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Fernand Dehousse: his life, thought and role in the birth of the European Parliament

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Introduction

The European project is experiencing a phase of distress, characterized by an acute lack of institutional boldness and a scarcity of the creative governance ideas that once defined its inception. This period of stagnation leaves the European Union vulnerable to significant pressures on two fronts: internally, the Union is increasingly strained by the growing political power of Eurosceptic forces that challenge the very foundations of supranational cooperation; externally, it faces a geopolitical landscape where several global actors aim at dismantling or fragmenting European integration to serve their own strategic interests. In this climate, debates about the future of European integration often oscillate between calls for renationalisation and proposals for deeper political union, revealing a persistent uncertainty about the institutional and democratic direction of the Union. Yet, the present moment is not entirely without precedent. The formative decades of European integration were themselves marked by competing visions, institutional experimentation, and unresolved tensions between sovereignty and supranational authority. Revisiting the intellectual and political trajectories of actors who operated within that formative environment allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these tensions were originally articulated and negotiated.

Among them, Fernand Dehousse occupies a distinctive position. Long overlooked in much of the historiography of European integration, he was an active and wit contributor to the debates that shaped the parliamentary and federal dimensions of the European political project. Examining the political imagination of figures such as Dehousse enables a historically informed perspective from which contemporary institutional challenges can be more critically framed.

A Belgian jurist, socialist, and statesman, Dehousse was not merely a witness to early integration but a primary architect of its democratic institutions. His characteristic lies in his unique ability to synthesize the rigors of international law with the radical ambitions of European federalism. Among his contemporaries, some of which favoured purely technocratic or intergovernmentalist solutions, Dehousse recognized early on that a united Europe could only survive if it were anchored in popular legitimacy and pan-European democracy. Since the 1950s, he was involved in developing plans for a new institutional governance for Europe, and was the driving force behind the 1960 report on direct elections to the European Parliament. His work represents one of the first serious attempt to transform

a consultative assembly of national delegates into a sovereign house of the people. Studying Dehousse today helps providing the missing institutional and governance answers required to navigate the current crisis, as his thought offers a blueprint for balancing executive efficiency with democratic accountability. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *whether, and to what extent, Fernand Dehousse's political thought has shaped the development of the European Parliament and continues to offer relevant insights for understanding its democratic role within the European Union?*

The relevance of this study is rooted in the need to provide new and disruptive answers to the current geopolitical and institutional distress suffered by the European Union, which lacks the bold structural answers necessary to secure its future. By examining the political imagination of one of the primary contributors to European development, this research seeks to bridge the gap between historical precedent and contemporary needs. Furthermore, this thesis holds significant academic relevance as it constitutes the first comprehensive study on the life and thought of Fernand Dehousse carried out in the English language. By introducing his ideas to a wider audience, this research places Dehousse within the broader academic discourse over the history of European integration and the development of European Union's (EU) studies, filling a notable gap in a historiography that has previously overlooked his central role in favour of better-known figures such as Monnet, Schuman, or Spaak.

To achieve this, the thesis puts the political thought of Dehousse in constant dialogue with relevant literature on European integration. It analyzes the tensions between intergovernmentalists and supranationalists in early European history, utilizing the pioneering works of Alan Milward (1992) and Andrew Moravcsik (1998,2002) to understand the state-centric resistance Dehousse encountered, while contrasting them with the neofunctionalist perspectives of Ernst Haas (1958,1961) and the historical synthesis provided by Desmond Dinan (2011). The study further engages with Berthold Rittberger's analysis of the creation and empowerment of the European Parliament (2003,2005) and Kiran Klaus Patel's historiography on how the EU became "Europe" (2015,2020). To address the institutional mechanics of the European Union, the research incorporates the theories of Müller Gómez, Wessels, and Wolters on inter-institutional power struggles (2019). Furthermore, the work examines Dehousse's federalist democratic legacy against the backdrop of democratic legitimacy theories, comparing it with Giandomenico Majone's regulatory state (2014) and Fritz Scharpf's distinction between input and output legitimacy (1999). By placing

Dehousse's procedural breakthroughs in conversation with Jürgen Habermas's normative calls for transnational democracy (2015) and the invisible constitution theories of Antje Wiener (2008,2009), this study highlights how Dehousse's revolutionary pragmatism sought to resolve the democratic deficit long before it became a central theme of contemporary European political science.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopts a qualitative, historical-institutionalist approach. It relies on extensive primary source analysis, such as fundamental treaties in the history of European integration like the Rome Treaty, the Maastricht Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, the Nice Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty, the Treaty of Bruxelles and the Treaty of Luxembourg. Moreover, the study refers directly to Fernand Dehousse's discourses and work through the Fernand Dehousse Digital Archives at the European University Institute, which include his private correspondence, radio lectures, meetings's transcripts and official reports. The study also utilizes a comparative framework, evaluating Dehousse's mid-century proposals against the platforms of contemporary federalist actors to trace the evolution of federalist thought from the post-war era to the present day.

The temporal scope of this study is deliberately expansive in order to capture both the origins and the long-term legacy of Fernand Dehousse's thought. While the analysis focuses primarily on the pivotal decades between 1945 and 1975, tracing Dehousse's trajectory from the 1948 Hague Congress to his leadership within the European Parliamentary Assembly, the thesis also provides a comprehensive account of his biography (1906–1976). Beyond this core period, the study examines the subsequent evolution of European integration and European Union institutions up to the present day. Particular attention is given to the ways in which the institutional foundations advocated by Dehousse were reshaped through the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, and Lisbon. Finally, the thesis offers a contemporary comparative perspective, assessing Dehousse's original federalist project in light of current political movements and initiatives, including the European Movement International, the Union of European Federalists, and the pan-European party Volt Europa. Taken together, this approach results in a chronological framework spanning more than a century, from 1906 to 2026.

This broad chronological framework explicitly situates Fernand Dehousse's thought within the major interpretative paradigms of European integration. The study engages with Liberal Intergovernmentalism, as developed by Andrew Moravcsik and Alan Milward, with

neofunctionalism and supranational institutionalism as articulated by Ernst Haas and further elaborated by scholars such as Stone Sweet and Sandholtz, and with subsequent institutional and legitimacy-oriented analyses advanced by authors including Berthold Rittberger, Kiran Klaus Patel, Giandomenico Majone, Fritz Scharpf, Antje Wiener, and Jürgen Habermas. Rather than adopting one theoretical model over another, the study uses Dehousse's political and institutional activity as a historically grounded lens through which to reassess these frameworks, particularly in relation to the democratic dimension of integration.

The figure of Dehousse is approached in this thesis as analytically relevant for a double reason. First, his European political trajectory provides a privileged insight into the intellectual and political mindset of a member of the generation of European integration. Through his writings, proposals, and institutional initiatives, it becomes possible to reconstruct how an early federalist actor conceived the European project, which problems he sought to address, and which institutional solutions he considered viable. In this sense, Dehousse serves as a primary actor within the integration arena, not merely as an observer but as a contributor to the design of European governance. Second, the study of his thought offers a critical framework for contemporary reflection. By revisiting his proposals on parliamentary empowerment, federal institutional balance, and democratic legitimacy, the thesis re-evaluates current debates on European reform in light of earlier federalist imaginaries. Dehousse's work thus functions both as a historical reminder of the ambitions and constraints of early integration and as a normative reference point through which present-day proposals for European governance can be assessed, compared, and potentially reimagined. In this dual capacity, his figure allows the enduring debate on European integration to be examined simultaneously from its origins and from the perspective of today's institutional challenges.

The structure of the thesis reflects these objectives through an in-depth three-part analysis. Chapter 1 provides an extensive political biography of Dehousse, situating him within the specific intellectual and social climate of 20th-century Belgium. It examines the influence of his mentor, Ernest Mahaim, and his collaboration with Paul-Henri Spaak, while detailing how his early activism in the Walloon movement and the Ligue d'Action Wallonne shaped his convictions regarding federalism as a tool for both national and supranational organization. This chapter grounds his European thought in his practical experiences as a socialist

international lawyer and evaluates the early theoretical tug-of-war between intergovernmental and supranational visions of Europe.

Moreover, the chapter gives an introduction to early European integration in the post-world war two framework, by placing particular attention to how the European-American relations shaped the institutional building of the European Communities. Finally, the chapter introduces the theoretical doctrines of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, by framing them in the European institutions' building context. This theoretical framework aims at introducing Dehousse's thought in a broader academic literature and to analyse the different political and institutional paths under discussion during the early days of European integration.

Chapter 2 directly engages with Fernand Dehousse's institutional imagination and policy proposals, focusing on his concrete contributions to the architecture of the European Community. It offers a detailed analysis of the drafting of the European Political Community Treaty of 1953 and of the landmark Report Dehousse of 1960. These texts are examined as political manifestos that sought to democratize the European project along federalist lines. As the core chapter of the study, this section provides a systematic analysis of Dehousse's political thought and his proposals for an integrated and democratic European Community, with particular emphasis on the role of Parliament within the institutional framework he envisioned.

The chapter further explores the developments that led to the first direct elections to the European Parliament by universal suffrage in 1979. By comparing these institutional outcomes with Dehousse's original proposals, the thesis highlights both continuities and divergences between his federalist vision and the subsequent reality of the European Parliament. Finally, the chapter situates Dehousse in a normative dialogue with Jürgen Habermas, contrasting their respective conceptions of popular sovereignty and constitutionalism. This comparison interrogates whether Dehousse's procedural emphasis on direct elections constitutes a more practicable route to democratic legitimacy than contemporary deliberative models. Through this dialogue, Dehousse's theory of federalist democracy in Europe is assessed against one of the most influential modern scholars of European political theory.

Chapter 3 evaluates the enduring legacy of Fernand Dehousse's thought within the contemporary structure of the European Union, with particular attention to the development of the European Parliament. It traces the Parliament's institutional evolution following the first direct elections of 1979 through the successive treaty reforms (Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, and Lisbon) which gradually expanded its powers, albeit not fully in the manner envisioned by Dehousse. The chapter addresses the problem of the contemporary "democratic deficit" by interpreting it through the lens of Dehousse's original federalist proposals.

Furthermore, the chapter situates Dehousse's solutions to the democratic deficit in dialogue with those advanced by other prominent scholars, including Moravcsik, Majone, Fabbrini, and Scharpf. It then assesses whether Dehousse's ideas for a supranational and democratic Europe continue to resonate within present-day discourses on European integration. By analysing the statutes, policy platforms, and institutional reform proposals advanced by contemporary actors such as the European Movement International, the Union of European Federalists, and Volt Europa, the thesis conducts a comparative assessment between Dehousse's mid-twentieth-century federal proposals and present-day reform agendas. This comparison makes it possible to identify both continuities and divergences in the understanding of parliamentary empowerment, supranational institutional balance, and democratic legitimacy. In doing so, the study does not merely assert the contemporary relevance of Dehousse's thought, but concretely evaluates how far current reform initiatives reflect, reinterpret, or depart from the federal-democratic framework he articulated.

The thesis concludes through an evaluation of Dehousse's work in light of current EU integration debates, assessing his work's influence in current political and associational activities. The thesis argues that Fernand Dehousse's advocacy for a democratic and supranational Europe not only had a tangible impact on the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament, but also exerted a long lasting influence that remains relevant still today. The boldness, pragmatism, and conviction with which Dehousse defended his ideas constitute a significant legacy for contemporary political programmes seeking to modernise European governance in a federalist direction. Finally, the fact that not all of Dehousse's proposals were ultimately realised serves as a reminder of the plurality of voices that have shaped the evolving project of European integration, and of the reality that Europe, while not an accident of history, remains an unfinished project that demands, now as before, political imagination and institutional solutions.

1. Contextualizing Fernand Dehousse

The twentieth century confronted European societies with an unprecedented concentration of political, social, and institutional transformations. Two world wars, the crisis of liberal democracy, the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, and the progressive construction of supranational forms of governance profoundly reshaped the political landscape of the continent. Within this rapidly changing environment, individual actors did not merely adapt to historical circumstances but, in certain cases, actively contributed to redefining the frameworks within which political life was organised.

It is within this dynamic interaction between individual trajectories and broader historical forces that the life of Fernand Dehousse must be situated. A jurist, politician, and committed European federalist, Dehousse developed his intellectual and political activity at the intersection of national and supranational debates that were central to twentieth-century Europe. To better understand such an eventful life, it must be contextualised within his era: Belgium and Europe in the 20th century.

This study contextualises Dehousse's life by analysing it in relation to the European integration process, the history of the European project at the time of Dehousse's work, and the main intellectual European *milieu* active during his time. The first chapter is therefore divided into three subsections.

First, this chapter provides a political biography of Fernand Dehousse, following a linear and chronological reconstruction from his formative years to his intellectual and political maturity. Rather than offering a comprehensive biographical portrait, the focus is placed on those aspects of his life and career that are directly relevant to his engagement with European integration. We will focus particularly on the personal encounters that Fernand Dehousse had in his life, with individuals such as Ernest Mahaim, Georges Truffaut and Paul-Henri Spaak. We believe that understanding the people an author meets and is influenced by during their life is of the utmost importance for fully understanding the meaning of their intellectual activity, especially if they have dedicated their life to such an endeavour.

The second subchapter deals with the history of European integration at the time of Dehousse’s work. This section will also be treated as a 'biography' of the European integration process from 1945 to 1975, during which time Dehousse was politically active in shaping it. A chronological explanation of the European integration process will help us better

understand Dehousse's political endeavours by contextualising them. However, the sub-chapter not only seeks to give an chronological account of the early European integration process, but also to give an historical explanation through a functionalist outlook on the West outlook in the aftermath of World War Two, by drawing on functionalist theory International Relations (IR). It argues that the European integration process was a functionalist choice by European member states, an ideological one by European intellectuals, and a realist one by the USA administration.

Finally, the last subchapter discusses the intellectual divide between supranationalists and intergovernmentalists in the aftermath of the Second World War. Having introduced the biography and historical context of Fernand Dehousse's work, it is essential to discuss his intellectual principles and contextualise them, since they shaped his entire political action in the process of building Europe. The subchapter introduces and explains both intergovernmentalism and supranationalism as IR theories and contextualises them within the European setting by examining historical figures and trends that contributed to shape Dehousse’s mentality and political action.

1.1. Fernand Dehousse: a biography

Born in Liège on July 3 1906, in what were destined to be the last years of King Leopold II kingdom, Fernand Dehousse’ birth seemed a harbinger for the century to come. Son of Constante Dehousse, an estimated poet, writer and dramaturg who earned his living by working as an accountant at the Cuivre et Zinc factory in Liège, and Victorine Danthine, he grew up in an environment that, while modest, nurtured both intellectual curiosity and social awareness (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview).

Dehousse pursued his secondary and higher education in Liège. He studies Law at the University of Liège, earning a doctorate in law and a degree in social sciences, with a thesis on treaty ratification, in 1929. During his studies, he also meets Rita Lujan, which Dehousse will marry in 1929 (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview). An academic herself, Rita Lujan went on to teach Medieval Literature at a university, becoming one of the first female professors to hold a chair in Belgian academia (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview). Together, the couple will have two kids: Jean-Maurice and Françoise. His academic ambitions took him beyond Belgium, leading him to further studies in Paris, Grenoble, and

Geneva between 1929 and 1931 (Demoulin, 1967, pp. 294-302). During his stay in the French capital, he follows lectures of Albert de la Pradelle, Georges Scelle and Gilbert Gidel, all of which will profoundly influence Dehousse's thought (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). In those years, he meets Professor Ernest Mahaim, a key figure in Dehousse's intellectual and personal development.

Himself a Walloon, Ernest Mahaim was 37 years senior of Dehousse, and devoted his life to teaching Law between Liège and Bruxelles (Kéfer, 2019, pp.176-179). A man of science and action, he was particularly interested in the internationalization of Labor Law, dedicating his studies to the topic, which would eventually lead him to be one of the drafters of the Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, later to become the *Constitution of the International Labour Organization (ILO),* turning his lifelong dream of an international institution dedicated to protecting workers right into a reality (Kéfer, 2019, pp.176-179). Mahaim became a key figure within ILO development, becoming president of the ILO's Governing Body in 1932.

It's hard to establish the real weight of Mahaim's influence over the young Dehousse. Surely, his humanistic thought and public-driven life must have had a huge impact on the young pupil, convincing Dehousse to specialize in international law as the only method to assure peace and humanitarian well-being. The encounter with Mahaim determines the first, life-long, inspiration of Fernand Dehousse: a committed passion for international law and a *forma mentis* trained to tackle both academical and political issues on a transnational basis. Particularly, the lessons learned with Mahaim will be visible in all of Dehousse academic and political endeavours. Ernest Mahaim passed away in 1938, the announcement bore an inscription from the Gospel of Matthew "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied". This epitaph encapsulates the essence of his life, a relentless pursuit of justice, social progress, and the dignity of labour (Kéfer, 2019, pp. 176-179).

Thus, under the mentorship of Professor Ernest Mahaim, Dehousse decisively turns towards public international law, shifting away from his initial focus on civil law. In particular, he refines his legal expertise and develops a keen interest in the practical applications of law in international governance (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86).

In 1931, he became Mahaim's assistant and, in 1935, succeeded him as a lecturer in public international law at the University of Liegi. Meanwhile, in 1934, he was recognized as a

laureate of The Hague Academy of International Law, one of the most prestigious international law institutes in Europe. He will be promoted to full professor on January 1st, 1940 (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423).

During the pre-war period, when he was still a young professor of International Law, he becomes deeply interested in developing the so called "Walloon question", that is, the ideological and political space that the Walloon nation, the French-speaking part of Belgium's territory and people, would occupy in the Belgian Kingdom (Histoire des Belges, 2025, available online). As a young student in Liegi, he collaborated with *La Barricade*, the monthly journal of the *Ligue d'Action wallone,* an active political committee made of young students that advocated for an autonomous Walloon region within a federal and broader Belgian context, pushing for equal rights between Dutch speakers and French speakers (Institut Destrée, 2025, available online). It's particularly after 1936 that Fernand Dehousse becomes politically central in the developments of the *Ligue d'Action Wallone,* sidelining figures such as Auguste Buisseret, Jean Rey, and most importantly, Georges Truffaut.

Georges Truffaut is the second great encounter in Fernand Dehousse' political and intellectual development. Born in Liegi in 1901, Truffaut is remembered as one of the city's great, having served for different years as a municipal councillor and later as an alderman for public works (Philippe Raxhon, 1999, pp. 334-337). Remembered as an idealistic and stubborn individual, Georges Truffaut shared with Fernand Dehousse a sincere concern for the Wallonia question and an ardent faith in federalism. Himself a socialist, on the eve of World War Two Truffaut strongly criticized Henri Spaak's government position and attitudes towards Nazi Germany (Philippe Raxhon, 1999, pp. 334-337). Fernand Dehousse found in Truffaut a man of shared ideals, their companionship, although cut short by Truffaut's premature death during the war, helped Fernand Dehousse further develop his two political pillars: socialism and federalism, and introduced Dehousse in his first real political activities within the *Ligue d'Action Wallone* and the broader Belgian resistance during World War Two (Dehousse & Truffaut, 1938, pp.1-36).

