Dipartimento di Scienze politiche   *Cattedra   Sociologia*

LOSS OF CITIZENS ' CONFIDENCE IN EU INSTITUTIONS:

DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT AND CIVIC EDUCATION

SUMMARY

RELATORE   CANDIDATO

Prof. Lorenzo De Sio   Federico Vitali

Matr. 068602

ANNO ACCADEMICO

2013-2014

The **chapter I ("European Union and Democratic Deficit")** presents the main meanings used for the locution democratic deficit, starting from the one adopted by D. Marquand (1979) to point out that the European Parlament (EP), being not directly elected by european citizens, disclosed limits of authority (in terms of electoral mandate). Furthermore, the political movement JEF *(Jeunes Européens Fédéralistes),* during the Berlin Convention in 1977, adopted its own manifesto in which was stressed throughout the "European continent" a "malaise", a sense of alienation and a lack of confidence in the economic and political institutions. Basically, the European citizens denounced the inadequacy of the policies to take into account people's needs, since they were not involved in the decision-making process that affected their own lives.

Another source is represented by the PE Glossary, where the expression "democratic deficit" (closely linked to the one of "governance") is defined as a lack of democratic legitimacy within the different EU Institutions, that show to be not accessible to citizens and so reducing their accountability.

Considering the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, the issue of the democratic legitimacy gained relevance during the European integration process. At a later stage, the Lisbon Treaty on one side increased the legislative and budget power of the EP in order to tighten up the control over the EC and, on the other, introduced the "right of initiative for EU citizens", so stepping up their participation in the EU decision-making process and legitimating the dialogue amongst EU institutions and civil society.

Also the Researchers of the House of Commons (UK) provides a meaningful contribution, stating that the criticalities of the UE democratic deficit are: limited Member States' powers (national sovereignty); not election of the EC as executive authority; poor influence of the EP in respect to Council and Commission; UE policies that appear not to be approved by the majority of citizens; the legislative role of the Court of Justice that, by contrary, should limit its action to the interpretation of the current laws; the predominance of the European legislation over the national one on "critical matters".

Therefore, the confidence in the European institutions appears to be an extremely up-to-date issue just considering, for example, the low turnout at the elections, the results of the referenda (showing the willingness of expressing anti-European feelings) and the poor exercising the vote rights/duty implied by the *citizenship*.

Amongst the key results of the Report "The EU Promise", realised by Eurobarometre - TNS Qual+ (2014) in Italy, Germany, Denmark, Portugal, Finland and Poland with the aim of surveying and understanding the feeling of citizens towards the EU,comes to light that the majority of the participants interviewed have first a national – than european - sense of belonging and of identity, and that a stronger economic cooperation and peace policy must in any case preserve national identities, differences and interests.

Further, with respect to the "UE democratic life" issue, participants evaluate as ineffective, not easily accessible and negative the information provided by media on the UE in general and on the elctions in particular, having contributed, by consequence, to make european citizens expressing a not fully aware vote.

These results support the thesis of J. Habermas, who beleives that the lack of confidence of European cititens in EU does not imply a xenophobic feeling or plan towards the other countries but, most of all (and positively), a willing to support the national legislative achievements. In order words Habermas thinks that what Europe is missing is not its own "community" but the trust of its citizens, that are not sure that being part of the european community represents a step forward the goal of a more free and fair society.

Nevertheless, the last survey of Eurobarometre *(Standard EB 81),* shows that the majority of European citizens have a positive feeling towards EU (34% of the interviews vs 26%). Also in the report of the survey realised by the Pew Research Center (2014, february) on a sample of 7.022 people, emerges that: "...*the euro crisis that began in 2008 dealt a savage blow to the image of the European Union. Between 2007 and 2013, EU favorability fell by 34 percentage points in Spain, 21 points in France and 20 points in Italy. But views of the EU and the European project may have begun to recover in the past year. Median EU favorability across the seven countries is up from 46% in 2013 to 52% in 2014, led by a 13-point improvement in French opinion. Median belief that European economic integration strengthens a person's national economy also increased, from 26% to 38%, driven by a 15-point increase in the UK and a 12-point rise in Poland.*"

Basically, results stress that it's not the idea of Europe and the integration process to be weakened by the crisis, but the institutions – Parliament, Commission, BCE – all judged as unsatisfactory (expect for Polish citizens).

