factor which has seriously affected the functioning of the European Union was the economic crisis that broke out in autumn 2008. In addition to the problems faced by almost every Member State, the worst situation was that of Greece, especially since this country was a member of the Eurozone. Greece's problems, on the verge of financial collapse, have resulted in an unprecedented mobilization of the other Member States. This episode has demonstrated, if proof were needed, the degree of interdependence between major economies, given particularly by the use of a single currency in 17 of the 27 states. "The burden" fell on the shoulders of Germany, which approved a loan to help the Greek economy significantly, with major domestic political risks for Chancellor Angela Merkel. Ireland found itself in a similar situation in the autumn of 2010; it was also forced to seek the assistance of the European Union. Paradoxically, the country that has twice impeded the European construction now depended on it for crucial help. The economic crisis and, moreover, the Eurozone's crisis determined the strong states of the Union, together with the European Commission, to raise the problem of revising the Treaty of Lisbon, in the sense of implementing additional control mechanisms, centralized budgets and expenditure limits for each Member State, in order to prevent future situations such as that of Greece. This proposal was received with suspicion in the large states that are not part of the Eurozone, like Britain or Poland. In addition, the question of creating separate decision-making bodies for the

Eurozone countries reopened the old discussion about a “two-speed Europe”. Although these debates are far from being completed and the economic crisis far from being over, it is already clear that the Union has emerged weakened from this episode.

A third factor which negatively impacts the existence of the European Union is represented by increasingly strong signals coming from major countries about the "failure of multiculturalism". Leaders from Germany, Britain, France and Italy recently spoke explicitly about the fact that immigrant integration policies have not delivered the expected results, arguing that societies are not more powerful and capable of ensuring a dialogue between cultures, but rather more weak and inconsistent. More concretely, there is a clear awareness of the fact that immigration has caused major divisions in Western societies. It is unclear what will be the political consequences of these statements, but there have been explicit references to the fact that immigrants should be forced to accept the culture and the state are set to accept integration into society, thus avoiding the creation of closed communities like the Turks in Germany or the Muslim minority in Britain.

These issues currently affecting the operation of the European Union each constitute a justification for carrying out this research, because any problem faced by the Union has a direct impact on Member States, but also its role in international relations. The Union's economic strength is undeniable; it represents an actor who can fight on an equal footing with U.S. and China. It is not surprising that the EU Member States have been in the last decades the main source of international migration. Politically and diplomatically, however, the Union is still looking for a clearly defined role. At a symbolic level, the Union has a significant baggage, because it has achieved the purpose for which it was created: to ensure peace on the European continent. However, it took more than 30 years for the national interests and pride of the Member States to be subsumed, at least in part, to a common foreign policy. Even after the Maastricht Treaty, however, the EU continued to speak with many voices in international relations. The pinnacle of the internal division within the Union on foreign policy was reached with the outbreak of the war in Iraq in 2003, when the Franco-German duo was unable to impose their point of view before the European partners and other important countries, such as Spain, Italy and in particular the United Kingdom, which joined the United States in their intervention against Saddam Hussein. The Lisbon Treaty sought to partially eliminate the risks of duplicitous speeches by merging the two posts of Commissioner responsible for foreign policy into one, in the person of the High Representative, the first being Baroness Catherine Ashton. However, the Union's capacity to act and react with one

voice has not significantly been improved, as the above mentioned the episode during the Spanish Presidency illustrates.

Therefore, the European Union is at a crucial moment of its existence, being faced with several challenges, both internally and externally. As we said at the outset, this context overlaps with the latent democratic deficit problem, which diminishes the legitimacy of key decisions taken by EU leaders, as the relationship between them and the citizens for whom these decisions are taken and who are directly affected by them, is deeply flawed. With the exception of occasional referenda in different Member States on European issues, the European Parliament elections, held every five years, the single form of expression for citizens is the European elections, through which they can send signals about their satisfaction with the progress of the Union European. The most accessible tool to assess their level of satisfaction is the importance they attach to the direct election of their representatives in the European Parliament; judging that the average turnout constantly decreased from the first elections in 1979, this is not very high.

The purpose of this paper is not to put out a clear and practical method of electing MEPs. On the contrary, it seeks to identify specific elements from the complexity of issues that make up an electoral system that promote citizen satisfaction with democracy. In order to achieve this objective, we will build on experiences of the Member States, bringing together both established democracies and newer democracies, rich states and states with a lower standard of living, parliamentary or presidential democracies, ethnically divided states and countries where inter-ethnic cooperation has a long tradition. We will also track and identify contextual factors relevant to any political system which induce satisfaction of citizens. Subsequently, transposing these findings to the young democratic political system represented by the European Union, we will seek to identify possible solutions for reducing the democratic deficit, which take into consideration both the electoral system and the context. We are not engaging in pointless identifying a unique electoral system. The European Union needs concrete and applicable solutions, not unnecessary efforts.

Therefore, the main research question of this thesis is:

How can the electoral system be used in the attempt to address the democratic deficit in the EU?

The paper also addresses a number of secondary research questions, each relating to the primary relationship between electoral systems and the democratic deficit:

How does confidence in the institutions impact the democratic deficit in a political system?

What contextual variables affect the citizen's satisfaction with democracy?

How does the MEPs performance impact the citizen's satisfaction with democracy?

What are the main challenges facing the European Union in its bid to become a strong player in the International System?

In order to both determine the importance of the EU on the international stage and to conduct the complex analysis of the importance of electoral systems in addressing the democratic deficit problem, the paper will have the following structure:

Chapter 2 deals with the European Union from a general perspective, discussing its position on the international scene, its relations with major powers like the U.S. and China, but also with a number of Member States which are in turn important international actors, such as Germany, France and Great Britain, the main challenges faced in recent history, particularly the crisis started in 2008 and the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty (the failed referendums in countries such as France, Netherlands and Ireland) and how the Union and its Member States responded to these challenges.

Chapter 3 will examine in detail the EU institutions, to illustrate the extremely complex structure and elements that differentiate it and that makes similar to a political system from a modern state. We will also consider the issue of the European elections, as they look today and the multitude of problems that make them only second order elections in the minds of citizens, and we make a first connection between the European elections and the electoral procedures used for electing MEPs and the democratic deficit.

In Chapter 4, we conduct a thorough insight into the world of electoral systems to reveal their importance for any democratic political system, the relationship between citizens and political elites, the numerous elements that make up an electoral system, the forms they can take and the impact that each of these elements may have on the outcome of elections and on how the political system evolves in the following years.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the statistical analysis. On the basis of existing theories and explanations in the literature, we derive complex models in order to identify which elements

of the electoral system and contextual factors promote citizen satisfaction with the quality of democracy in a political system. Based on this analysis, we indicate the directions in which the electoral politics within the EU may turn, this being the main element of interest of this thesis.

Finally, the last section of the paper is devoted to conclusions and possible directions for further analysis. The emphasis will be placed on the possibility to implement the conclusions of the analysis conducted in this work, in order to correct the problem of democratic deficit in the European Union.