In 1938, Fernand Dehousse and Georges Truffaut write together *L'État fédéral en Belgique,* destined to be one of the foundational texts of modern Belgian political divisions. The project envisioned a system composed of three regions - Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels - where the linguistic border serves as the boundary between the first two regions (Dehousse & Truffaut, 1938, pp.1-36). The text will be adopted by the *Ligue d'Action wallonne* on 17 of March

1938, and will be proposed to the Belgian Chamber as a proposal for constitutional revision (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). Rejected by the chamber the year after, *L'État fédéral en Belgique* remained one the first great proposal for a federal and democratic Belgium, after the famous 1912 *Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre* by Jules Destrée (Destrée, 1963, pp. 5-20).

It was in these final years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War that Fernand Dehousse, in line with the customary practice of academics of the time, began to combine his university career with the role of a public intellectual and political commentator. Particularly active between 1936 and 1938, Dehousse warned the Belgian public about the violence manifested by Nazism in Germany, expressing concern over German rearmament and the Munich Agreement of 1938 (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview). It's also in those years, precisely in 1936, that Dehousse and his wife have their first child.

In May 1940 Fernand Dehousse flees to Tolosa, reaching his wife and his family who fled some months prior, after the Germany army invaded and quickly occupied Belgium (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview). While in France, he writes a virulent article in the magazine *L'Ere nouvelle*, ironically titled *Monsieur de Saxe-Cobourg Gotha*, in which he criticizes the policy of neutrality advocated by the Belgian Kingdom and argues, from a juridical point of view, that the Belgian King Leopold III has been legally deposed after the German occupation (Dehousse, 1943). Upon his return in Liegi, on the 25th of October 1940, Fernand Dehousse is dismissed from his role as a university professor by the Belgian and German authorities due to his article appeared on *L'Ere nouvelle* and just ten months after he was promoted to full professor at the University of Liegi (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). His exclusion from university will last until the end of the German occupation in September 1944 (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). Once reinstated, he remained in his academic role until his retirement in 1976 (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423), contributing over several decades to the academic formation of students in international and European law.

During the harsh reality of the German occupation, the mature Fernand Dehousse was able to put into practice all the theoretical and ideological experiences he had gained at the University of Liège and within the *Ligue d'Action Wallonne*. In 1942, he joined the Belgian resistance, adopting the codename *Jeune* (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). Firstly, he joined the *Rassemblement Démocratique et Socialiste Wallon*, where he presided the movement's Commission of Foreign Affairs; later, due to divergent views on federalism, he

quits the *Rassemblement* joins the *Parti Socialiste belge* (PSB) on the 20th of August 1943 (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). This event marks the start of a fellowship between Dehousse and the Belgian Socialist Party which is destined to last for all the rest of the Fernand's political life, taking him to sit in the Senate uninterruptedly from 1950 to 1971, serving in the Belgian government on different occasions, and occupying the position of Minister of National Education between 1965 and 1966, and Minister of Community Relations between 1971 and 1972 (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86). In this latter role, he proposed a legislation granting linguistic autonomy to Fourons (Voeren), a measure that ultimately led to the fall of the Eyskens-Cools government (Delforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). In this sense, the war marked Dehousse's first clear engagement in political activism, as no substantial evidence of political involvement can be identified prior to the German occupation of Belgium, however, his family is known to have had a liberal, rather than socialist, political orientation. (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview).

It's in the War period that Fernand Dehousse meets another key figure in his political and personal life: Paul-Henri Spaak. Already a prominent figure in Belgian politics at the time he met Dehousse, Spaak went on to be a fundamental figure for Belgian post-war reconstruction and for European integration. Prisoner of war during World War One and partisan during the second, lawyer and erudite, a man of government and at the same time described as "excelling in defending Communists charged with conspiring against the security of the realm" (Liquisearch, 2025, Available online); Paul-Henri Spaak is one of the most complex and fascinating figures of his time.

Apart from his national political career with the PSB, which saw him cover the role of Minister of Transport, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and twice the role of Prime Minister; Paul-Henri Spaak was heavily involved in international politics throughout all of his life. Particularly, Spaak has been one of the greatest contributors to the international political structure, both through his activities in constructing the United Nations (UN) and the European Union. Involved in the foundation of the UN since its dawn in the early 1940s, he contributed in drafting the United Nations Charter and was elected to chair the first session of the newly born General Assembly in 1945, contributing to the UN development throughout all his life (Spaak, 1969, pp. 155–182).

However, it's through his activities as an advocate for European integration that Spaak secured a lasting place in the historiography of European integration. Listing all his

achievements in advancing European integration would require a separate study, but it's perhaps important, to correctly communicate the importance of Spaak in European integration history, to recall his leadership in leading the Spaak Committee of 1955 and his following involvement in the signature of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 (Spaak, 1971, 239-252).

Paul-Henri Spaak's companionship helped Fernand Dehousse further shape his political and intellectual thought, guiding him toward merging his federalist and international worldview with a pragmatic supranationalism and a socialist twist. Although both came from a socialist background, the two were not always like-minded with regard to foreign policy. While exiled in France, they discussed Belgium's policy of neutrality toward Germany, advocated by Paul-Henri Spaak—Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1936 and 1940—which Dehousse disapproved of. Instead, he supported an approach that would have left Belgium better prepared for a possible German invasion (Renaud Dehousse, 2025).

The encounter with Spaak, whose name has been given to one of the main buildings of the European Parliament, was fundamental in shaping Fernand Dehousse's interest in the European project and the development of his European thought. While the seeds of his federalist and socially-oriented political ideas were already present in his personality and during his student years, his encounters with three key figures —Mahaim, Truffaut, and finally Spaak— played a crucial role in shaping them. Thus, understanding their influence is essential to our research on the legacy of Dehousse's thought in European democracy and institutional development.

In 1944, Paul-Henri Spaak consulted him as a legal expert for Belgium's delegation to the San Francisco Conference, which laid the foundation for the United Nations (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). Reflecting on this experience, Fernand Dehousse published a book entitled "Cours de politique internationale", which consists of the transcription of a series of radio lectures he delivered during the conference period. In the volume, he describes the processes and tensions that shaped the emergence of the United Nations (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview).

It's at the San Francisco conference that Dehousse remains struck by the weaknesses of European states, bled dry from two world wars, and matures the awareness of the need of a united Europe (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). Thus, Fernand Dehousse entered the final

stage of his intellectual and political journey: the fight for a federal and united Europe. Until this point, his experiences and encounters had shaped his internationally oriented, federalist and socialist convictions, primarily focusing on addressing the Walloon question and fighting the German invaders. Now, it was time for him to channel the full weight of his ideals and expertise toward the vision of a united and peaceful Europe.

What this research has sought to demonstrate thus far is the trajectory that led to Fernand Dehousse's involvement in European federalism, which constitutes the central focus of the present study. We have shown how his life experiences and the people he met built his political beliefs around the need of international rules and a left-leaning federalism. In particular, his time spent as a PhD student, and then professor, at the University of Liège with Ernest Mahaim strengthened his convictions over the need of a supranational rule-based order. Of identical importance was his involvement in the *Ligue d'Action Wallone*, where, alongside his companion Georges Truffaut, Dehousse developed his federalist thought, that will characterize indelibly his political thought. Finally, the encounter with Henri Spaak and his involvement in the PSB cementified his socially oriented views, giving a more solid and classical structure to his political thought. Arguably, it was this peculiar yet rich political and intellectual life that led Fernand Dehousse, now mature in thought and years, to fight for the creation of a supranational, human rights oriented, and federal Union.

Dehousse will eventually work again with the United Nations after his first San Francisco stint. Between 1946 and 1950, he served as Belgium's representative to the UN Economic and Social Council and participated in the Human Rights Commission, working alongside Eleanor Roosevelt (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86). He was particularly involved in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and played a role in the 1948 UN Conference on Freedom of Information. His commitment to multilateralism was evident in his tenure at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague from 1957 onwards (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86).

However, Fernand Dehousse started to be influential in the history of European development as soon as in 1948, when he took part in the *Comité d'études pour l'Union européenne*, a body composed by French intellectuals and lead by Jean Monnet, with the aim of creating a European federation (Dehousse, 1948a, p.1). Already at this early stage, Dehousse approached European integration as an unprecedented institutional experiment, a conviction he would later articulate explicitly when he stated that "what we are building is something never seen before" (Dehousse, 1952b, p.204).

This Committee held its meetings from 26 November 1948 to January 20, 1949, in Paris, under the guidance of Édouard Herriot, and proposed the creation of a European Consultative Assembly, tasked with providing policy counselling based on European public opinion, but without any legislative powers. The Assembly would have also worked as a policy forum, made up not only by politicians but also by intellectuals and prominent European figures, to provide recommendations to the Council of Ministers (Dehousse, 1948a, p.1). The Council of Ministers here mentioned refers to that established by the Brussels Treaty of 1948, wich the *Comité d'études pour l'Union européenne* proposed to enlarge both in membership and scope to give access to more European countries (such as Italy) and to include policy debates which went further than merely security and defence.

The work of this Committee will flourish in the Treaty of London of 1949, which effectively established the Council of Europe. Reflecting on the outcome of these negotiations, Fernand Dehousse noted that "The Statute of the Organisation, as it was ultimately adopted, appears to be significantly more progressive than what could have been expected during the preparatory meetings", highlighting how the final institutional design exceeded the cautious expectations formed during the Paris preparatory meetings (Fernand Dehousse, 1948b, p.34).

Dehousse will keep shaping the structure of the Council, serving as a member of its Consultative Assembly from 1954 to 1961 and as its president from 1956 to 1959 (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86). Fernand Dehousse brought forward his efforts and expertise as a European and humanist in 1950, when, alongside Sir David Maxwel Fyfe and Pierre-Henri Tietgen he worked on the European Convention of Human Rights, signed by the member states of the Council of Europe on November 4, 1950 (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). His involvement in European integration deepened with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Assembly between 1952 and 1958, where he worked relentlessly to assure that, by integration France and Germany's coal and steel industries, a war would never touch the European soil again (Miny, 2019, pp.83-86).

Shortly after, Fernand Dehousse took forward his efforts towards a more secured and united Europe by participating at the Ad Hoc Assembly for the creation of a European Defence Community (EDC) between 1952 and 1954. Here, he advocated relentlessly for a supranational and federalist defence institution, that would serve all Europeans (Miny, 2019, pp. 83-86) . The rejection of the EDC by the French Parliament on August 30 1954 signalled the first major setback for Dehousse's federalist ambitions. Nevertheless, Dehousse continued

to be involved in the European project, always taking up key role for the development of a European integration. Between 1955 and 1961, he was involved in the Western European Assembly, chairing two commissions regarding the Saarland in 1955 and 1956, where he showcased his diplomatic abilities and helped to resolve a dispute that hindered European integration, until the Saar's incorporation into the Federal Republic of Germany in 1957 (Miny, 2019, pp.83-86).

However, the major contribution of Fernand Dehousse's thought and career has been undoubtedly his participation in the establishment and democratization of the European Parliament. From December 1958 to February 1960, he holds the role of Commissioner within the working group for the European Parliamentary Assembly (Deforge et al., 2000, pp. 420-423). The Assembly was ideated as a merely consultative body, with no real legislative powers, whose task was to discuss the proposals made by the Commission and report their views to the Council (Deschamps, 2016e, p.2). The single Assembly convened for the first time from 19 to 21 March 1958, and it consisted in politicians that were designated by each national parliament, without being directly chosen by European citizens (Deschamps, 2016a, p.2).

In 1962, it convened to change its name in European Parliament and gradually gained more influence, especially over decisions concerning the Council budget in the 1970s (Jacqué , 2011, art.2). Dehousse was, throughout all of his time in the European Institutions, a fierce supporter of universal suffrage in the elections of European officials, and saw in the European Parliament the right body where to implement it. His dream, which he shared with many people of his generation, would become true only in 1976, the year of Dehousse's death, when a deliberation of the Council made the European Parliament eligible by universal suffrage.

To better understand the *zeitgeist* in which Dehousse operated, it's best to look at the state of European Integration during its first decades. Thus, in the next chapter we are going to discuss the first two decades and a half of European integration, that is between 1945 and 1970, to have a better understanding of the time's political and intellectual climate.

1.2. The Origins of the European Integration in the postwar era (1945-1970)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the European continent faced not only physical and economic devastation but also a profound crisis of political legitimacy and security. Although the political realisation of European integration took shape primarily in the post-war period, the idea of European unity itself long predated 1945. Projects of European cooperation had circulated throughout the interwar years and were further developed within resistance movements and political debates during the war, creating an ideological background upon which post-war integration could build (Dinan, 2011, pp. 3–12).

This longer intellectual genealogy highlights that European integration was not a sudden invention of the post-war period but the outcome of evolving political, economic, and cultural debates extending across several decades. Integration can therefore be understood as a historical process shaped by multiple temporal layers rather than as a linear or teleological project beginning in 1945 (Patel, 2015, pp. 1–9). In this perspective, important continuities can be observed between interwar experiences of economic cooperation and post-war integration initiatives, as the crises of the 1930s informed later efforts at institutionalised cooperation (Berend, 2016, pp. 12–25).

The early institutional phase of European integration must nevertheless be situated within a broader transatlantic geopolitical context. In the immediate post-war years, the United States emerged as a hegemonic power, economically and militarily dominant, and increasingly committed to shaping a liberal democratic order in Western Europe (Segers, 2023, pp. 18–24). This commitment materialised most visibly through the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan), which between 1948 and 1952 provided over $13 billion in aid to Western Europe, contributing decisively to economic stabilisation and encouraging new forms of political and administrative cooperation (Segers, 2023, pp. 41–44).The early years of European integration must be situated within a broader transatlantic geopolitical setting. As documented by Mathieu Segers in *The Origins of European Integration*, the United States emerged from the war as a hegemonic power, economically and militarily dominant, and increasingly committed to a vision of a liberal democratic order in the West. The American commitment to European recovery materialized through the Marshall Plan, which provided over $13 billion (approximately $140 billion in today's dollars) in aid to Western Europe between 1948 and 1952, thereby catalyzing economic stabilization and political cooperation (Segers, 2023, pp.41-44).

American assistance was not merely an act of economic solidarity but also served explicit strategic objectives. By fostering recovery and prosperity, the Marshall Plan aimed to contain the spread of communism and to consolidate a bloc of aligned capitalist democracies within the emerging Cold War order (Segers, 2023, pp. 52–58). Within this framework, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), established to administer Marshall Plan aid, played a dual role. It functioned both as a mechanism for economic recovery and as a platform for dialogue and coordinated action among European states, thereby embedding early cooperation within the broader logic of Cold War containment (Bossouat, 2008, p. 13). Early post-war integration processes thus emerged from the interaction between pre-existing European ideas and the strategic conditions created by American political and economic power, rather than from dynamics that were either purely endogenous or exclusively externally imposed.

The Cold War rapidly polarized the continent, further reinforcing the American rationale for encouraging integration. The emergence of a bipolar world order following the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, and particularly the division of Germany, meant that Western Europe was both economically interdependent and geopolitically vulnerable. The geopolitical asset in Europe was exploited by the new American-led international order that, rooted in New Deal-style functionalist rationalism, aimed at avoiding both ideological extremes: fascism and communism (Berghahn, 2008, pp. 29-31).

Integration in Western Europe was thus conceived not only as a means of economic cooperation but as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. As Weisbrode puts it, the transatlantic partnership was “bound together in mind and deed,” offering Western Europe a combination of material aid, security guarantees through NATO, and ideological coherence rooted in liberal democracy and capitalism (Weisbrode, 2009, p.10). Thus, it is fair to assess that the European integration process was to some extent a realist and American lead project, imagined, at least in its western Europe form, as a strategic ally against Soviet expansionism.

However, the Europeans were not passive actors at the time when European integration was starting to be built. A vast political and cultural literature, that saw nationalism has the main actor culpable of initiating the Second World War, laid the foundation for what became the dream of a united Europe. Intellectuals such as Stefan Zweig and Altiero Spinelli already longed for European unity before and during the war, as described in their masterpieces *The World of Yesterday* and *The Ventotene Manifesto.* Books like T.E. Elliot's *Notes towards the*

definition of culture (1948) clearly supported the view of a shared culture in western Europe, and paintings like Picasso's *Dove* (1949), although not strictly related to European integration, underlined the European need for unity, fraternity and peace. Politicians were not slower in picking up the zeitgeist of the time. Major political figures like Jean Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and many more, raised to the occasion and championed the cause of a United Europe.

Whether for the fear of being trapped in a bipolar world, or for a real belief in the cause, the concept of European unity gained political traction at this time. Movements like the United Europe Movement and the Union of European Federalists argued for integration as a safeguard against both Soviet authoritarianism and the resurgence of European nationalism (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016b, p.3). Leading to the The Hague Congress of 1948 being pivotal in framing integration as not only an economic or strategic imperative, but a moral and political one (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016b, pp.11-12).

The year 1950 marked a significant turning point with the Schuman Declaration, which proposed pooling coal and steel production between France and Germany, resources essential to war-making, under a supranational authority. This initiative, grounded in functionalist logic, sought to bind former adversaries through economic interdependence and create the conditions for sustained peace (Schuman, 1950, Available online).

The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established in 1951, marking the first concrete institutional embodiment of European integration. It was supported strongly by the United States to anchor Germany within a democratic European framework, thereby addressing fears of German resurgence. The ECSC was not simply an economic arrangement; it was a deliberate political project designed to “make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible” (Schuman, 1950, Available online).

According to some scholars, such as that of Ernst Haas, the ECSC was expected to generate "spillover" effects, fostering further integration in adjacent policy areas (Haas, 1958, p.14). While initially limited in scope, the ECSC created a precedent for supranational governance and institutionalized cooperation among six founding states: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Parallel to the ECSC, efforts were made to create a European Defence Community (EDC) and its political counterpart, the European Political Community. These efforts sought to extend integration into the realm of military and foreign policy. These were clear Cold War projects: with U.S. encouragement, Western Europe was to take on more responsibility for its defence against the Soviet Union. Despite the enthusiasm of federalist figures such as Paul-Henri Spaak and Altiero Spinelli, the French National Assembly's rejection of the EDC in 1954 brought these ambitions to a halt. Nonetheless, the debates surrounding these initiatives introduced enduring themes regarding the balance between supranationalism and national sovereignty which last even today.

After the failure of both the EDC and the EPC, integrationists shifted back to economic cooperation. In 1957, the Treaties of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). The EEC represented a major leap toward market integration, setting the objective of a common market and customs union. The creation of an economic community reflected the idea that integration was conceived as a mean to promote economic growth and stability through technocratic governance (Spolaore, 2013, pp.7-8). The EEC's institutional structure, including the Commission, Council, and Parliamentary Assembly, reflected an incremental but consistent move toward supranationalism.

However, the process of European integration was not without tension or alternative trajectories. Alongside the supranational model embodied by the European Economic Community, which aimed at progressive economic integration through common institutions and policies, a competing vision emphasising trade liberalisation without political transfer of sovereignty also emerged. This alternative approach found institutional expression in the creation of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960, promoted primarily by the United Kingdom and other states reluctant to commit to supranational governance structures (Dinan, 2011, pp. 69–75).

The divergence between the EEC and EFTA reflected contrasting economic philosophies and political priorities. While the EEC pursued market integration through common external tariffs and shared regulatory frameworks, EFTA was conceived as a looser arrangement centred on intergovernmental cooperation and free trade in industrial goods, deliberately excluding deeper political integration (Patel, 2015, pp. 56–61). These differences were rooted not only in economic considerations but also in broader concerns over national sovereignty,

geopolitical orientation, and the role of the state in economic governance (Berend, 2016, pp. 78–84).