The Chapter I ends with a short presentation of data referred to the turnout rates to the EP elections and to the referendum on the European Constitution. As far as EP elections turnout is considered, since 1979 up today it is recorded a steady decrease.

To sum up, the complexity of the enlargement process and of its history, the critical sequence of events regarding the adoption of a European Constitution and the analysis of time series of data on the elections turnout, contribute to feature and define the context within here are analysed the different EU visions; the function and the role that EU institutions (EP and EC first) should have; the priorities and strategies to be adopted to increase the active citizenship and the direct participation to the policy making process.

The democratic deficit, originally meant as a detachment between European institutions and National governments and progressive lack of national sovereignty and action of Member States on economic and social issues, in the last years has also acquired a meaning related to the sense of EU that citizens have, in terms of decreased legitimacy and accountability.

In the ISPI Report "Euroscetticismi e democrazia" (2013), it is underlined as all over Europe the discontent towards who managed the economic crisis - in a unsatisfactory way and producing dramatic consequences for the citizens (about twenty millions of unemployed, for example) - can be traced, even if with different motivations and intensity. Elements of conflict pro and against EU can be find inside the same government coalitions and national political parties; the creation of movements different from "traditional parties" is everywhere.

To provide an idea of the differences inside the same Eurosceptic movements and parties all over Europe, the **chapter II ("Present and future of EU: scenarios, perspectives and visions")** gives an overview of the specific political positions, country by country. Then, in the chapter are presented two possible scenarios.

The **first** focuses the interest and effort of the citizens towards the social, political and economic aspects of their own country, asking their governments not to concede additional sovereignty to EU institutions. The **second** is about the transformation - in the short-medium term – of the Eurosceptic pressures in approaches and behaviors that have been defined as "critical pragmatic Europeanism".

The two proposed scenarios – matching the options presented by Martin Schulz – share a basic aspect: it is necessary for national governments and European institutions, to make a choice. Further, in M.Schulz's opinion, to state that Europe suffers from a democratic deficit (dd) does not imply the sharing of the anti-European and Eurosceptic positions: the "dd" is traceable mainly within the relations among Parliament and Commission and national governments. His point of view – as ex President of EP – leads him to stress the marginalization of the abovementioned European institutions by the side of State and Government Heads, since there are inclined to take decisions within bilateral Summits (J. Habermas calls it "a model of post-democratic power").

In addition to this view of a democratic deficit traceable inside the relations inter and infra institutions, throughout the Thesis has been presented a different and parallel perspective. That is, the one of a "dd" that can be found in the progressive "inability" of the Bruxelles institutions to effectively represent the citizens' needs and interests (and so not considering them as mere "*taxpayers*").

Another contribution supporting the "critical-pragmatic Europeanism" against the fragmentation, comes from the considerations that A. Manzella presents when analyzing the composition and structure chosen by Junker for the European Commission. So, if the "critical-pragmatic Europeanism" will be the prevailing scenario, it means that a new balance between a reinforced economic integration, national sovereignty and democratic policy will be found. It is evident that to a stronger economic integration would necessarily correspond a progressive transfer of sovereignty, and this fact will be acceptable only if the real and perceived levels of democracy will be safeguarded, guaranteed and increased.

To conclude, the formula of making-taking decisions within bilateral Summits appears not to be feasible, since it is in contrast with the principles of solidarity, equal opportunities and process transparency, that should characterize the expected democratic boost.

Chapter III **("To cope with democratic deficit in EU: a key role for the education process")** approaches the main focus of the Thesis, that is the existence of a link among democratic deficit and the weakness or inadequacy of the education and information

offer. Obviously this link it's only one of the possible interpretations of the "dd" phenomenon, chosen with reference to a few considerations supported by the literature.

The hypothesis here proposed is that the opportunity for citizens to influence EU developments, (e.g. a stronger role of the EP or of the European Citizens' right of initiative) depends also on a stronger citizens' engagement, that is possible if they have adequate awareness of what the EU is, what it does and how it functions.

To begin, is necessary to highlight that the majority of EU citizens do not understand (or know) the working modalities of European institutions: roles, competences and decision making processes. Over the 70% of the EU population believes inadequate or poor the basic information hold about EU (Report of the survey "Public Opinion in the European Union"). The report also stresses that amongst the Young aged 14 y.o. only the 35% knows who elects the EP members.