Rather than representing a temporary deviation, the coexistence of these two models underscored the fundamentally contested nature of European integration during its early decades. The eventual predominance of the EEC model did not eliminate these tensions but instead reflected shifting strategic calculations and the gradual recognition of the limits of purely intergovernmental cooperation in addressing long-term economic and political challenges (Van Meurs, 2018, pp. 42–48).

The 1960s brought a political crisis to the integration process. President Charles de Gaulle of France, sceptical of supranational authority and protective of national sovereignty, triggered the "Empty Chair Crisis" in 1965 by withdrawing French representatives from EEC institutions to protest proposed expansions of majority voting (Deschamps, 2016b, p.2).

The resulting Luxembourg Compromise of 1966 reasserted the right of member states to veto decisions they deemed of vital national interest. This episode illustrated the persistent limits of supranationalism and the enduring salience of national interests, resonating with the insights of intergovernmentalist theory.

Despite these tensions, the EEC achieved substantial progress in customs union formation and the launch of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a central policy that consumed a large share of the Community's budget (Dinan, 2011, pp.85-88 & 98-104).

The 1969 Hague Summit represented a renewed commitment to integration. Leaders agreed on three strategic objectives: completion (the finalization of the common market), deepening (institutional reforms and new policies), and enlargement (admitting new member states) (Danescu, 2016, pp.2-4). This marked the beginning of a new phase in integration.

The Werner Report, in 1970, outlined a plan for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), though progress was stymied by the global economic turbulence of the 1970s. Nonetheless, the creation of the European Currency Snake and later the European Monetary System showed efforts to stabilize exchange rates and move toward monetary convergence (Delivorias, 2015, pp.3-5).

Politically, the 1970s witnessed the formal introduction of European Political Cooperation, an intergovernmental framework for coordination in foreign policy established in 1970 through the Luxembourg (Davignon) Report. Although limited in scope and firmly controlled by the governments of the member states, EPC represented an important step in structuring a collective European presence in international affairs. From its inception, European integration thus displayed an external dimension, even if its action in foreign policy remained constrained by national sovereignty and consensus-based decision-making (Dinan, 2011, pp. 143–147).

While modest in its institutional ambitions, EPC provided a foundation for subsequent developments in European foreign policy cooperation. By creating regular consultation mechanisms and shared diplomatic practices, it laid the groundwork for later frameworks such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), formally introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, while preserving the fundamentally intergovernmental character of Europe's external action (Patel, 2015, pp. 132–137).

Generally, between 1945 and 1975, European integration evolved from a visionary ideal into a concrete institutional and political reality. This formative period, shaped by both historical urgency and strategic opportunity, laid the foundational architecture upon which the European Union would later be built. The physical and moral devastation of the Second World War, coupled with the discrediting of nationalism, spurred a powerful intellectual and political yearning for unity. Thinkers such as Altiero Spinelli and Stefan Zweig had long envisioned a Europe bound by shared values rather than competing nation-states, an idea that gained renewed momentum at key junctures like the 1948 Hague Congress, where integration began to be framed as a civilizational commitment to peace and cooperation (Centre Virtuel de Connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016, p.2).

The integration process was neither linear nor uncontested: it advanced through landmark initiatives like the ECSC and the EEC, but also faced setbacks, including the failure of the European Defence Community and the Empty Chair Crisis. Yet, its institutional resilience and political adaptability ensured continued progress. Intellectual and political figures such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, and Fernand Dehousse were instrumental in shaping this trajectory. Their federalist visions, while not always fully realized, consistently informed reform efforts and deepening integration.

The theoretical interpretations of this era reflect its complexity. While some authors have highlighted the spillover effects from economic cooperation to political integration (Haas, 1958, p.14), others, such as Moravcisk, have underscored the continued primacy of sovereign states in shaping outcomes. More recent perspectives stress the growing influence of identity and public opinion in shaping European integration's course (Kuhn, 2019, pp.1-3). This theoretical hybridity reflects the dual nature of early integration: it was simultaneously pragmatic and visionary, realist and functionalist.

By the early 1970s, the European project began to take on new dimensions. The Werner Report and the emergence of European Political Cooperation signalled ambitions for monetary union and political coordination, while the move toward direct elections to the European Parliament, scheduled for 1979, pointed to a growing emphasis on democratic legitimacy, long advocated by federalists such as Dehousse.

Rather than constituting a mere prelude to European unification, the period from 1945 to 1975 represented a decisive chapter in its own right. It marked the transition from a war-torn continent to a community of states pursuing integration through treaties, institutions, and shared values. The achievements and tensions of these years remain central to understanding both the possibilities and limitations of European integration today.

One of the most persistent institutional and intellectual debates during those decades concerned the nature of European democracy. As mentioned above, the conjunction between ideal values and real politics in addressing the European question created two different visions on how European democracy should have been structured. Namely, the intergovernmentalism vision and the supranational vision. It was this *leitmotiv* that guided the first thirty years of European integration, and arguably still does. Thus, in the next section, we are going to analyse what are the main theoretical arguments, and historical supporters, of both European intergovernmentalism and supranationalism. In this way, we will better grasp the intellectual fight for European democracy, to better introduce and frame Dehousse's position and thought on European democracy and on the role of the European Parliament throughout the EU first thirty years.

1.3. Intergovernmentalism and Supranationalism in the European integration process

As mentioned above, intergovernmentalism and supranationalism have been described as the two main camps in which European integration has been contested (Euroculturer, 2013, Available Online). In this chapter, we will analyse the theoretical background of these two political cultures, understand their dynamics in the context of European integration, and present some major political figures, supporters of one or the other camp, who shaped the European political humus at the time of Dehousse. To do this, we will first analyse and discuss the intergovernmentalist camp and then move on to the supranationalist camp.

1.1.1. Intergovernmentalism in the early European context

Intergovernmentalism is a concept that pertains to the Theory of International Relations. Generally speaking, intergovernmentalism is understood as the construction of organizations or fora, where single member states discuss and deliberate together, under various rules, on issues of common interests. As all theories in the field of International Relations, intergovernmentalism is all but a static concept written in stone. Scholars have declared, amended and discussed continuously on the development of the intergovernmentalist theory, as new forms of inter-states associations emerged in History. Intergovernmentalist scholars, while holding true the major tenants of the theory, violently disagree on the causes, mechanisms and consequences of intergovernmental institutions. In our thesis, we are going to analyse mostly one version of intergovernmentalism, namely: Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI). Liberal Intergovernmentalism has been the main theoretical lens for intergovernmental thought in analysing the process of European integration, particularly through the work of Andrew Moravcsik.

Liberal Intergovernmentalism, primarily developed by Andrew Moravcsik, represents a significant evolution from classical intergovernmentalism. It offers a more complex account of the actors and processes that shape state preferences and intergovernmental outcomes. In contrast to classical views, which treat the state as a unitary actor, liberal intergovernmentalism incorporates domestic pluralism into its analysis (Kleine & Pollack, 2018, pp. 1493-1509). According to this model, international politics are driven not solely by state interests but also by the interaction of rational individuals, private groups, and bureaucratic coalitions at the national level.

These domestic actors, mostly driven by economic interests, compete to influence national preferences, and governments, in turn, aggregate and represent these interests in international negotiations (Kleine & Pollack, 2018, pp. 1493-1509). Integration thus results from a two-level game: the formulation of state preferences based on internal political competition, and the subsequent bargaining between states at the international level (Kleine & Pollack, 2018, pp. 1493-1509). Unlike supranationalist models, liberal intergovernmentalism sees international institutions not as autonomous sources of authority, but as contractual instruments designed by states to solve specific collective action problems, enhance credibility, and reduce transaction costs (Kleine & Pollack, 2018, pp. 1493-1509).

This version of intergovernmentalism helps explain key decisions in EU history as rational outcomes of preference formation and strategic interstate bargaining, rather than the product of transnational or institutional dynamics alone. In this respect, the interpretation of European integration as a process driven primarily by national governments is consistent with a broader historical reading according to which integration functioned as a means through which states sought to restore authority, legitimacy, and economic capacity in the post-war period, rather than to transcend sovereignty (Milward, 1992, pp. 17–25).

In his famous book *The Choice for Europe: Preferences and Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Andrew Moravcsik's explain how the European integration process, by him understood under the lenses of liberal intergovernmentalism, unfolds through three interconnected stages: national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining, and institutional choice (Moravcsik, 1998, pp.18-24).

In the first stage, domestic actors compete to shape the government’s stance on European cooperation. These preferences are then carried into the second stage, intergovernmental bargaining, where EU member states negotiate the terms of integration (Moravcsik, 1998, pp.20-24). Moravcsik assumes that such negotiations take place in non-coercive, information-rich environments, where the outcomes are largely determined by the relative power of the negotiating states. Once negotiations have taken place, the last stage, that of institutional choice, comes in. Here, governments design and empower institutions not to relinquish sovereignty, but to ensure the credibility of the bargains they have reached. The delegation of certain competences to supranational bodies, such as the Commission or the Court of Justice, is thus seen as a calculated move to reduce transaction costs, resolve enforcement problems, and enhance trust among member states (Moravcsik, 1998, pp.67-70).

According to Moravcsik, the institutional architecture of the EU reflects this logic: even seemingly autonomous bodies like the Commission and the European Parliament ultimately remain tethered to national governments. The Commission's composition results from intergovernmental negotiation, while the Parliament, despite being directly elected, is structured around national party systems that continue to reflect domestic political priorities. In sum, even as integration deepens, power remains fundamentally anchored in the hands of the member states.

This state-centred interpretation of European integration is consistent with a broader historical analysis that emerged from the study of post-war Europe. From this perspective, European integration did not represent a process of state erosion or transcendence, but rather a strategy through which national governments sought to rebuild authority, legitimacy, and economic capacity after the disruptions of the Second World War. Integration is thus understood as a means of strengthening the nation-state by pooling sovereignty selectively in areas where unilateral action had proven insufficient (Milward, 1992, pp. 17–25).

In this reading, European institutions were created and empowered not as autonomous political actors, but as instruments designed to serve national objectives and to stabilise intergovernmental cooperation. The willingness of states to delegate limited competences to supranational bodies reflected pragmatic calculations aimed at securing economic recovery, social stability, and political control, rather than an ideological commitment to supranational governance. Far from undermining national sovereignty, European integration contributed to its reconfiguration and reinforcement under new international conditions (Milward, 1992, pp. 27–33).

This interpretation challenges narratives that portray European integration as an inexorable transfer of power away from the state. Instead, it emphasises the continued centrality of national governments as the primary architects and beneficiaries of integration, whose authority was consolidated rather than diminished through participation in European institutions. Even as common policies and shared rules expanded, decisive political control remained firmly anchored at the national level, confirming the fundamentally intergovernmental character of the European project in its formative decades (Milward, 1992, pp. 318–322).

Among the major figures in the early history of European integration, several stood out as strong supporters of intergovernmentalist ideas. Chief among them, and by far the most influential, was Charles de Gaulle. According to most scholars of de Gaulle, the French World War II hero always viewed European integration as a means to expand French influence across the continent (Deschamps, 2016c, p.2). Far from being a founding father of the European Union, yet still sensitive to the zeitgeist of his time, de Gaulle envisioned an intergovernmental Europe as a way to secure peace on the continent, restrain West Germany, and extend France's power through institutional channels.

Although he supported a certain form of European integration, evidenced by France's participation in the Common Market in 1957 and his insistence on a Common Agricultural Policy, de Gaulle consistently opposed supranational integration throughout his career. He wanted the European Council to be based in Paris and dreamed of a Europe led by France.

The peak of his European policy came as France repeatedly vetoed the United Kingdom's entry into the European Communities, proposed the Fouchet Plan in 1961, which was ultimately rejected, and triggered the infamous Empty Chair Crisis in 1965 (Deschamps, 2016b, p.2). The Fouchet Plan can be seen as the clearest expression of de Gaulle's vision for Europe. Proposed by Christian Fouchet, a Gaullist politician, the plan aimed to supplement the existing Community treaties with intergovernmental cooperation in foreign policy, defence, science, culture, and human rights (Deschamps, 2016d, pp. 2-3).

Institutionally, the draft treaty proposed the creation of a Council composed of Heads of State or Government, which would meet three times a year and adopt decisions unanimously. A Council of Foreign Ministers would handle affairs in between summits. Under this draft, the European Assembly would have had only an advisory role. The Council would be supported by a Commission composed of national diplomats representing their governments (Deschamps, 2016d, pp. 2-3). The rejection of the plan by other European countries marked the most significant setback in de Gaulle's European strategy.

Another major figure in European politics at the time was Harold MacMillan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1963. Perhaps less idealistic than his french counterpart, Macmillan's decision to apply for EEC membership in 1961 was driven by a combination of economic and political factors. Economically, he aimed to revitalize Britain's economy by aligning with the sustained growth experienced by EEC countries like West Germany and

Italy. Politically, there was a pressing concern about Britain's diminishing global influence post-Empire and the risk of being sidelined as the EEC evolved into a significant political entity. Macmillan believed that joining the EEC would allow Britain to influence European integration from within, rather than being a passive observer (Ludlow, 2016, Available Online). Without a formal proposition, unlike de Gaulle, of how a United Europe would need to look like, MacMillan remained a starch proponent of a strong Britain that could influence from the inside the future of the continent, highlighting once again his position in what would be his last party' speech as Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party (MacMillan, 1962, Available Online).

1.1.2. Supranationalism in the early European context

Like intergovernmentalism, supranationalism has its intellectual roots in the field of International Relations. This school of thought challenges the dominant realist assumption that international politics are inevitably marked by power competition, recurring conflict, and the supremacy of nation-states. While not denying the rationality of state actors or the anarchical structure of the international system, supranationalists argued that institutionalization could transform global politics into a rule-governed order capable of reducing insecurity and promoting cooperation (Wiener & Diez, 2009, p. 90).

Supranationalism shares with Liberal Intergovernmentalism certain foundational assumptions, such as the recognition of boundedly rational actors and the importance of domestic and societal preferences. According to Haas, societal actors are guided by value-based interests and adapt their strategies to the democratic institutional context available to them in order to advance those interests (Haas, 1958, pp.14-18). Both theories acknowledge that dense international interactions generate interdependence, making unilateral state action inefficient and pushing governments to establish common rules and institutions. Moreover, supranationalists do not deny the importance of member states and intergovernmental bargaining in the EU integration process (Sweet & Sandholtz, 1997, pp.297-312). However, two fundamental differences distinguish supranationalism from intergovernmentalism.

First, supranationalism departs from state-centred approaches by conceptualising European integration as a process shaped by actors beyond national governments and their domestic constituencies. Whereas Liberal Intergovernmentalism primarily focuses on national governments and their internal constituencies, supranationalist theory incorporates

transnational and supranational actors as autonomous participants in the integration process. These include multinational corporations, cross-border interest groups, professional and civil society organizations, and most importantly, supranational institutions such as the European Commission, the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the European Parliament (EP), and the European Central Bank (ECB). These actors are not merely tools of the member states; they develop institutional agency, pursuing their own interests and expanding their competencies independently.

Second, supranationalism challenges the intergovernmentalist assumption that states can permanently control the institutions they create. Whereas Liberal Intergovernmentalism treats institutional design as a functional choice aimed at ensuring compliance and efficiency (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019, pp.64-84), supranationalists argue that institutions tend to evolve beyond their original purposes, especially when gaps emerge in legal or political authority. Paul Pierson describes this phenomenon as the emergence of institutional "gaps", which are exploited by supranational actors and interest groups who seek to expand the competences of European institutions (Pierson, 1996, pp. 123-146). Once certain powers are transferred to the supranational level, rolling them back becomes politically and institutionally costly, thus creating a ratchet effect that favours further integration.

According to supranational scholars, the primary drivers behind the supranationalization of the European Union are often practical mechanisms designed to facilitate and regulate the development of transnational discourses within the EU. As these cross-border issues and interconnections become increasingly complex, they naturally encourage deeper levels of supranational integration (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz, 1997, pp. 297-312).

These evolving linkages create new "political arenas" that differ fundamentally from traditional intergovernmental frameworks. Once established, supranational bodies do more than support intergovernmental bargaining or political diplomacy, they actively work to expand their own supranational prerogatives. In doing so, they begin to shape legislative and policy outcomes, often skewing intergovernmental decision-making toward supranational interests (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz, 1997, pp. 297-312).

The emergence of supranational institutions marks a pivotal shift. As theorized by Ernst Haas, integration is a dynamic process: the creation of supranational authority alters societal expectations and behaviours, which in turn feed back into policymaking at the supranational

level. As these institutions begin to deliver the kinds of coordinated solutions that pro-integration actors envisioned, they become the centre of a new type of politics (Haas, 1961, pp. 366-392).

Interest groups increasingly seek to influence supranational policies, thereby opening new channels of political participation. In turn, this engagement provides supranational organisations with expertise, information, and legitimacy, further strengthening their authority. This dynamic is frequently driven by functional spillover, whereby the pursuit of policy objectives in one sector generates pressures to extend supranational authority into functionally interdependent policy domains (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz,1997, pp. 297-312). Spillover occurs because the effective achievement of initial policy goals often depends on regulatory coordination and decision-making capacities in related sectors, making further transfers of competence both necessary and politically rational.

In conclusion, supranationalism offers a fundamentally different understanding of European integration than intergovernmentalism. While it acknowledges the initial role of member states and their interests, it highlights the transformative effects of institutionalization, the emergence of new political arenas, and the unintended consequences of integration. Far from being a top-down imposition of federalism, supranational integration in the EU is depicted as the cumulative result of bottom-up pressures, functional necessity, and the political agency of actors operating beyond the nation-state.

Fernand Dehousse was not the only one, during his time, to support a supranationalist project for Europe. As we have seen in the first chapter of our study, Fernand Dehousse was deeply influenced by supranationalist activists, such as Paul-Henri Spaak and, to a lesser extent when it comes to supranationalism, Ernst Mahaim and Georges Truffaut. However, he was not the only one in Europe that dreamed and worked towards a supranational Europe. Throughout the Old Continent, many men and women were eager to contribute to the European Project. Amongst them, two, Jean Monnet and Altiero Spinelli, are surely worth to be mentioned, both for the value of their work and to better understand the supranationalist political environment at the time of Dehousse's political endeavour.

In his *Memorandum from Algiers*, dated 5 August 1943, Jean Monnet articulated one of the earliest and most comprehensive visions for post-war European reconstruction. His memorandum not only reflected the urgency of the moment but also laid the intellectual

foundations for the supranationalist model of integration that would later influence the creation of the European Communities. Monnet's central concern was that the imminent military defeat of the Axis powers would not in itself ensure peace. Without a concerted, proactive plan for political and economic reconstruction, Europe risked sliding back into nationalism, economic fragmentation, and conflict (Monnet, 2016, pp.171-176).

Two core objectives dominate Monnet's memorandum: the re-establishment of democratic regimes across Europe, and the economic and political organization of a "European entity" capable of ensuring long-term stability and prosperity (Monnet, 2016, pp.171-176). Central to both aims was his conviction that Europe's nation-states were too small to prosper independently in the modern world, a belief shared with other intellectuals of the time. Economic recovery and social progress, in Monnet's view, could only be achieved through a federated Europe or, at the very least, a tightly integrated common market that would render protectionist policies obsolete and prevent economic warfare among states (Grin, 2021, pp. 71-73).

Importantly, Monnet did not envision this transformation as a grassroots movement. In fact, his entire plan was premised on the idea that it would be elite actors who would lead, design, and manage the reconstruction of Europe (Monnet, 2016, pp.171-176). The masses, in his view, were to be educated and prepared for integration by these same elites through the press, radio, and schools.

This understanding of European reconstruction as a technocratic and elite-driven process has been widely analysed in the literature on federalist and functionalist thought. Monnet's approach combined a long-term federal ambition with a pragmatic functional method, privileging sectoral economic integration and institutional innovation over immediate constitutional solutions. Rather than appealing to popular mobilisation, this strategy relied on transnational networks of experts, administrators, and political leaders, particularly within a broader transatlantic context, to engineer integration incrementally and render sovereignty-sharing both effective and politically acceptable (Ciappi, 2025, p.88).

Another influential figure in European supranational integration in post-war Europe was Altiero Spinelli. Along with Monnet, he is considered one of the founding fathers of the European Union, and the main building of the European Parliament in Brussels now bears his name. Spinelli's idea of supranationalism was best explained by himself in the famous work

"The Ventotene Manifesto", co-authored with Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni. Written during his imprisonment on the island of Ventotene, where many anti-fascists and political prisoners were held by Mussolini's regime, the "Ventotene Manifesto" is not only the expression of a clear and pioneering political project, but also of the greatest acts of intellectual freedom produced during the Italian fascist era. Altiero Spinelli, a communist who was very critical of the Soviet Union, was the main author and intellectual ideologist of the Manifesto. He argued that the nation state was incapable of managing the highly intricate and complex world emerging from the Second World War (Spinelli & Rossi, 2025, pp.14-16). Ideas, people and capital were already flowing at a rate that the nation state couldn't cope with, and so Spinelli and his comrades saw it as an obsolete remnant of the past, to be disposed of as soon as the war was over (Spinelli & Rossi, 2025, pp.28-29). Above all, despite his explicitly left-wing positions, Spinelli believed that neither communism nor capitalism, let alone nationalism, could preserve humanity's greatest gift: peace. He understood that both the need for capital to expand by any means necessary and the quasi-imperialist grand theories of the Communist International were destined to lead humanity to war, destruction and death. To avoid this, at least in Europe, he argued for a deeper, democratic and supranational integration of the European member states (Spinelli & Rossi, 2025, pp.36-39). Ultimately, after the war, Spinelli, like Monnet and Dehousse, would play a leading role in the construction of a united Europe, both as a member of the European Parliament and as Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship.

In this sub-section we have presented the theories of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism from a theoretical point of view, then placed them in the post-war European context and introduced some of their main proponents at the beginning of the European integration process, i.e. at the time of Fernand Dehousse. The purpose of this section was to better understand the political and intellectual climate surrounding the question of how to build a sustainable Europe.

Having established Fernand Dehousse's biography, his historical context and the intellectual climate of post-war Europe, in the next chapter we will present, discuss and compare Fernand Dehousse's European political action and thought, starting from his writings and interventions during his decades-long European political career.

2. Fernand Dehousse and the Institutional Imagination of Europe

This chapter explores the political goals and rationale behind Fernand Dehousse's advocacy for the direct election of the European Parliament and, more broadly, for a federal Europe. Drawing on his personal correspondence, meeting documents, institutional drafts, proposals, speeches, pamphlets, and articles either authored or co-signed by Dehousse, the aim is to reconstruct the political logic, priorities, and aspirations that he envisioned for a united Europe.

Particular emphasis is placed on the material produced by Dehousse, often in collaboration with his colleagues, during meetings of the European Movement and its various commissions. These documents are sourced primarily from the Fernand Dehousse archives at the European University Institute (EUI) in Fiesole, the most comprehensive collection of primary sources on the Belgian politician. The time span covered ranges from 1949 to the 1960s, the most productive years of Dehousse's European political activity.

The chapter seeks both to reconstruct and contextualize Dehousse's actions and discursive interventions during the crucial years of European reconstruction, and to illuminate the personal convictions and intellectual temperament that informed and strengthened his vision of a united Europe.

2.1. Dehousse's vision for a European Parliament

On 12 January 1949, not even one year after the start of the Marshall Plan, European leaders were eager to reimagine the future of a shattered continent. In this pursuit, Jean Drapier, Chief of Cabinet of Paul-Henri Spaak, Dehousse's friend and mentor and at the time Prime Minister of Belgium, wrote a letter to Professor Dehousse, inviting him to become a member of the European Movement (now European Movement International) (Dehousse, 1949, p.104) The European Movement was a newly formed transnational initiative advocating for a federal Europe that had already secured the backing of major postwar leaders such as Winston Churchill, Léon Blum, Alcide De Gasperi, and Paul-Henri Spaak. The Movement, through the involvement of national political leaders, aimed had the objective of promoting unity among the European nations through fora, social mobilization and policy proposals. Three days later, on 15 January 1949, Dehousse accepts the invitation to the Movement, beginning an uninterrupted engagement with the organisation that would span nearly three

decades (Dehousse, 1949, p.104). Dehousse's engagement with the European Movement will be a fruitful affiliation, perhaps the most significant for the Professor's pro-european engagement, and will give him the opportunity not only to exchange his federalists ideas with the brightest minds of Europe, but also to have access to various platoforms where to give voice to his political vision, such as the Preparatory Commission for the Council of Europe in 1949 (Agence France Press, 1949, pp.15-17). Dehousse immediately got involved in the Movement's working by participating in various conferences throughout Europe in the late 40s and early 50s, always spearheading the Federalist cause. From 25 to 28 February 1949, just a month after he entered the group, Dehousse was present at the inaugural session of the International Council of the European Movement in Bruxelles. During this meeting the group set as its objectives the adoption of a European Charter of Human Rights and the adoption of the statute for a European Court (European Movement, 1949, pp. 95-100). A few months later, between 8 and 12 December 1949, at the Lausanne Conference, Dehousse took part as member of the Movement, in the foundation of the European Cultural Centre, now in Geneva (European Movement, 1949b, pp.10-19).

Most importantly, the years spanning from 1952 to 1954 were particularly industrious for Dehousse and the European Movement, especially with regard to the drafting of the treaty for the European Political Community, a proposed supranational framework intended to provide the European communities with a common political authority. In this context, Dehousse held the key role of Secretary General and participated in the discussions as one of the most engaged speakers.

The draft proposal for the treaty of the EPC reflects the extensive work of Dehousse and his comrades. On 6 March 1952, the Action Committee held its first meeting under Spaak's presidency, where Dehousse served as Secretary General. Other federalist leaders included Spinelli, Frenay, Kogon, and Philip (European Movement, 1952, p.7). Dehousse took on the role of Secretary General with practicity and vision, pushing for the Commission to embrace a real federalist structure. "I am on the 'revolutionary' side", he declared, hinting at the need to abandon the intergovernmentalist structure in the future EPC (Dehousse, 1952a, p.63). However, as seen in the written transcript of the meetings, when exorting his colleagues in imagining the future of Europe, he never loses his practical spirit. For example when he shares his conviction on the need of anticipating and taking into consideration the possible worries or quarrels of Member States before submitting them the draft proposal (Dehousse, 1952a, p.63). His practical effort came perhaps as a necessity to offer Europe a federal

political model that would have swiftly accepted by Member States, as he forecasted that without action, Europe would fall apart: “The Germans and the French will quarrel. Belgium… will practice the policy of Pontius Pilate. The Italians will cry… And the Russians will only have to pick up Europe, piece by piece.” (Dehousse, 1952a, p.63). Dehousse practicality served to give the movement strength and direction, often getting the group’s proposals further than what many great speakers, such as Philip, could do (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview). Moreover, Dehousse’s charisma and vision comes out on multiple occasion during the meetings of the Committee, such as when, discussing with his colleague Monsieur V. Herzyl, who highlighted how the uninominal electoral system proposed by Dehousse was contrary to all the national traditions of European countries, Dehousse bluntly replied “I am not one of those who defend everywhere and always tradition. What we are building is something never seen before, this forces us to sometimes not follow the traditions” (Dehousse, 1952b, p.204). Finally, when asked which name the new political organization ought to bare, Dehousse proposed using the name “United States of Europe”, arguing that it was a name that communicated exactly what it ought to communicate, it was easibly translatable, and it would have been well received by the USA (Dehousse, 1952c, p.123). His character comes out as practical and energic, giving clear explanations to proposed plans he deems unpractical, even when they are not strictly related to politics. Because of its revolutionary yet pragmatic character, Dehousse’s European political thought can be seen as more closely aligned with that of Jean Monnet than with the more radical and idealistic federalism advocated by Altiero Spinelli (Renaud Dehousse, 2025, Interview).

Between 8 and 10 October 1953, Fernand Dehousse participated in the Second Congress of the European Movement in The Hague. Here, Dehousse had the opportunity to discuss the structure of this new political project, the EPC, which he enthusiastically described as an entirely new formula, suitable to the new times (Dehousse, 1953a, p.3).

The conference was aimed at discussing the most pressing issues concerning the draft treaty establishing the EPC, focusing on those issues seen as more contentious by the various members of the Ad Hoc Assembly. Placed in a wider historiographical perspective, these EPC debates also illustrate Patel’s warning against a teleological account of European integration: rather than a straight line towards today’s EU, the process consisted of “many alternatives, twists and turns, trials and errors,” of which the EPC represented one of the most ambitious constitutional options. (Patel, 2020, pp. 199-203).

During the conference, discussions followed, and Dehousse did not shy away from addressing what he saw as the two most pressing points regarding the democratic structure of the EPC (Dehousse, 1953b, p.1). Firstly, when discussing the structure of a possible democratically elected political body within the EPC, Dehousse supported the creation of two democratically elected chambers (Dehousse, 1953c, p.2). The second of them, dubbed the "Senate" in the documents, discussions emerged on whether seats distribution should reflect a weighted representation system, in which the number of seats was distributed based on a fixed formula among member states, or whether it should follow a parity model, giving each state equal representation regardless of size or population. Dehousse spoke in favour of the first model, denouncing a more realistic democratic representation of Europe and, adding, that "A parity-based Senate ceases to be a Chamber and becomes a diplomatic conference deliberating by delegations", risking to tip the balance away from supranationalism and back to intergovernmentalism, reflecting what would already happened in the Council (Dehousse, 1953d, p.4).

Secondly, Dehousse tackled also the organization of executive power within the EPC. The draft treaty proposed a dual executive structure: a European Executive Council functioning as the Community's government and a Council of National Ministers representing member state governments. This arrangement was meant to balance supranational authority with national sovereignty. Dehousse emphasized the importance of the executive's independence and stability, noting that its members would be chosen by the Senate and not by national governments. He highlighted several treaty provisions designed to ensure political continuity and shield the executive from frequent crises, including mechanisms such as constructive votes of no confidence. He also warned against proposals that would either subordinate the European Executive to the Council of Ministers or create a hybrid body composed of both national and European ministers, as such arrangements would blur political accountability and undermine democratic governance (Dehousse, 1953e, p.8).

Dehousse involvement in the second the Hague Congress revealed important features of his political vision for what were supposed to be the first democratic and supranational institution of Europe, the EPC. While recognizing the limitations and imperfections of the draft treaty, Dehousse argued that it provided a workable and coherent institutional framework capable of launching the European project. He cautioned against reforms that would reverse the supranational spirit of the Community and stressed that the institutional balance achieved between democracy, state sovereignty, and European integration, was both

delicate and vital. He expressed his preference for the proportionality system in seats redistribution and the role and frame of the executive power within the EPC. His overarching message to the Congress was clear: the European Community must be democratic, functional, and politically stable if it is to succeed, and the structures proposed by the Action Committee offered a solid foundation from which to begin.

The final structure, as drafted by the Action Committee in 1954, envisioned different provisions advocated by Fernand Dehousse, such as two democratically elected chambers with the same power, the proportionality principle in dividing seats, and an executive government. Far from suggesting a mere coordination among sovereign states, the Committee conceived a supranational political community governed by its own institutions. These were designed to ensure democratic legitimacy, legal authority, and effective governance, and included a bicameral parliament, a politically accountable executive, a unified court of justice, and a consultative economic and social council.

At the heart of this institutional architecture stood the Parliament of the Community, conceived as a bicameral legislature composed of a Chamber of the People and a Senate. These two chambers were to hold equal legislative powers. The Chamber of the People was to directly represent the citizens of the European Community and be elected by universal and direct suffrage. Although the duration of parliamentary mandates had not yet been firmly established, the distribution of seats was already carefully defined: Germany, France, and Italy would each be allocated 31 seats; Belgium and the Netherlands, 30 seats each; and Luxembourg, 12, for a total of 261 members (later raised to 268). Several electoral systems were being debated within the Commission: a uninominal system, a proportional representation system, or a model that would allow each country to decide for itself. Dehousse notably defended the uninominal system, arguing that innovation rather than tradition should guide the design of these novel institutions (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231).

The Senate was conceived to represent the member states and would be composed of delegates elected by the national parliaments. Like the Chamber of the People, its term length had not yet been definitively fixed. Its composition reflected a balance between demographic weight and state equality: Italy, Germany, and France would each have 21 senators; Belgium and the Netherlands would each have 10; and Luxembourg would be represented by 4 senators, bringing the total to 87. This model followed a federalist logic, supported by Dehousse, in which the two chambers, one expressing popular sovereignty and the other

representing national institutions, would operate with parity of legislative power (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231).

Notably, the fact that both of the two chambers' decisions would have been acceptable if passed by simple majority, was proposed first by Dehousse to the Committee, which accepted it (Dehousse, 1952d, p.208).

To ensure coherence in the work of the Parliament, the Commission proposed a set of shared rules for both chambers. Each Member of Parliament and each senator would vote individually and independently, with no imperative mandate. This principle guaranteed that elected officials would not be bound by national or partisan instructions and could instead act according to their own judgment. In line with this supranational spirit, each representative was considered to be acting not in the name of their nation, but on behalf of the Community as a whole (European Movement, 1954, pp.231-232).

The executive branch was equally innovative. It was to consist of two main bodies: a European Executive Council, which bore executive responsibilities similar to what would later become the European Commission, and a Council of National Ministers. The European Executive Council was envisioned as the administrative and political driver of the Community. Its structure included a president, chosen by the Council of National Ministers via a two-thirds qualified majority; six members appointed by that president; and the presidents of two already-existing supranational authorities—the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community and the Commissariat of the European Defence Community. The Executive Council would be jointly responsible to the Parliament of the Community, and it could be dismissed by a simple majority vote in either chamber. An exception was made for the presidents of the ECSC and EDC, who would require a two-thirds majority vote for dismissal. This provision ensured stability for key executive actors while preserving parliamentary oversight (Dehousse, 1954b, p.232).

The Executive Council would be charged with the general political and administrative conduct of the Community. It was designed to operate, in principle, through administrative delegations to national governments, except in matters of defense, which would be handled directly. However, the Parliament had the authority to empower the Executive Council to establish its own independent administration when necessary. As Herbert Whittaker Briggs observes in his analysis of the draft Statute of the European Political Community, this institutional arrangement reflected a system of delegated supranational powers that relied

extensively on national administrations for implementation, while remaining subject to parliamentary confidence and control, thereby favouring flexibility, efficiency, and a gradual approach to integration rather than the creation of an immediate centralized federal authority (Briggs, 1954, pp. 116–122).

The Council of National Ministers was to serve as the intergovernmental counterpart to the Executive Council. Composed of ministers from each member state who held responsibility for European affairs in their respective governments, it would retain all the consultative and decision-making powers granted to it under the ECSC and EDC treaties. Importantly, it was charged with issuing binding opinions on all decisions taken by the Executive Council. Unless otherwise specified in treaty law, these opinions would be issued by a two-thirds majority, thus ensuring both consensus and legitimacy without enabling obstruction by a single state (European Movement, 1954, pp.).

Alongside the legislative and executive branches, the Comité also foresaw the establishment of an Economic and Social Council. Although its structure remained to be determined, this institution was assigned a consultative role within the institutional framework. The Comité further proposed that if the Council of Europe were to establish an Economic and Social Council of its own, it should absorb that of the European Community, an early indication of an effort to rationalize European institutions and prevent redundancy in the growing European institutional system (European Movement, 1954, pp.231-232).

The judicial framework completed the institutional architecture, centered on an expanded and unified Court of Justice. This Court would emerge from the existing judicial bodies of the ECSC and EDC, but would assume a broader mandate and be reconstituted as the Court of Justice of the Community. Its essential task would be to guarantee the supremacy of law within the Community and to ensure the unity and consistency of jurisprudence across all areas of competence. Its jurisdiction would extend beyond the purely economic or regulatory domain, encompassing constitutional law, administrative law, criminal law, civil law, and enforcement matters. Judges would be appointed either by national governments or by the national parliaments, and they would not serve for life, a design choice that underscored the Court’s accountability and adaptability (European Movement, 1954, pp.231-232).

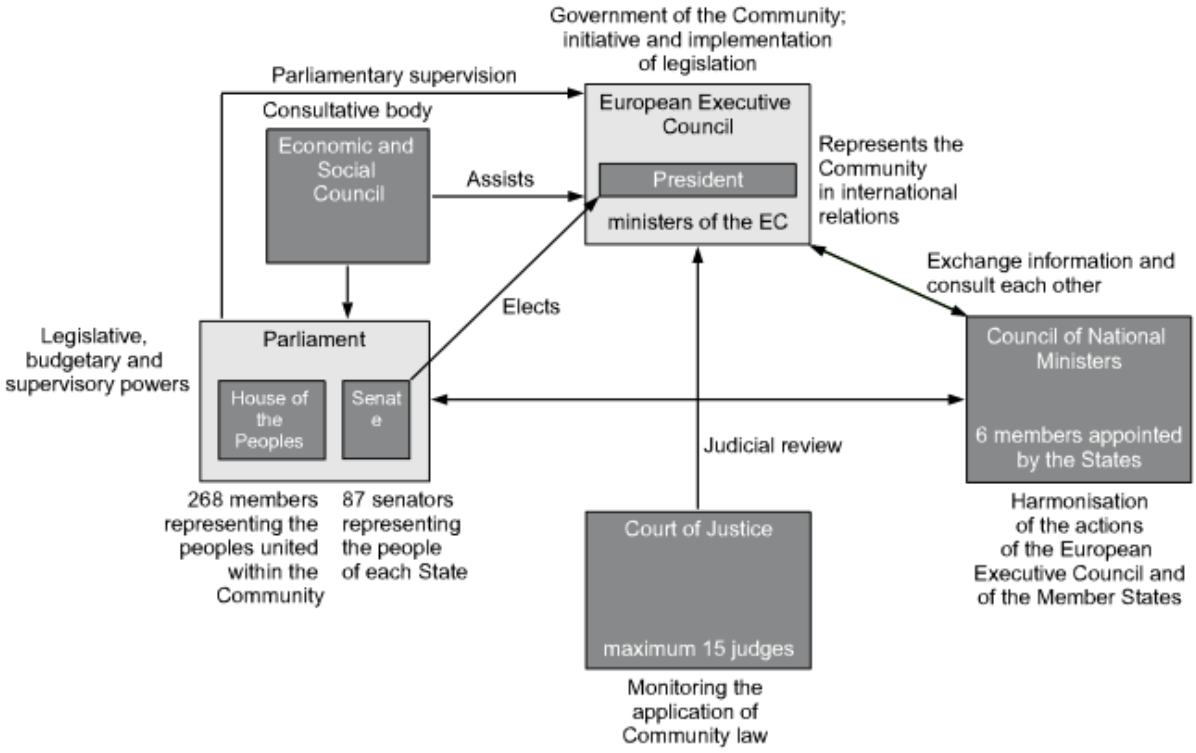

Figure 1: Proposed structure for the European Political Community (Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016a, Available online)

This institutional design, meticulously detailed in its architecture and animated by democratic aspirations, represents one of the clearest expressions of Fernand Dehousse's vision for a supranational Europe. It fused the federalist ambition of political unity with a keen sensitivity to democratic representation and legal order. The fact that these institutions were envisaged not merely as theoretical constructs but as blueprints for action underscores the seriousness and political maturity of the Comittee's work, and of Dehousse's lifelong commitment to a united Europe governed by law, by the people, and for the people.