So, the request for the development and increase of participation and awareness can be matched strengthening the education process and, in particular, the learning of contents related to citizenship education. Contents that cannot be restricted to the ones generally implied in the curricula of civic education.

As a matter of fact, for citizenship education is meant aspects of the compulsory education – but also of the tertiary one – aimed at making students become active citizens through the acquisition of civic competences as: knowledge of the society and of the social and political movements; the European integration process and EU structures; the main – present and past – social turning outs.

In general, all over Europe, the EU is taught within the didactic curricula of the general civic or citizenship education. The education to citizenship is implied in the school timetable of all EU countries and could be provided as a specific subject or within another subject, as a "cross-curricular one". However there are relevant differences from country to country about the specific European issues that should be transferred during the curricular hours focused on civic education and active citizenship.

For example, the role, the competences, the relationships and the functioning of European institutions – that should be considered key contents, useful to understand the

decision making process of EU – are very often overlooked, for the benefit of more basic geographical or historical information.

A second aspect tracing the difference among MS concerns the competences of the teachers that should transfer these contents.

A third aspect to reflect on – again marking a difference – is the availability and quality of the didactic devices supporting the teaching of EU contents and issues. At this regard, it is necessary to mention that the most of experimentations and pilot projects contributing to the design and development of the didactic tools have been co-funded by the EC, and that these tools are still today meaningful to challenge the criticalities that have been stressed throughout this Thesis.

At this point, the chapter III provides a short analysis of two EU Programmes (Jean Monnet and Citizens for Europe) that have influenced and supported the education systems of MS, especially because they are strongly focused also on the integration of the European dimension inside the national education and training curricula, promoting transnational cooperation and networks at school and tertiary levels (in addition, both the programmes have fostered the EC initiative "Learning Europe at School).

Throughout Europe hundreds of interventions and projects have been promoted by Schools, Universities, Local Administrations, Citizens Associations and Voluntary organisations that have acquired competences and developed tools useful in their working context and for their institutional mission. In general are projects extremely focused on the production of tangible results: training modules, didactic tools, websites, video and multimedia outputs.

Finally, in **chapter IV** are presented the **"Conclusions".**

First, considering education as essential to become a responsible citizens, it is necessary to set up a system promoting the networking between good schooling, university and research in order to foster an effective school-work transition.

Second, if such scheme or framework is highly desirable , each country should look at goals and objectives and, therefore, build policies using right and effective methods to overcome criticalities and to achieve expected results. The most relevant are:

1. **policies and strategies must be designed according to strong analysis of available or "ad hoc" collected evidences**, considering alternatives, options, different scenarios, and related strengths and weaknesses;
2. **the voices of users** must be seriously considered in defining expected objectives;
3. **indicators and benchmarks must be described and quantified in order to improve accountability of government and governance action;**
4. **action planning and timetable must be under a continuous monitoring and evaluation process,** not only considering summative or administrative aims, but also to learn lessons, to make the implemented processes visible and traceable, and to be more prepared to face and cope with rapid social and economic changes.

Starting from these principles, two specific focuses have been chosen.

The **first** concerns that the quality level of education contexts must be particularly high within pre and primary school, since the good start of processes aimed at creating identities, values, principles and "landmarks" is, on one side a right of all citizens and, on the other, the main condition to properly develop competences of citizenship and aware participation. It's not by chance that the analysis made on the state of art of "EU learning at school" shows that – at least in our country – the most innovative and numerous experiences are traced in pre, primary school and lower secondary education.

The **second** concerns the accessibility to education opportunities. It has been stressed that the need to increase citizenship competences must be first met within compulsory education (the sooner the better): it is advisable, in fact, that the themes referred to as "EU contents", should be approached during those education curricula – as the ones of primary school - where it is easier and necessary the transfer of values and principles grounding the European social model (tolerance, democracy, civil rights, respect, equality, etc.).

As a matter of fact, if the assertion of the citizenship right – and first of all of the European citizenship – is influenced and related to the acquisition of specific knowledge and values, the dropping out from education contexts of a still too high rate of young European, implies that, on one side this young miss the chance to gain these competences and, on the other, the community loses citizens aware that participation is not only a right but also a duty.