According to scholar such as Patel, the abandonment of the EDC and EPC in 1954 reinforced the tendency to prioritise "low politics" over "high politics" in Western European integration, helping explain why constitutional projects like the EPC were sidelined even as integration continued along other tracks (Patel, 2020, p. 203). However, Fernand Dehousse did not shy away from discussing and proposing new plans for a federal Europe.

After the de-facto failure of the EPC in 1954, the most comprehensive and relevant project for a supranational Europe and a directly elected Parliament, Fernand Dehousse brought forward his instances on a different numbers of occasion. He was present, between the 10th and 13th of July at the European Movement Rome Congress, which happened just a couple of

months after the ratification of the Rome Treaty establishing the European Economic Community and the Euratom (Europa Libera, 15th June 1957, p.1). Building on the momentum, Fernand Dehousse was tasked to present the report which would serve as the basis of the congress' discussions. In his report, which he titled "A European Political Authority", Dehousse exhorted his colleagues to take forward the federalist project by building on what was built until now, in order to give Europe the unified political authority it deserved (European Movement, 1957, p.1).

However, perhaps the most well-known work of Fernand Dehousse, one that crowns an entire political life dedicated to the construction of a more united and democratic Europe, is the Report on the Elections of the European Parliamentary Assembly, published on the 30th April 1960. The report, dubbed "Report Dehousse", served as the pillar stone on which the European Parliamentary Assembly of the three European Communities at the time, the European Economic Community, the European Community of Steel and Carbon, and the Euratom, would have to become elected directly by universal suffrage for the first time. Dehousse was tasked on behalf of the Commission of Political Affairs of the European Parliamentary Assembly to produce a report explaining why the Assembly should have been elected universally and directly[1].

In the report, Dehousse tackles directly the problem of the democratic deficit within the European Communities. He argues that, although functionally operative, decision-making within the European Communities is made by a narrow cadre of political elites, experts, and civil servants, with little to no direct involvement from the broader population (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). Not only this lack of democratic participation went against all of what Dehousse fought for during his political life, but it also posed a long-term threat to the stability and legitimacy of the Communities (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). To further support his position, Dehousse places significant emphasis on the symbolic and functional value of elections in democratic societies. He asserts that only free elections can provide the necessary foundation for political legitimacy (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). He challenges the notion that elections should be postponed until the Assembly's powers are expanded, countering that the act of electing representatives directly will itself catalyse institutional development and confer greater authority upon the Assembly (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12).

[1] European Parliamentary Assembly. (30 April 1960). *Report on the elections of the European Parliamentary Assembly by Universal suffrage*. In Meeting Documents, European Community of Steel and Carbon. Available at: https://aei.pitt.edu/13816/1/doc.22.PDF.

The report also addresses legal and procedural questions. Dehousse and the working group interpret the relevant treaty provisions not as requiring full-scale treaty revisions, but as permitting partial and specific modifications to accommodate the electoral reform (Dehousse, 1960b, pp.7-9). They conceive of the proposed convention as a legally valid and politically feasible instrument, which would not contravene the foundational treaties but rather serve as a mechanism to implement their latent democratic intentions. Importantly, the group proposes a transitional period during which a hybrid system would apply: a portion of the Assembly would continue to be designated by national parliaments, while the remainder would be directly elected (Dehousse, 1960b, pp.7-9). This phased approach is highly revealing of Dehousse's skills as a diplomatic politician, providing for a realistic compromise that accounts for the political sensitivities of member states while remaining consistent with the long-term goal of full democratic legitimacy.

The Report Dehousse also addresses the issue of uniformity in electoral procedures, noting that while complete identity in national laws is not necessary, a common framework of principles must be established. Uniformity, in this sense, is interpreted flexibly, allowing for national variations within a shared institutional architecture (Dehousse, 1960b, pp.7-9).

Finally, Dehousse anticipates and refutes objections that the Assembly lacks sufficient power to justify direct elections. He contends that the act of electing representatives would itself transform the Assembly's political stature, granting it a new legitimacy and momentum that could be used to expand its role. In this way, Dehousse reverses the causal logic of the skeptics: it is not that more power must precede elections, but rather that elections can be the instrumental condition for acquiring more meaningful powers (Dehousse, 1960c, pp.13-14).

In sum, the Report Dehousse is the operational peak of the politician's European career, where, through a combination of political vision and strategy, legal analysis, and institutional design; Fernand Dehousse and his working group presented to Europe another possibility, after the failure of the EPC, to united further in a democratic and supranational way. Within this context, the Report Dehousse can be seen as a foundational contribution to the theory and practice of European democratic integration.

The European Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Report Dehousse on 17 May 1960, not even one month after its publication. However, the Council of Ministers never ratified the proposal, failing to reach the unanimity requested to make Dehousse's democratic and supernationalist Assembly a reality.

Indeed, the struggle for a democratic and supranational Europe, embodied in the idea of a European Assembly, has followed a long and uneven path, ultimately leading to the establishment of today's European Parliament. The next chapter will trace the evolution of this institutional journey, from the earliest conceptions of a European Assembly to the modern Parliament, highlighting both the milestones and the setbacks of an institution that remains the most emblematic expression of European democracy.

2.2. The Road to 1979: The Historical Evolution of the Direct Elections to the European Parliament

The transformation of the European Parliament from an assembly of appointed delegates into a directly elected democratic institution in June 1979 was the culmination of more than three decades of political struggle, intellectual debate, and institutional development. This subchapter examines the European Parliament's historical evolution from the after war period until the first direct and universal elections, placing particular emphasis on the historical development of its institutions and on shedding a light on the political intersections that shaped the European Parliament until 1979. The subchapter makes use of previously introduced notions such as the political divide between intergovernmentalists and supranationalists, the evolving political landscape within the European Communities (EC), and Dehousse involvement in the democratization process of the European Parliament.

The genesis of a European parliamentary system lies in the immediate post-World War II period, during which the need for peace, stability, and economic recovery across the continent led to a surge in support for European unity. As discussed above, a variety of political actors, both institutional and ideological, advocated for the creation of common European institutions as a way to transcend national rivalries (Sotiroski, 2023, p.172). In this context, the idea of a democratically elected European parliament gained traction among federalist thinkers and political leaders who believed that European integration required democratic legitimacy to succeed in the long run. At the heart of such a federalist system laid the idea of establishing a common and democratic political representative body (Rittberger, 2005, pp. 47–49).

The 1948 Congress of Europe held in The Hague stands, again, as a foundational moment. Promoted by the European Movement and presided over by Winston Churchill, the Congress

brought together over 800 delegates, including members of national parliaments, former resistance fighters, trade unionists, and federalist intellectuals[2]. One of the central demands of the Congress was the establishment of a European assembly with powers of democratic control. Though primarily aspirational, this event embedded the notion of parliamentary democracy at the heart of European integration (Rittberger, 2005, pp.47-49). Dehousse, present at the Congress, shared his excitement by stating that such a proposition would represent "an entirely new formula, adapted to the needs and interests of contemporary Western Europe; in this respect, it even represents a kind of 'discovery' in the field of moral and political sciences" (Dehousse, 1953a, p.3).

Just a year later, on the 5th of May 1949, the Council of Europe was created. The history of its Consultative Assembly, though intergovernmental and lacking legislative competence, provided an early example of an attempt to form a transnational parliamentary forum. The Assembly first consisted in representatives appointed by each Member State according to each Member's internal rules, but this rule got amended as early as in May 1951, mandating for each member state's representative in the Assembly to be elected by that member's national parliament or appointed from among its members of parliament[3]. The total number of representatives in 1949 was 87, with each Member State electing between 2 and 18 representatives based on size[4]. Their job was to discuss any matter related to the scope of the Council and draw conclusions to be forwarded to the Committee of Ministers under the form of non-binding recommendations and opinions[5]. Between 1949 and 1951 discussions were undergoing to turn the Consultative assembly into a Continental Parliamentary Assembly. The discussions followed along the line of the intergovernmental versus supranational divide, that we have introduced in the first chapter. The main reason of the discussions was the perceived crisis of the Council of Europe, as "little progress had been made in building a united Europe" and that "public opinion and national parliaments were beginning to show a certain weariness and of disappointment at what was being done – or […] not being done –

[2] Congress of Europe. (1948). *Congress of Europe: The Hague, 7–11 May 1948* (Proceedings). Council of Europe / European Parliament. pp. 423-446.
[3] Council of Europe. (1949). *Statute of the Council of Europe* (European Treaty Series No. 1). Art.25. https://rm.coe.int/1680306052
[4] Council of Europe. (1949). *Statute of the Council of Europe* (European Treaty Series No. 1). Art.26. https://rm.coe.int/1680306052
[5] Council of Europe. (1949). *Statute of the Council of Europe* (European Treaty Series No. 1). Art.23. https://rm.coe.int/1680306052

in Strasbourg"[6]. On 26 November 1951, the Committee on General Affairs of the Council issued a report reaffirming that the fundamental aim would be establishing "European political authority with limited functions and real powers" and urgently appealed to the United Kingdom to remain part of it (Consultative Assembly, 1951, pp.779-781). The report mentioned the constitution of a "Continental Parliamentary Assembly whose members would be chosen by 'some form of universal franchise, for example, a restricted, or second-degree franchise'. This Assembly would exercise 'a democratic control' over 'the European Political Executive' which the Continental States would establish among themselves" (Wassenberg, 2024, p.30).

On 10 and 11 December 1951, the proposal to turn the Consultative Assembly into a constituent assembly failed, due to the objections of the British and the Nordic representatives, who favoured a moderate reformation on the Council on strict intergovernmental lines (Kivistö & Haapala, 2023, p.315). The objections led to the resignation of its Belgian President, Paul-Henri Spaak.

Although unsuccessful, the creation and attempted reformation of the Council's Consultative Assembly helped normalize the concept of parliamentary consultation in matters of European cooperation, even if it did not manage to satisfy federalist aspirations for supranational authority (Dinan, 2011, pp. 75–78).

After the failure of turning the Council Consultative Assembly into a parliamentarian body, the history of European integration shifted towards a narrower yet more in depth approach. The "six" countries of Western Europe, real protagonists of early days integration, decided to pursue deeper integration via the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 through the Treaty of Paris. The aim of the ECSC was to integrate the coal and steel industries of its member states under a common authority to prevent future wars between France and Germany. By pooling these key resources, it also sought to create economic interdependence and lay the foundation for lasting peace and European unity (Alter & Steinberg, 2007, p.1). This innovative arrangement, largely shaped by Jean Monnet's vision, created not only a High Authority with independent executive powers but also a Common Assembly. Under article 20 of the Treaty of Paris, the Common Assembly was to be established (Polin & Raitano, 2014, 745–772). Composed of 78 members coming from

[6] Consultative Assembly (1951b). *Documents, Working Papers, Third Session, 'Aims and Prospects of European Policy. Report on the Aims and Prospects of European Policy'*. pp. 779–81.

national parliaments, the Common Assembly had consultative and supervisory powers over the High Authority, including the ability to dismiss it through a vote of censure (Alter & Steinberg, 2007, p.1). The High Authority itself represented the supranational-government of the ECSC, as, according to article 9 of the Treaty of Paris, it ought to "the members of the High Authority shall exercise their functions in complete independence, in the general interest of the Community"[7]. Although it lacked legislative authority, the Assembly represented an important symbolic and procedural shift toward supranational parliamentary governance (Rittberger, 2003, 203-225).

Moreover, of fundamental importance for the historical development of the European Parliament is the provision, under article 21 of the Treaty of Paris, regarding the elections modalities of the members of the Common Assembly. In fact, the article declared that "The Assembly is composed of delegates whom the Parliaments are called upon to appoint from among their members for one year, or elected by direct universal suffrage, according to the procedure established by each High Contracting Party"[8]. The inclusion of the possibility of electing the Assembly by direct universal suffrage was a provision deeply cherished by European federalists such as Monnet, Dehousse, Spaak, and Spinelli. Though embedded like a seed within a treaty largely governed by intergovernmental principles, it would blossom twenty-eight years later, in 1979, serving as the legal foundation for the first direct elections to the European Parliament by universal suffrage (Glockner & Rittberger, 2012, p.4).

The ECSC Common Assembly was significant in two respects. First, it served as a structural prototype for future European parliamentary institutions. Second, it laid the legal groundwork for the direct elections of a supranational European assembly by universal suffrage. This signalled a crucial step in the history of European Parliament development and in the history of European integration. After the failed attempt of democratizing on a supranational level the Council's Consultative Assembly, the creation of the ECSC Common Assembly, although far from the federalists ideals, in perspective, can be seen as a victory for European democracy and the supranationalists partisans such as Dehousse.

After the above discussed failure of the European Political Community in 1954, so dear to Fernand Dehousse, the ambitions and dreams of European federalists to create a

[7] ECSC Treaty. (1951). *Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community*. Art. 9. Paris, 18 April 1951. Available at EUR-Lex: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11951K/TXT.
[8] ECSC Treaty. (1951). *Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community*. Art. 21. Paris, 18 April 1951. Available at EUR-Lex: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11951K/TXT.

supranational direct democracy needed new paths through which to express themselves. The signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957 marked such a possibility.

These treaties established the European Economic Community and Euratom. Each Community was granted an institutional structure modelled on that of the ECSC. However, under the EEC and Euratom Treaties, the High Authority was renamed the Commission and, unlike the ECSC Treaty, where rule-making power resided exclusively with the High Authority, legislative authority was now shared between the Commission and the Council of Ministers (Van Hulle, 1975, p.591).

Initially, both the EEC and the Euratom treaty provided for two distinct assemblies. The rules and institutions governing such assemblies mirrored those of the ECSC assembly, including a provision, included in both treaties, mandating for the Assembly to "draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedures in all member states" [9] [10]. This provision closely reflects Dehousse's proposal for European direct elections by universal suffrage (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231).

However, practical considerations based on the similarity of the two treaties institutional frameworks, soon led to the merger, through the Convention of 25 March 1957 on certain institutions common to the European Communities, of these assemblies with the ECSC's into a single joint body: the Common Assembly[11]. The Assembly's membership was increased to 142, still composed of delegates from national parliaments, but the provision commanding the Assembly to draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage remained under article 21(3)[12]. While the Treaty of Rome reproduced the ECSC model in many respects, including its consultative assembly, it also introduced a fundamental innovation. The Common Assembly, rebranded as "European Parliamentary Assembly", now operating within

[9] Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty). (1957). *Treaty of Rome*. Art.138. Available at: https://netaffair.org/documents/1957-rome-treaty.pdf.
[10] Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom Treaty). (1957). *Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community*. Art.108. Paris/Rome: Treaties of Rome. Available at: https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/ardb/evt/1_avrupa_birligi/1_3_antlasmalar/1_3_1_kurucu_antlasmalar/1957_treaty_establishing_euratom.pdf.
[11] Convention on certain institutions common to the European Communities - Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (1957). *Treaty establishing the European Economic Community*. Art.2. Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/bbd4096e-0a59-4128-bdbc-7163fc80bc86/publishable_en.pdf.
[12] Convention on certain institutions common to the European Communities - Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (1957). *Treaty establishing the European Economic Community*. Art.21(3). Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/bbd4096e-0a59-4128-bdbc-7163fc80bc86/publishable_en.pdf.

the framework of three Communities - the ECSC, the EEC, and Euratom - reorganized itself politically by grouping members according to political affiliation rather than nationality: an institutional format much closer to Dehousse's Parliament (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231) . In 1958, it elected Robert Schuman as president, setting a symbolic precedent for a more genuinely parliamentary ethos (Polin & Raitano, pp. 745-772).

This institutional development reflected the growing scope of European integration and the increasing complexity of managing it. Although the European Parliamentary Assembly remained consultative, its regular sessions, debates, and resolutions contributed to a nascent European political space. The symbolic rebranding of the European Parliamentary Assembly to the "European Parliamentary" on 30 March 1962 further signaled its evolving role and ambition. As Rittberger and others, including Polin, have argued, the very act of renaming the Assembly carried a clear political message: it signaled that the institution was no longer merely a technical committee but aspired to represent the democratic will of Europe's peoples (Rittberger, 2005, pp.85-90).

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the push for a directly elected European Parliament was repeatedly blocked by governments committed to an intergovernmentalist vision of integration. This perspective, typified by Charles de Gaulle's Presidency (1959 – 1969), held that European cooperation should occur strictly between sovereign states, without the creation of autonomous supranational entities with direct links to European citizens (Deschamps, 2016c, pp.143-147).

De Gaulle's France staunch opposition to deeper European integration remains one of the crucial reason for the failure of the European Parliament to reform itself during the 60s. As mentioned above, De Gaulle's Fouchet Plans (1961–62), for example, sought to redirect European integration toward a union of states governed by unanimity and dominated by national executives. These plans were not only a rejection of the supranational ambitions of the Commission and the Parliament, but also an explicit rebuke of federalist proposals for democratic reform. The Fouchet negotiations failed, but they left a lingering legacy of caution among member states regarding parliamentary empowerment (Rittberger, 2005, pp.94-97). The European Parliament (back then just known as the "European Parliamentary Assembly") worked tirelessly to propose the activation of the article providing for the direct elections of the Assembly by universal suffrage, at least by the 1960's Report Dehousse. However, as discussed above in the case of the Report Dehousse, due to France resistance and Members'

reluctancy to lose the complete oversight of the elected members of the Assembly, the Council of Ministers never approved and rarely even discussed such a proposal until 1979 (Jacobs & Corbett, 2007, pp.12-14).

Thus, during the intergovernmentalist resistance of the 1960s, the Parliament resorted to expanding its influence informally, particularly by requiring regular updates from the Council and Commission on follow-up to its resolutions (Costa, 2009, pp.16-17). By institutionalizing practices like written and oral questions, it incrementally asserted its role as a democratic watchdog.

With the entrance of the United Kingdom (UK) in the European Communities (EC) in 1973, the intergovernmentalist approach was reinforced. British governments were often skeptical of any initiative that might reduce the authority of Westminster in the different fields of policymaking. When it came to the European Parliament, the UK's support for direct elections was always conditional and hesitant, reflecting deep-seated concerns over sovereignty and domestic legitimacy (George, 1991, pp.151-156).

However, the 70s, unlike the decade that preceded them, were to become a watershed period for the institutional development of the European Parliament. The cultural wave of the late sixties and early seventies in Europe intensified critiques of technocratic and top-down governance, and pushed for higher degree of democracy in all of its institutions, including European ones. While the aim of the protests, that came to be known as the protests of 1968, were not directly aimed at the European Institutions, and were very different across Europe, the cries of students and workers all across Europe for a higher degree of democracy in all aspects of life influenced the future of EC institutions (Tulli, 2016, pp.3-4). Moreover, as an increasingly established institution, the European Parliament began to assert greater authority, drawing legitimacy from its claim to represent the peoples of Europe at a time when citizens were demanding stronger democratic oversight. This was a clear example of the inter-institutional power struggle that would continue to shape the long-term evolution of the European institutional framework (Gómez et al., 2019, pp.18-19). These developments, coupled with the sustained advocacy of the European federalists across the Old Continent, contributed significantly to the advancement, albeit limited, of the European Parliament's powers in the early 1970s.

Particularly, the early 1970s saw an increase in competences and power of the European Parliament. The Treaty of Luxembourg in 1970 gave the EP authority over non-compulsory

expenditure within the Community budget, and the right to propose amendments to legislation[13].

Five years later, in 1975, the Treaty of Brussels extended these powers to include a budgetary veto right for the Parliament[14]. These reforms were the product of extensive negotiations and reflected a growing recognition among member states that the Parliament's influence had to be commensurate with its increasing responsibilities (Rittberger, 2003, pp.215-219). Parliament's new powers were soon deployed: in December 1979, months after the first direct elections, the EP rejected the budget for 1980 by a four-fifths majority, a dramatic assertion of its legitimacy (Costa, 2009, pp.18-19).

The Parliament's greater budgetary control served to elevate its status, improve its internal organization, and strengthen its claims to democratic legitimacy (Lodge, 1984, pp.31-39). Importantly, these changes made the case for direct elections more compelling: if the Parliament was to wield power over public finances, it ought to derive its mandate from the electorate.

The decisive shift came at the Paris Summit of 1974, where heads of state and government of the EC declared their intent to proceed with direct elections, concluding that "that the election of the European Assembly by universal suffrage, one of the objectives laid down in the Treaty, should be achieved as soon as possible", effectively acknowledging the political necessity of democratic legitimacy[15]. The following 1976 Act on Direct Elections (hereafter "the Act") codified this decision, mandating for members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to be directly elected by citizens of the Member States. Moreover, it required to hold elections every five years, and it prescribed proportional representation while granting states leeway in electoral mechanics[16]. A watershed document in European integration history, the

[13] Treaty amending certain budgetary provisions - Luxembourg Treaty. (1970). Art.1 & Art.4. Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/93a76f6b-b740-40f0-8b30-2c7c25fa625d/publishable_en.pdf?.

[14] Treaty amending certain financial provision – Treaty of Bruxelles. (1975). Art.2. Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/4/15/bd96621d-f5e8-4b9f-9785-c5bd0f0cfed4/publishable_en.pdf.

[15] European Communities. (1974). *Final Communiqué of the Meeting of Heads of Government of the European Community, Paris Summit, 9–10 December 1974*. p. 3. Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/2acd8532-b271-49ed-bf63-bd8131180d6b/publishable_en.pdf.

[16] Council of the European Communities. (1976). *Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage*. pp. 1-9. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:01976X1008(01)-20020923&qid=1753626157613.

Act was a remarkable example of institutional compromise: it harmonized core principles of democracy while respecting national diversity (Hix & Høyland, 2011, pp.51-53).

Between 7 and 10 June 1979, citizens in the nine member states of the European Communities went to the polls to elect their representatives to the European Parliament. For the first time in history, a multinational parliament was chosen by direct universal suffrage. With more than 180 million eligible voters and nearly two-thirds turnout, the elections were a landmark event in the evolution of European democracy (Archick & Mix, 2010, pp.2-4).

Though the Parliament's formal legislative powers remained limited, the direct elections had a profound legitimizing effect. The electoral framework combined common principles, such as proportionality, with national flexibility: for instance, the United Kingdom used a first-past-the-post system in England, Scotland, and Wales, and a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system in Northern Ireland. Despite these differences, the elections were broadly regarded as a success. They changed how MEPs viewed their role, how national governments negotiated institutional reforms, and how the public engaged with European affairs. The election of Simone Veil as the Parliament's first president, herself a Holocaust survivor, also gave European democracy a powerful human symbol (Polin & Raitano, 2014, pp.745–772).

The political consequences of direct elections became particularly evident with the emergence of the so-called Crocodile Club, an informal cross-party group of Members of the European Parliament founded in 1980 at the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. Bringing together parliamentarians from different political groups, the Club aimed to capitalize on the Parliament's newly acquired democratic legitimacy in order to promote a comprehensive reform of the European Communities. Meeting initially in the Strasbourg restaurant "Au Crocodile", its members argued that a directly elected Parliament could no longer be confined to a merely consultative role. Active primarily between 1980 and 1984, the Club's efforts culminated in the Parliament's adoption of the Draft Treaty establishing the European Union in February 1984, marking the first time the European Parliament sought to act as a constituent authority. Following the adoption of the Draft Treaty, the Crocodile Club gradually ceased its activities, having fulfilled its core political objective. In this sense, the Club functioned as a crucial bridge between the 1979 direct elections and the Parliament's later constitutional ambitions, translating electoral legitimacy into institutional initiative (Iapichino, 2022, pp.7-11 & pp.184-206).

The introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament was not an inevitable outcome of integration, but the result of decades of sustained advocacy, institutional development, and political compromise. Federalists provided the normative vision; intergovernmentalists set boundaries; but over time, both perspectives converged around the need for a democratic mandate. The 1979 elections marked a pivotal step in the Parliament's transformation from a consultative assembly into a central actor within the European Union's political system.

2.3. A Comparison for Dehousse's ideas: Jürgen Habermas' "Why the Development of the EU as a Transnational Democracy is Necessary and How It Is Possible"

Having explored Fernand Dehousse's involvement in the construction of the European Parliament and the historical development of the latter, from its embryonic conceptualisation by post-war federalists to the watershed moment of the first universal democratic elections in 1979, this subchapter turns to a comparative reflection between Dehousse's vision and that of another eminent thinker of European integration: Jürgen Habermas. While separated by context, methodology, and disciplinary orientation, both figures devoted significant attention to the normative and institutional underpinnings of a supranational European democracy.

The choice to engage with Habermas' 2015 essay *Why the Development of the EU into a Transnational Democracy Is Necessary and How It Is Possible* is motivated by two principal considerations. First, Habermas' contribution to the discourse on European democratic integration, though influential, remains relatively underexplored in relation to the broader corpus of his philosophical and political writings. Yet, it is precisely in this essay that one finds a particularly rich and systematic attempt to conceptualize the European Union as a post-national democratic project. Second, the contrast between Habermas and Dehousse offers a rare opportunity to compare two distinct yet complementary approaches to the challenges of democratic legitimacy at the supranational level: one emerging from the post-war institutional imagination of a legal scholar and political practitioner, the other from the theoretical rigor of a post-functionalist philosopher responding to the democratic crises of the 21st century.

This comparative analysis thus aims to shed light on the convergences and divergences between Dehousse and Habermas regarding the nature and purpose of the European Parliament, the conditions for supranational legitimacy, and the institutional architecture of a democratic Europe. In doing so, it not only highlights the historical continuity in the struggle for European democratic integration, but also foregrounds the enduring theoretical and political relevance of both authors in shaping the future trajectory of the Union.

Jürgen Habermas' "Why the Development of the EU into a Transnational Democracy Is Necessary and How It Is Possible" stands as a cornerstone of contemporary political theory concerning European integration. In this essay, Habermas examines not only the prospects for establishing a supranational democracy within the European Union, but also the broader question of whether supranational democracy is achievable at all (Habermas, 2015a, p.546). He, in fact, discusses on how there has never been a supranational democracy, but democracy has always played a role only constrained in Member States (Habermas, 2015a, p.546). This subchapter provides a comprehensive, academically grounded explanation and assessment of Habermas' essay, highlighting its intellectual coherence, political urgency, and theoretical innovation. Furthermore, the subchapter aims at critically assessing and comparing the thought of Dehousse with that of Habermas, to highlight the similarities and differences between the thought of two of the most highly influential thinkers in European integration history.

At the heart of Habermas' inquiry lies a foundational question for assessing Fernand Dehousse's political endeavour: can democracy be effectively transposed beyond the nation-state? By taking the European Union as an example of the only existing political body who has supranational democratic features, Habermas argues that the European project faces an existential choice: either it transforms itself into a legitimate transnational democracy or it risks institutional decay, fragmentation, and political irrelevance (Habermas, 2015a, p.546).

This dilemma arises from an observable and persistent democratic deficit within the EU (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). While nation-states remain the principal sites of democratic legitimacy, they are increasingly unable to respond to global interdependencies and transnational challenges, such as financial crises, climate change, and mass migration. Meanwhile, EU-level decision-making suffers from technocratic opacity and an important democratic deficit given by lack of direct citizen participation (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548).

Although Dehousse and Habermas share a common European democratic ethos, and both their objectives lay in the supranationalization of European democracy, their perspectives diverge mostly due to different biographical reasons. First, Fernand Dehousse operated in a context where the very idea of European integration was novel and fragile. His emphasis was thus on constructing stable institutions and embedding parliamentary procedures in supranational governance. On the other hand, Jurgen Habermas, writing after several decades of integration, responds to a different challenge: how to democratise a Union that has become technocratic and remote.

Secondly, another stark difference lays in their role in the construction of a supranational and democratic Europe. While Dehousse's career starts in the academic environment, and his political ideas, as explored above, stem firstly from his studies on federalism and human rights; his life eventually brought him to actively become a fundamental figure of the early days of European integration through his commitment as politician and activist. On the other hand, Jurgen Habermas, who has dedicated a significant part of his intellectual career writing on Europe integration, has never actively pursued such an integration through political action. As such, the two men thought on European supranational democracy are further differentiated by their different lives.

Lastly, another major difference is to be found in the branch of academia they operated in. Fernand Dehousse, as mentioned above, dedicated his academic years to conduct research in the fields that laid at the intersection between politics and law. On the other hand, Jurgen Habermas was mostly trained in politics and philosophy, studying the latter under highly influential and impactful scholars of the *Frankfurter Schule*. This divergent research fields need to be taken into account when assessing the couple's opinion and projects for the future of Europe.

In his essay, Habermas tackles as a first thing the EU's democratic deficit, and he does so by using the work of Dieter Grimm, one of the best-known and theoretically most distinguished judges of the German Federal Constitutional Court (from 1987 to 1999), who identifies three main reasons for the EU democratic deficit. First, during the historical development of the EU institutions, a particular pattern of policies was raised to a quasi-constitutional level and thereby immunized against the usual process of political change. He particularly notes the fact that neoliberal policies were crystalized in EU treaties and thus rendered virtually impossible a democratic-based shift of economic policies (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548).

This fact had major consequences as neoliberal economic policies were implemented across the globe. As a result, the negative integration of different national societies through market freedoms took priority over a positive integration that is accomplished politically through the will formation of citizens themselves (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). Second, the EU suffers from high levels of unpolitical and undemocratic policy-making. This is the consequence of the interplay between institutions that are free from any democratic legitimation pressure, such as the European Court of Justice and the European Commission, and institutions like the EU Council and the Council of Ministers, whose decisions are not sufficiently legitimised by the national democratic process, as national elections alone cannot authorise representatives of other governments to participate in decisions over nations as a whole (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). Habermas's diagnosis of the EU's democratic deficit resonates in important ways with concerns already articulated by Fernand Dehousse several decades earlier. While Dehousse did not frame the issue in terms of neoliberal constitutionalisation, his critique of intergovernmental dominance and his insistence on direct parliamentary legitimation point to a structurally similar concern: the progressive insulation of European decision-making from democratic will-formation. Moreover, Habermas insists by drawing on Dieter Grimm (Grimm, 2014, p.11), this asymmetry between decision-making bodies and lack of citizens participation is an additional incentives for national governments to decouple their policies within the EU institutions from the will expressed by their national voters during the elections (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). Third, the European Parliament, despite being directly elected, remains distant from the everyday concerns of EU citizens. Grimm argues that the absence a single European electoral law, of pan-European political parties and the lack of a shared public sphere, undermines its ability to function as a genuine forum for democratic will-formation (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). Consequently, Habermas contends that European democracy suffers not only from institutional weakness but also from sociocultural fragmentation (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). From Dehousse's perspective, however, the weakness of the European Parliament was not an argument against expanding its powers, but rather evidence of the urgency of doing so. His long-standing advocacy for direct elections stemmed precisely from the belief that parliamentary authority and political salience are mutually reinforcing, a position that anticipates Habermas's rejection of Grimm's conclusion.

Surprisingly, as Habermas notes, starting from these three pillars, Dieter Grimm arrives to another conclusion. According to him, expanding the powers of the European Parliament would worsen the EU democratic deficit, due to the lack of a shared European public sphere.

Grimm believes that without the social and political foundations of democracy, enhancing the Parliament's powers risks further alienating citizens (Habermas, 2015b, pp.547-548). However, Habermas strongly disagrees with this, pointing to globalization's erosion of nation-states ability to act independently. In this respect, Habermas's position brings him close to Dehousse. Both reject the idea that democratic legitimacy must precede institutional empowerment; instead, they conceive democratic practices as something that can be generated and strengthened through institutional reform itself.

In making the case for deeper political integration, Habermas identifies interrelated challenges that underscore the necessity of a supranational democratic reform in the EU. First, he addresses the imbalance of power within the Union, pointing particularly to Germany's dominant role in managing the eurozone crisis (Habermas, 2015c, pp.548-550). This asymmetry has the potential to reintroduce hegemonic dynamics that threaten the principle of equality among Member States and the spirit of European solidarity (Habermas, 2015c, pp.548-550).

Second, Habermas draws attention to the rise of illiberalism across the continent. The re-emergence of nationalism, xenophobia, and the growth of right-wing populist movements in several Member States, such as Hungary, signal a troubling erosion of shared liberal democratic values (Habermas, 2015c, pp.548-550).

Finally, he critiques the erosion of welfare state structures within the EU. While economic integration has facilitated market efficiency, it has also constrained national welfare systems without establishing a compensatory mechanism at the EU level. This has led to increased socio-economic inequality and fueled political disillusionment among citizens who perceive the EU as indifferent to social justice (Habermas, 2015c, pp.548-550).

For Habermas, only a supranational polity rooted in democratic legitimacy can address these challenges. He thus sees institutional reforms headed towards the supranational levels as the only possibility to solve them.

So how come have the least democratic body of the EU gained so much power? Habermas points out to the crisis-induced empowerment of these bodies. Much like theorized by Capoccia and Kelemen under the "Critical Junctures" theory (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p.341), bodies like the Commission and the Council of the European Union have gained massive powers during crisis times, at the expenses of the European Parliament (Habermas, 2015d, pp.550-552). Although Dehousse did not theorise "critical junctures" in contemporary

terms, his repeated concerns against Council dominance in European integration reflect a similar intuition: that moments of crisis tend to marginalise parliamentary institutions unless they are structurally protected and democratically anchored.

One of the most innovative aspects of Habermas' proposal is the theory of "double sovereignty" (Habermas, 2015e, pp.554-555). In contrast to classical federalism, which tends to hierarchise political authority, Habermas envisions a heterarchical arrangement in which sovereignty is shared in a novel way between European citizens and the Member States. This framework rests on the idea of a dual constituent subject: European citizens, acting collectively, authorise the formation of a supranational polity, while the peoples of the Member States retain their role as custodians of historically grounded democratic achievements. Rather than displacing national identities or constitutional legacies, European integration under this model is conceived as building upon them (Habermas, 2015e, pp.554-555). In this respect, Habermas's idea of double sovereignty invites comparison with Dehousse's reflections on how the institutional design of the European Parliament might have more fully embodied a dual democratic mandate.

Habermas proposes specific institutional reforms aimed at operationalizing the double sovereignty framework. Central to his vision is the principle that the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, each representing one of the two constituent subjects, should enjoy institutional symmetry in both legislative and executive functions (Habermas, 2015e, pp.554-555). This would involve, among other measures, reinforcing the ordinary legislative procedure, in which the Council and the Parliament are involved on equal footing, and extending it across all policy areas. Additionally, the equal participation of the European Council and the Parliament in the election of the President of the Commission is seen as a necessary expression of this dual sovereignty (Habermas, 2015e, pp.554-555). Habermas further argues that the European Parliament should be granted the right to initiate legislation, thereby ending the Commission's long-standing monopoly on legislative proposals. The Commission itself should be reconstituted as a fully accountable executive authority, answerable to both the Parliament and the Council (Habermas, 2015e, pp.554-555). Finally, Habermas underscores the importance of reaffirming the principle of subsidiarity, not merely as a procedural safeguard, but as a substantive democratic commitment ensuring that competences are exercised at the most appropriate level and that the autonomy of Member States is preserved (Hbaermas, 2015e, pp.554-555).

Collectively, these reforms aim to transform the EU from a technocratic hybrid into a fully legitimate democratic federation, one that satisfies supranational standards of democratic legitimacy without compromising the constitutional autonomy of its Member States.

In this respect, Habermas's idea of double sovereignty and institutional reforms invites comparison with Dehousse's reflections on how the institutional design of the European Parliament might have more fully embodied a dual democratic mandate. The concept of double sovereignty, as laid down by Habermas, can be drawn to a parallel with the reforms advocated for by Fernand Dehousse in his endeavour for a European supranational democracy. Particularly, the idea of double sovereignty can be traced also in the Comite d'Action's Plan for a European Political Community's proposed structure (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). Here, the duplicity of the role of the Parliament, divided between a House of the People, made up by 268 members representing the peoples united within the Community, and the Senate, made up of 87 senators representing the people of each State, mirrors the theoretical idea of Habermas of European Parliamentary democracy as based on a double sovereignty. However, the two thinkers realize this double sovereignty in different manners. While Dehousse realizes it within the European Parliament itself, Habermas does it in coordination with the Council. In the latter's view, it is the Council itself that ought to reflect the interests of the people of each state (peoples of the Member States, in Habermas words). The difference in the application of such a concept of "dual sovereignty" reflects the different beliefs held by the authors in enhancing a supranational democracy. While Dehousse wanted a federal model legitimized mostly by the Parliament, Habermas is more skeptical, and sees the Council as a source of legitimization, although more fragile. Moreover, while Dehousse, both in the proposal for an European Political Community, and in his proposals under the Report Dehousse, meticously explain and lay down the institutional characteristics that a European supranational democracy ought to have, Habermas does not. In fact, the German philosopher, perhaps due to the shorter nature of a scientific paper vis-a-vis a full report, does not indulge in explaining the solid structure that such a double legitimacy based EU democracy ought to have, but just sketches a general picture. Particularly, Habermas does not explain how the Council should operate in its representation of the peoples of the Member states, by renouncing to investigate into the Council's voting system, by instance.

Moreover, Habermas emphasizes that institutional reform alone is insufficient for the democratization of the European Union. In his view, the success of transnational democracy also depends on the cultivation of a European public sphere and a shared democratic political

culture capable of sustaining practices of public justification and mutual recognition (Habermas, 2015f, pp.552-554). In this respect, Habermas advances a substantive and holistic conception of democracy, in which institutional arrangements must be complemented by communicative processes and civic dispositions. This approach contrasts with Fernand Dehousse's more procedural and legal understanding of democratization, which places primary emphasis on institutional design, parliamentary procedures, and the federal model as the key instruments for generating democratic legitimacy at the supranational level. Contrary to claims that Europe lacks a unified demos, Habermas argues that national public spheres can be "opened to each other" through translation, media cooperation, and pan-European deliberation (Habermas, 2015f, pp.552-554). He challenges the "no demos" thesis by asserting that civic solidarity need not rest on ethnonational identity. Instead, shared democratic values and mutual recognition can serve as the foundation for transnational legitimacy. The lack of mutual trust among citizens of different Member States, he contends, is a political and communicative deficit, not a natural condition (Habermas, 2015f, pp.552-554). A striking feature of Habermas' essay is its faith in the educative and self-reflective capacities of democratic publics. Habermas views European unification not merely as a technocratic project but as a normative learning process: just as national democracies were constructed through historical struggles, a European democracy can emerge through discursive engagement, political mobilization, and shared experiences. Habermas calls for citizens to act "as if" they were already members of a dual community, national and European. By doing so, they would close the gap between normative ideals and institutional realities, thereby enabling the creation of a post-national political identity grounded in democratic practices (Habermas, 2015f, pp.552-554). This is a fundamental aspect introduced by Habermas, who has dedicated a significant amount of his academic life to study the political public sphere and political communication, and it represents a complete novelty when compared to Dehousse's thought.

Habermas's intervention on European integration has generated an extensive and diverse body of secondary literature. Scholars have variously interpreted his proposal as a form of post-national constitutionalism, deliberative supranationalism, or as a normative defence of European federalism under novel conditions. Authors such as Jürgen Neyer (Neyer, 2012, p12), and Antje Wiener (Wiener, 2008, p.1) have emphasised the deliberative dimension of Habermas's European project, while others, such as Fritz Scharpf, have criticised its feasibility in the absence of a European demos (Scharpf, 1999, pp.6-7). More recent

contributions by Cristina Lafont (Lafont, 2020, p.3) and Rainer Forst (Forst, 2012, pp.78-101) have further debated the normative foundations of Habermas's concept of transnational legitimacy. Engaging with this literature allows Habermas's 2015 essay to be situated not as an isolated intervention, but as part of an ongoing discourse on the democratic future of the European Union.

Jurgen Habermas' essay *Why the Development of the EU into a Transnational Democracy Is Necessary and How It Is Possible* offers a visionary yet pragmatic roadmap for the future of the European Union, combining a deep normative commitment to democratic ideals with a careful consideration of institutional realities. Central to his framework is the notion of "dual sovereignty", which reflects a sophisticated understanding of the EU's unique political ontology. By reconciling state sovereignty with democratic transnationalism, Habermas charts a path that transcends both nationalist retrenchment and neoliberal technocracy.

However, his proposals face formidable obstacles, such as the absence of political will among governing elites, the rise of populism, and entrenched national interests render treaty reform politically challenging. Moreover, the lack of a vibrant European public sphere further complicates the prospect of democratic mobilization across borders.

The strength of Habermas' contribution lies in articulating what is both necessary and possible. He reminds us that the EU's legitimacy crisis cannot be resolved through economic adjustments alone. Only by restoring democratic agency to European citizens, and embedding that agency within robust institutional structures, can the EU regain its normative credibility.

In this respect, Habermas' approach merits comparison with that of Fernand Dehousse, both for relevance and depth. While both approaches lead to the same directions, they do so in different ways. In Habermas we find a deeper degree of theoretical reasoning that underpins political beliefs and strategy, something that, without being non-existing, is somewhat lacking in Dehousse's approach. A clear example can be found in Habermas theory of the "double sovereignty". Moreover, while both authors realize the necessity of such a double sovereignty, they disagree in how to realize it institutionally. While Dehousse supported the realization of a double sovereignty within the European Parliament, Habermas believed in the realization of such an objective through the share competences of the Parliament and the Council. Moreover, while Dehousse was working to lay the foundation of new political institutions, although starting from the already existing ones, Habermas was working to renovate already existing ones. Proposals such as strengthening the Commission role as a

full-fledged executive legitimized by the dual sovereignty body – in Dehousse, the Parliament, in Habermas, the Parliament and the Council - seem to be shared by both Habermas in his paper and by Dehousse when he stated that "For Europe to exist, it must have a Government of Europe" (Dehousse, 1953e, p.8). Another interesting feature shared by both authors is their reformist, yet decisive tendencies. In fact, Habermas objective, as he clearly states in the abstract of the essay, is to reform the EU institutions starting from what is already there (Habermas, 2015a, p.546). At the same time, Fernand Dehousse and the working group interpret the relevant treaty provisions not as requiring full-scale treaty revisions, but as permitting partial and specific modifications to accommodate the electoral reform (Dehousse, 1960b, pp.7-9).

In sum, comparing Habermas's essay with Dehousse's work helps to contextualize Dehousse's activities within a broader and evolving trajectory of European supranational development, highlighting both continuities and transformations in European political thought. The different approaches between the two authors shed a light not only on the value of the two authors' work: at times clashing, at times convergent, at times complementary; but more importantly on the legacy of Dehousse's intellectual and political activity.

In the next chapter we are going to dig deeper into this legacy, by taking a look at how Dehousse's proposals were reflected, or not, into the institutional development of the European Parliament as we know it now. Moreover, we will address also an issue raised by both Dehousse and Habermas: the democratic deficit within the EU institution. Finally, we'll take a closer look at how, if at all, Dehousse's proposals compare with current proposals for reforms of the European Parliament.

3 An Evaluation of Fernand Dehousse's Influence and Ideas on the Institutional Evolution of the EU

The developmental history of the European Parliament as an institution was everything but smooth. Between setbacks, compromises, and Pyrrhic victories, the first direct elections of 1979 nevertheless marked a decisive turning point in the long institutional journey that federalists such as Fernand Dehousse had imagined since the immediate postwar years, when Dehousse himself claimed that "With some luck and considerable goodwill, we could achieve the objective of our efforts [a sovereign supranational assembly n.d.r.] in 1962, but more probably in 1963" (Dehousse, 24th December 1959a, Interview). From that moment onward, the European Parliament began a steady evolution from a consultative assembly to something much similar to a legislative chamber, although with many limits, within the European Union's complex institutional architecture. This transformational pattern , marked most clearly by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and later by the Treaty on the European Union (Lisbon Treaty) of 2009, has progressively altered the balance of power within the Union, institutionalizing many of the democratic principles that Dehousse and his contemporaries had once theorized.

In this last chapter, we are going to examine the evolution of the European Parliament's institutional role following the first direct election of 1979, and compare the European Parliament's development to Fernand Dehousse's institutional proposals. To do so, we will introduce and analyze the five main treaties that shaped the European Parliament into its current form: the Maastricht Treaty, the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Treaty of Nice and the Lisbon Treaty. Our choice fell on these five treaties as they best represent, both in terms of importance and chronological coherence, the main milestones that lead to the actual institutional form of the European Parliament. We will first analyze their content, and then provide a comparison with Dehousse's institutional proposals.

Afterwards, following the intent, that is, to analyze post-1979 political proposals for the institutional development of the European Parliament, and compare them with Dehousse's ones; we will present and compare Dehousse's proposals with those of the most recent and relevant literature on the topic. In particular, we will present and compare the proposal set out by Sergio Fabbrini and Marco Buti, Andrew Moravcsik, Cristopher Lord, Peter Mair and Jacques Thomassen, and Giandomenico Majone. Our research confronts selected works of these authors as an attempt to shed a light on the current academic debate over the topics

covered by Dehousse's work. In particular, it will do so by focusing on these authors' works and debates over the alleged "democratic deficit" found in the EU institutions and particularly in the European Parliament. The choice to focus on the topic of democratic deficit relies on the fact that solving the democratic deficit problem while building a supranational institutions has always been a topic at the heart of Fernand Dehousse's political activities.

Finally, the last part of the chapter will present contemporary political projects and association that aim at building a supranational and democratic Europe. In particular, we will present the history and the work of two pan-European association: International Movement Europe and the Union of European Federalists; and one pan-European political party: Volt Europa. By presenting these realities, and comparing their work with Dehousse's work and thought, we aim to give a contemporary outlook to the federalist project and finally evaluate Dehousse's legacy in contemporary politics.

3.1. From Maastricht to the Treaty on the European Union: The Evolution of the European Parliament and the Legacy of Fernand Dehousse

Before examining the institutional shifts of the 1990s, it is essential to recall the foundational thought of Fernand Dehousse, whose federalist vision provided the intellectual blueprint for many of the reforms that would later materialize. Central to Dehousse's thought was the conviction that a European assembly could not remain a mere consultative body; it had to evolve into a genuine legislative power to bridge the gap between the European project and its citizens. He famously advocated for a "dual legitimacy" model—a bicameral system where a Chamber of the People, elected by universal suffrage, would balance a Senate representing the Member States (Dehousse, 1954a, p. 231). For Dehousse, the European executive also had to be independent of national governments, deriving its legitimacy directly from the Parliament itself (Dehousse, 1952a, p. 63).

The Treaty of Maastricht, signed on 7 February 1992 and entered into force on 1 November 1993, stands as the first main watershed moment in the history of post-1979 European integration. The treaty formally established the European Union, replacing the previous system of loosely connected Communities with a more unified institutional framework built on three pillars: the European Communities, the Common Foreign and Security Policy

(CFSP), and Cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) (Christiansen et al., 2012, pp. 686- 688). For the European Parliament, Maastricht was nothing short of revolutionary. It expanded its powers significantly, notably by renaming the "co-decision procedure" as "ordinary legislative procedure", and making it the standard policymaking procedure under EU legislation[17]. The adoption of the co-decision procedure as the standard policymaking procedure represented an interesting shift toward Dehousse's federalist ideal. In fact, for the first time in the history of European integration, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, renamed under Maastricht the "Council of the European Union", were placed on an equal footing in several legislative areas, including the internal market, education, health, and consumer protection. The procedure required both institutions to approve identical texts for legislation to pass, effectively granting the Parliament a veto power over many legislative proposals[18]. While limited in scope compared to national legislatures, this innovation institutionalized a type of dual legitimacy that Dehousse had already advocated in the early 1950s through his proposal for a bicameral European Parliament composed of a Chamber of the People and a Senate representing member states (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). Although not part of a single parliament as in Dehousse's proposal, under Maastricht, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union acted de-facto as two chambers representing on the one hand the totality of the European populations, and on the other the different national constituencies. In both cases, the underlying rationale was the same: to balance the democratic principle of popular representation with the functional need for member state participation, although the Maastricht result appears more tilted towards intergovernmentalism than supranationalism, as we will argue later on.

Equally significant was the Parliament's enhanced role in approving the President of the European Commission. Article 158 of the Maastricht Treaty provided that the European Council should nominate a candidate for Commission President, subject to the Parliament's approval[19]. This provision, modest though it might appear, shifted the locus of political accountability away from national executives and toward the supranational sphere. Dehousse had long argued that the European executive must not be in the hands of national governments, but rather an independent body endowed with legitimacy derived from the

[17] Treaty on the European Union. (1992). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.189. Bruxelles.
[18] Treaty on the European Union. (1992). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.120-126-129. Bruxelles.
[19] Treaty on the European Union. (1992). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.158. Bruxelles.

European Parliament itself (Dehousse, 1952a, p. 63). The Maastricht framework did not fully achieve this ideal, yet it introduced a constitutional logic aligned with his vision: that European governance should be at least somehow democratically accountable. (Hix & Høyland 2011, pp. 72-76).

The Maastricht Treaty also expanded the Parliament's influence in budgetary matters, extending the authority first acquired under the Treaty of Brussels of 1975 (Costa, 2009, p.148). Under the Maastricht Treaty Parliament gained the right to reject the budget in its entirety, an authority that strengthened its leverage over both the Council of the European Union and the Commission[20]. Dehousse, who had warned as early as 1960 that the absence of financial control would render any assembly ineffective, would likely have viewed this development as a concrete step toward substantive parliamentary power (Dehousse, 1960b, pp. 7-9).

Nevertheless, the democratic promise of Maastricht, particularly in terms of strengthening parliamentary influence at the European level, was significantly constrained by a series of institutional compromises. The treaty's complex pillar structure preserved large domains of intergovernmental decision-making, particularly in foreign and security policy. Moreover, while the co-decision procedure symbolized equality between Parliament and Council, its application was limited to selected policy areas[21]. The persistence of unanimity voting in many domains reflected the cautious pragmatism of member states still reluctant to cede sovereignty.

From the perspective of Dehousse's intellectual legacy, Maastricht embodied the dilution of the federalist dream, as it adopted federalist provisions only in part. It brought forward, although in a hampered manner, his lifelong advocacy for a directly elected and empowered Parliament, yet it also institutionalized a hybrid system in which democratic representation coexisted uneasily with state-centric decision-making. In this sense, the Treaty marked the triumph of Member States' concerns over constitutional revolution, the very tension Dehousse had wrestled with in his political career.

[20] Treaty on the European Union. (1992). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.203. Bruxelles.
[21] Treaty on the European Union. (1992). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Artt.100,126,129,130. Bruxelles

Following Maastricht, the Parliament's political and historical development continued through a series of treaty revisions: Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001), and finally Lisbon (2009).

The Treaty of Amsterdam marked a significant qualitative step in the empowerment of the European Parliament by substantially extending the co-decision procedure to a wide range of policy areas, including employment, social policy, public health, consumer protection, transparency, and environmental policy[22]. In addition, Amsterdam strengthened the Parliament's role in the appointment of the Commission by requiring its approval of the Commission President prior to the nomination of the College as a whole, thereby reinforcing parliamentary oversight over the executive[23].

The Treaty of Nice, while primarily driven by the institutional constraints posed by eastern enlargement, further consolidated the Parliament's position within the Union's constitutional architecture. It revised the allocation of seats in the Parliament to preserve degressive proportionality among member states, expanded the scope of co-decision to additional policy fields, and confirmed the Parliament's decisive role in approving the Commission as a collective body[24]. The extension of the Parliament's power had been for a long a concern of Dehousse, as he stated in an interview with Belgian newspaper Le Soir "In any event, the extension of the responsibilities of the European Parliament is already the subject of concern among its members, including some of the most influential ones." (Dehousse, 24th December 1959b) However, Nice did not fundamentally alter the interinstitutional balance, it normalized the Parliament's presence as a co-legislator and constitutional actor within an enlarged Union.

Taken together, these reforms did more than incrementally strengthen parliamentary participation: they progressively embedded the European Parliament within the Union's legislative and executive accountability mechanisms, while stopping short of a full parliamentary model. In this sense, Amsterdam and Nice prepared the institutional and

[22] Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts. (1997). *Official Journal of the European Communities.* Artt.136-145, 251.
[23] Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts. (1997). *Official Journal of the European Communities.* Art. 214
[24] Treaty of Nice. (2001). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Artt. 189,190,214. Bruxelles.

procedural ground for the more far-reaching, but still structurally constrained, parliamentary empowerment introduced by the Lisbon Treaty.

The Treaty on the function of the European Union, also known as the Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007 and entering into force in 2009, represented the culmination of this gradual transformation. The Treaty of Lisbon re-formulated the Rome Treaty, renaming it Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), restructuring the EU's constitutional order and elevated the European Parliament to full co-legislator status[25]. In fact, the Treaty of Lisbon extended the co-decision procedure to nearly all policy areas, making it the most used method of decision-making for EU policies[26].

Moreover, the Treaty of Lisbon allowed the EP to initiate treaty changes under article 48 of the Treaty on the European Union[27]. This inclusion is of particular relevance. As the truest supranational body within the EU institutions, the European Parliament's ability to initiate treaty reform meant good news for European Federalists. However, in perfect EU-bureaucratic style, the proposal, once initiated by Parliament, would have to be sent to the Council of the EU, which then transmits it to the European Council, where it can pass by simple majority. The provision has never been used to this date. In 2023, a groups of MEPs wrote a proposal to launch dialogues for treaty reform. However, it has been stuck at the European Council ever since (European Young Federalists, 2025, Available Online).

Finally, in line with developments stemming from Maastricht in 1992, the Treaty of Lisbon granted the Parliament the power to approve or reject the whole EU budget under Article 314, effectively putting on an equal footing with the Council in this respect[28].

Lisbon also introduced the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), allowing one million citizens from at least seven member states to invite the Commission to propose legislation[29]. While not a direct parliamentary prerogative, the ECI complemented the Parliament's representative function by fostering participatory democracy at the supranational level. We can recognize in

[25] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.14.
[26] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.289.
[27] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.48.
[28] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.314.
[29] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.11(4).

this mechanism an attempt, however limited, to cultivate an instance of democratization of the EU institutions, an objective shared by Dehousse, although through different institutional strategies.

Another emblematic innovation of the Lisbon framework was the enhanced role of the European Parliament in the selection of the Commission President. Article 17(7) TFEU provided that the European Council should propose a candidate "taking into account the results of the European elections," subject to parliamentary approval[30]. This was a formal step forward compared to Maastricht where, although the Commission President was still to be formally approved by the Parliament, there was not the need to take into consideration European Political elections and the composition of the Parliament when proposing a candidate. It is exactly from this development that according to some scholars, through a process of legal interpretation, the practice of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, in which European political parties nominated lead candidates for the Commission Presidency, came to be (Marteinsdóttir, 2025, p.7). This practice mandates for the President of the Commission to be a direct expression of the political powers within the Parliament. What this means is that the role of the Council, currently fundamental in choosing the name guiding the European executive, would be really reassessed in favour of the Parliament. This non-legal process was first used in 2014, with the election of Karl Juncker as Commission President (Marteinsdóttir, 2025, p.8). In many respects, this development completed a circle first traced by Dehousse: the notion that Europe's executive authority must derive its legitimacy from the will of its citizens, as expressed through their representatives (Dehousse, 1953e, p.8). However, the Spitzenkandidat practice was short lived, as it has not been used again after Junker's election.

Despite the profound institutional transformations since 1992, the European Parliament's evolution remains marked by the same dialectic that animated Dehousse's federalist thought and that we have highlighted in the first chapter: the tension between supranational democracy and intergovernmental control. Dehousse had conceived the European Parliament not merely as a legislative body but as the moral and political center of a federated Europe, capable of expressing the general will of its peoples. In his interventions at the European Movement and the EPC debates, he had argued for a parity based senate as a *conditio sine qua non* to create a democratic arena (Dehousse, 1953d, p.4), warning against reducing parliamentary deliberation to intergovernmental negotiation (Dehousse, 1953b, p.1). This

[30] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.17(7).

warning remains strikingly relevant in assessing the post-Lisbon institutional equilibrium, where many policy areas still depend on consensus among national governments. In practice, while the Lisbon Treaty elevated the Parliament's formal status, the persistence of executive dominance, both by the European Council and the Commission, continues to constrain its political agency. Legislative initiative remains a monopoly of the Commission, and in areas such as foreign policy, economic governance, and treaty change, the Parliament's role is consultative or limited at best[31]. This asymmetry reveals the enduring limits of what Dehousse tried to overcome through the proposal of the EPC, where legislative authority would have been laid in the two chambers of the Parliament of the European Community (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). His belief that genuine integration required a constitutionally empowered Parliament and an accountable executive remains only partially realized to this day.

This outcome is due to the fact that the both the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty were treaties that furthered EU integration at a intergovernmental level (Fabbrini & Puetter, 2016, p.15). Far from adopting radical ideas for a supranationally united Europe, the European Member States have integrated cooperation by giving further powers to intergovernmental bodies, instead of supranational ones (Fabbrini & Puetter, 2016, p.15). As Sergio Fabbrini has argued, since Maastricht the European Union has been structured around a dual constitutional regime, in which supranational decision-making prevails in market-regulatory policies, while intergovernmental logics dominate policy areas close to core state powers, thereby constraining the European Parliament's role outside the supranational sphere (Fabbrini, 2019, pp. 418–427). Thus, while on the one hand certain progress was made towards the realization of a vision long articulated by Dehousse, such as EP's fundamental involvement in ordinary legislation, the two most important treaties after 1979, the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon, were fundamentally intergovernmentalists in nature.

Yet, the history of the European Parliament is not just a history of setbacks. By the early twenty-first century, the European Parliament had become one of the three central pillars of the EU's institutional architecture, alongside the Council and the Commission. Its legislative, budgetary, and supervisory powers had grown to levels that would have seemed unimaginable in the 1950s. Moreover, it is, the only real democratic body of the EU, in a normative similar way of how Dehousse and the European federalists wanted it to be.

[31] Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*. Art.17(2).

Precisely, the European Parliament, with its transnational party groups and multilingual deliberations, stands today as the most tangible embodiment of that aspiration described by Dehousse as “A Europe of the peoples, a Europe in which the peoples will play an increasingly important role and in whose destiny they will have a share” (Dehousse, 1963, p.6).

However, for the reasons we have seen above, the European Parliament seems as a halfway institution for federalists such as Dehousse. What such an amputated Parliament creates, according to both parts of the public opinion and scholars, is a democratic deficit in the EU institutions (Sorace, 2022, Available Online). Major criticisms link the lack of European Parliament weight in decision-making to what is perceived as a democratic deficit within EU institutions and policymaking (Sorace, 2022, Available Online). This lack of institutional weight is a problem for all of those people, starting from the likes of Fernand Dehousse and his companions, that have dreamt of a supranational and democratic governance for Europe. Far from being resolved with the elections of 1979, the European Parliament’s role and, more broadly, the democratic deficit within EU institutions, have occupied and still occupy Europe’s most committed minds for decades to come. Recognizing that the topic of democratic deficit in the EU institutions is at the core of Dehousse’s reasoning and an ongoing topic raised by federalists all over Europe, shows how part of the legacy of the Belgian politician remains well alive in today’s political discourse over the future of the EU.

In the next subchapters, we are going to explain what is exactly meant by democratic deficit in the EU, how the elections of 1979 and successive developments such as the Treaty of Maastricht and Lisbon failed to solve such deficit, and argue in favour of its overcoming. Finally, before concluding our study, we will present and debate the different federalist visions alive in today’s Europe, to test and re-imagine Fernand Dehousse’s legacy in contemporary European federalist thought.

3.2. Reassessing Europe’s Democratic Deficit: Fernand Dehousse in Dialogue with Contemporary Theory

A central pillar of Fernand Dehousse’s European political project was his effort to address the persistent democratic deficit within the emerging European institutions. As a steadfast advocate of European democratic federalism, Dehousse maintained that the active

participation of citizens in the European project constituted a fundamental precondition for a peaceful and prosperous future on the continent (Dehousse, 1960a, pp. 10-12). On a practical level, he advanced two major responses to this challenge, articulated respectively in the draft for the European Political Community and, several years later, in the Report Dehousse.

Within the EPC proposal, the creation of a Chamber of the People, to be directly elected by universal suffrage, represented Dehousse's first concrete and pragmatic attempt to overcome the problem of democratic deficit (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). Although he recognised the political compromises necessary to make the EPC acceptable to the member states, Dehousse nevertheless framed its bicameral structure, which also included an indirectly elected Senate, as a meaningful step toward endowing the European institutions with genuine democratic legitimacy. By introducing a parliamentary system grounded in dual representation, he sought to reconcile popular sovereignty with state participation in the governance of Europe (European Movement, 1954, pp. 231-232).

Conscious of the limitations and ultimate failure of the EPC project, Dehousse later revisited the issue from a more strictly parliamentary perspective in the Report Dehousse. Here, he reaffirmed his conviction that direct and universal elections were the most effective and realistic means of remedying the democratic deficit of the European Communities (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). While the earlier EPC had offered a comprehensive constitutional framework, the Report Dehousse focused on a single institution, the Parliamentary Assembly, arguing that only through the direct election of its members could the Communities acquire the democratic legitimacy necessary for their long-term stability and acceptance (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12).

As we have discussed, upon Dehousse's ideas the modern European Parliament was born, and, yet, it has still been accused of not fully covering the democratic deficit.

As discussed above, other thinkers, such as Jurgen Habermas, have provided their input in solving the intricate maze European democratic deficit. We have seen how according to Habermas the issue of democratic deficit still has to do with institutions but is reflected in a much broader approach, as he links the EU's democratic deficit to the technocratic insulation of decision-making, the constitutionalisation of neoliberal economic policy, and the absence of a genuine European public sphere enabling transnational political discourse (Habermas, 2015c, pp. 548 – 550). Thus, his proposed remedy is a constitutional transformation of the

Union into a transnational democracy founded on double sovereignty (Habermas, 2015e, pp. 554-555).

However, the intellectual and political dialogue over the alleged democratic deficit in EU institutions has a longer literature and context than just Fernand Dehousse and Jurgen Habermas. In this subchapter, we will present and analyse some of the most relevant take on the topic of democratic deficit within the European institutions, and compare various authors' position with that of Fernand Dehousse. The aim of this chapter is to encapsulate Fernand Dehousse's political discourse historically and evaluate it qualitatively, by comparing it with the most recent and relevant literature on the topic.

Before jumping straight into the different literature related to Europe's democratic deficit, we would like to introduce an interesting and useful tool, to accompany the reader into this part of our study. That tool is the so called "Monnet Compatibility Test" or MCT. Monnet Compatibility Test is a tool developed by Marco Buti and Sergio Fabbrini as an analytical framework to assess whether European governance arrangements are coherent with the foundational principles of European integration and with Jean Monnet's incremental logic of supranationalism (Buti & Fabbrini, 2022, p. 15). The test posits that any governance or policy response within the Union can be considered "Monnet-compatible" when three forms of coherence — institutional, economic, and political — are simultaneously satisfied (Buti & Fabbrini, 2022, pp. 15-16).

Institutional coherence refers to the ability of a governance framework to leverage supranational decision-making while still respecting the role of national institutions, thereby maintaining fidelity to the principle of subsidiarity and the logic of the EU Treaties (Buti & Fabbrini, 2022, p. 15). Economic coherence concerns the effectiveness and complementarity of policy responses at both the European and national levels, ensuring that vertical and horizontal coordination reinforce rather than undermine each other (Buti & Fabbrini, 2022, p. 16). Finally, political coherence entails the capacity of the governance arrangement to retain citizens' trust and political support, which is crucial for the long-term legitimacy of integration (Buti & Fabbrini, 2022, p. 16). In conceptual terms, the Monnet Compatibility Test is valuable beyond the field of economic governance. It provides a heuristic for analysing the legitimacy and democratic quality of European decision-making: a governance structure that strengthens supranational authority while ensuring national participation and maintaining citizens' confidence can be considered both effective and democratically

sustainable. The MCT plays an interesting role in discussions around the European democratic deficit as it does not propose an institutional solution per-se, but frames a set of rules that institutional propositions for a real democratic EU ought to respect.

In *A Democratic Audit of the European Union* (2004), Christopher Lord offers one of the most systematic attempts to evaluate the democratic quality of the EU's institutional order. His starting premise is that the democratic legitimacy of the Union cannot be captured by a single institutional criterion, such as electoral representation. Rather, it must be assessed through a multidimensional audit encompassing five key democratic functions: representation, accountability, participation, rights, and public control (Lord, 2004, pp. 8–11). These dimensions, he argues, are mutually reinforcing: "Democracy is not a single institution but a system of interlocking practices" (Lord, 2004, p. 10).

Lord acknowledges that the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 significantly improved the Union's representative credentials, giving citizens a formal channel of participation in supranational decision-making (Lord, 2004, pp. 47–48). However, he insists that this reform addressed only one element of democracy, namely representation, while leaving other dimensions, particularly accountability and executive responsibility, largely untouched. In his view, the European Parliament "represents, but does not yet govern" (Lord, 2004, p. 56): it can express public preferences but cannot effectively hold the executive to account. This structural imbalance reflects what Lord calls the "incomplete democratization" of the EU — a polity in which citizens can elect representatives without being able to sanction those who govern them (Lord, 2004, p.32).

Accordingly, Lord's audit identifies enduring weaknesses in three interrelated areas. First, the "executive deficit": the European Commission, while indirectly accountable to the Parliament, remains insulated from direct electoral control (Lord, 2004, pp. 72–74). Second, the "participatory deficit": citizens' engagement in European politics remains episodic and weakly institutionalized, as European elections continue to be framed by national concerns (Lord, 2004, p. 79). Third, the "accountability deficit": the complex and multilevel nature of EU governance blurs the chain of responsibility, making it difficult to determine "who is to be held responsible for what" (Lord, 2004, p. 84). For Lord, therefore, democratization at the European level requires not only electoral representation but also mechanisms ensuring that executives are politically and legally answerable to citizens through parliamentary and judicial oversight.

When compared with Fernand Dehousse's institutional imagination, Lord's analytical framework appears strikingly convergent. As discussed in Chapter 2, Dehousse's federalist designs already anticipated a multidimensional understanding of democracy akin to Lord's audit model. In his proposal for an EPC , Dehousse advocated a bicameral Parliament, combining a directly elected assembly with a chamber of states; an executive responsible to Parliament; and an independent judicial authority to safeguard the rule of law and citizens' rights Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). For Dehousse, direct elections were a necessary but not sufficient condition for legitimacy: the democratic edifice also required political accountability, participatory openness, and judicial control; the very dimensions Lord would later define as the criteria of a democratic audit.

In this sense, Dehousse's vision prefigures Lord's normative architecture. Where Lord's audit reveals that the post-1979 EU fulfilled only one democratic function, representation, Dehousse's federal design sought to institutionalize all five simultaneously. His blueprint combined representational legitimacy (through direct elections) with accountability (through parliamentary control of the executive), participation (through transnational parties), rights (through a supranational court), and public control (through transparent, law-based governance). Thus, while Lord's audit exposes the limited scope of democratization achieved by the existing Union, Dehousse's proposals demonstrate how a more balanced and coherent democratic order might have been realized. Analytically, one could say that Dehousse's project "passes" Lord's audit more convincingly than the actual institutional evolution of the EU, as it addresses representation, accountability, participation, rights, and control as interdependent rather than isolated dimensions of legitimacy.

Ultimately, Lord's framework provides a contemporary vocabulary for assessing the very democratic ideals that animated Dehousse's federalist thought. Both converge on the premise that European democracy must rest on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars. Yet where Lord identifies the persistence of a systemic imbalance between representation and responsibility, Dehousse had already designed an institutional system that aimed to overcome precisely that disjunction. His constitutional imagination thus appears normatively ahead of its time, anticipating by several decades the multidimensional audit logic through which Lord redefines the standards of democracy in the European Union.

However, not all authors have been as actively worried in tackling the European institutions democratic deficit as Dehousse, as some of them have been cautious over the topic. Some,

like Andrew Moravcsik, offer an interesting reinterpretation of the European Union's alleged democratic deficit. In his view, the widespread concern about the EU's legitimacy is largely misplaced, since the Union's institutional framework is, in comparative perspective, no less democratic than that of its member states (Moravcsik, 2002, p.603). He argues that the EU's system of governance operates under "constitutional checks and balances", including narrow competences, fiscal limits, supermajoritarian voting, and institutional separation of powers; that collectively constrain decision-making and ensure accountability (Moravcsik, 2002, p.603). The perception of a democratic shortfall, Moravcsik suggests, derives from an idealised understanding of democracy rather than from empirical institutional deficiencies (Moravcsik, 2002, pp. 606-607). Critics, he contends, evaluate the EU against an abstract model of plebiscitary or parliamentary democracy that "no modern government can meet" (Moravcsik, 2002, 605).

For Moravcsik, the Union's partial insulation from direct electoral control is neither exceptional nor normatively troubling. Rather, it reflects the functional logic of delegation in modern democracies (Moravcsik, 2002, pp. 606-608). Policy areas such as monetary policy, competition law and trade negotiations, which are those most frequently managed at the European level, are precisely those that national systems also entrust to independent or technocratic bodies. (Moravcsik, 2002, pp.613-614). Delegating such competences to non-majoritarian institutions, Moravcsik argues, is consistent with democratic practice because it safeguards impartial expertise, long-term policy stability, and minority rights in domains of low electoral salience where citizens are rationally ignorant of complex policy details (Moravcsik, 2002, p.614).

In this perspective, the EU's legitimacy rests not on direct popular participation, but on a dual mechanism of indirect accountability and constitutional constraint. Member state governments, acting through the Council and the European Council, remain accountable to their national electorates and thus provide a democratic chain of delegation (Moravcsik, 2002, pp. 612-613). Meanwhile, the European Parliament offers complementary, though not primary, representative legitimacy (Moravcsik, 2002, p. 612). Consequently, Moravcsik concludes that the EU is democratically legitimate insofar as it mirrors the institutional logic of advanced liberal democracies, combining representative oversight, judicial review, and technocratic delegation in a balanced and normatively defensible manner (Moravcsik, 2002, p. 622).

This functionalist and comparative approach diverges sharply from Fernand Dehousse's normative conception of European democracy. Writing in the formative decades of integration, Dehousse interpreted the absence of direct citizen participation as a genuine democratic deficit demanding institutional correction (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). His federalist vision centred on the direct election of a supranational parliament as the cornerstone of democratic legitimacy (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12). For Dehousse, legitimacy could not be secured through intergovernmental accountability alone; rather, it required the establishment of a European parliamentary system capable of representing citizens independently of their national governments (Dehousse, 1953e, p.8). In contrast, Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalist reasoning situates legitimacy within the existing system of national and supranational checks, viewing the EU's limited scope of action and indirect accountability as appropriate to its functional nature.

Where Dehousse envisioned a federal Europe grounded in direct representation and participatory democracy, Moravcsik defends a constrained Europe legitimized by delegation and constitutional restraint. Dehousse's approach is prescriptive and constitutive, seeking to democratise Europe through institutional innovation; Moravcsik's is descriptive and justificatory, demonstrating that the current institutional configuration already meets the standards of a modern liberal democracy. Ultimately, while both acknowledge the need for legitimacy in European governance, they diverge fundamentally on its source: for Dehousse, legitimacy emanates from the citizens' direct involvement in supranational decision-making; for Moravcsik, it derives from the accountable exercise of delegated authority within a system of constrained, representative governance.

In their article *Political Representation and Government in the European Union* (2010), Peter Mair and Jacques Thomassen revisit the democratic deficit debate by analysing two interrelated dimensions: the absence of a system of party government at the European level, and the apparent failures of European parties to represent citizens' preferences effectively (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, pp.20-2). Their argument departs from the widespread assumption that the Union's legitimacy could be enhanced by replicating the model of parliamentary or party government characteristic of national democracies. Instead, Mair and Thomassen contend that this assumption is both theoretically and empirically misguided: even if feasible, the establishment of party government at the EU level would not necessarily be desirable (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 21).

According to the authors, the democratic deficit manifests itself in two principal ways. The first relates to the lack of parliamentary control over the European executive, the Commission, which follows from the absence of a fusion between representation and government (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 21).Within traditional conceptions of representative democracy, legitimacy stems from this very fusion: political parties represent citizens, form parliamentary majorities, and thereby constitute and control the executive. As the authors note, *"*a main characteristic of party government is the fusion of the functions of representation and executive control*"* (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 24). However, they argue that the sociopolitical conditions that once enabled this fusion no longer exist in contemporary democracies (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 24-25). In fact, national parties have lost their representational vitality: from being rooted in civil society, they have evolved into quasi-public institutions, increasingly dependent on state resources and oriented toward the management rather than representation of the polity (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, pp. 24–25).

This transformation has eroded parties' dual role as intermediaries between society and the state. Parties have become, in the authors' words, "public utilities" (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 26), more concerned with maintaining governance than articulating citizens' interests. Consequently, the national model of party government can no longer serve as a democratic ideal for the Union. Attempting to reproduce it at the European level, they caution, would risk "hindering the capacity of European elections and parties to ensure representative outcomes" (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 24).

The second dimension of the democratic deficit concerns political representation within the European Parliament itself. Conventional scholarship has often interpreted European elections as second-order national elections, fought by national parties on national issues and used by voters to sanction or reward domestic governments (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 27). In this view, the democratic deficit arises because these elections fail to express the collective will of the European people. Mair and Thomassen challenge this diagnosis, arguing that such an assessment rests on a misunderstanding of where different kinds of representation should occur. Decisions about European polity questions, such as treaty reform or enlargement, belong to the intergovernmental level, where national parliaments and electorates retain ultimate authority (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, pp. 27–28). The European Parliament, by contrast, primarily legislates on policy issues structured along the left–right ideological dimension. In this domain, empirical research reveals a surprising degree of

congruence between European voters and their representatives: Research shows an unexpected alignment between European voters and their representatives: even without a fully developed system of EU-level political representation, the combined results of national elections still produce a fairly close match between the preferences of the European electorate and the positions of the European Parliament. (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 29).

This empirical findings support the authors' broader paradox: the absence of party government may in fact enhance democratic representation. Because European parties do not govern, they remain relatively free from the bureaucratic constraints and self-referential tendencies that plague their national counterparts (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 26). The separation between representation and government, that is, between the European Parliament and the Commission, creates conditions in which parties can more authentically represent citizens' preferences. As Mair and Thomassen conclude, *"*freed from the demands of governing, parties at the European level may be able to provide a more robust channel of representation than that currently on offer within the democratic polities of the member states*"* (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 26).

In their view, the democratic deficit thus appears less severe than commonly portrayed. The European Parliament has accumulated significant legislative and budgetary powers, and, crucially, its party groups already perform an effective representative function (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 32). The real danger, they argue, lies not in the absence of party government but in its possible introduction. Attempting to fuse representation and government at the European level might exacerbate existing legitimacy problems in both the Union and its member states (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 32).

Mair and Thomassen's conclusions represent a profound departure from Dehousse's ones. Dehousse's institutional imagination rested precisely on the premise that democratic legitimacy in Europe required the political responsibility of an executive to an elected Parliament. (Dehousse, 1953e, p.8) His proposal for the European Political Community envisaged a bicameral parliamentary system where the European executive would derive its authority from popular and parliamentary consent (Dehousse, 1954a, p.231). Mair and Thomassen, by contrast, interpret the current institutional separation between representation and government not as a deficiency but as a virtue.

Their reasoning also indirectly challenges Dehousse's belief in political parties as the essential mediators of democratic life. Whereas Dehousse's vision seems to take for granted

party-based representation as the cornerstone of a supranational democracy, Mair and Thomassen diagnose parties as the very agents whose fusion of representation and governance has produced crisis and alienation at the national level. In their account, the European Parliament's relative detachment from executive power preserves its representative integrity; precisely the opposite of what Dehousse envisioned.

Yet, their position does not entirely negate Dehousse's legacy. Both share the conviction that legitimacy in the European project ultimately depends on meaningful representation of citizens. The difference lies in the institutional path toward that end: where Dehousse sought to integrate representation and government, Mair and Thomassen advocate maintaining their separation. Their paradoxical conclusion, that "one of the most commonly cited aspects of the democratic deficit thereby appears to alleviate the other" (Mair & Thomassen, 2010, p. 21), invites a reconsideration of whether the European Parliament's strength must necessarily derive from executive control, or whether its democratic value may in fact lie in its independence.

In *Rethinking the Union of Europe Post-Crisis* (2014), Giandomenico Majone advances a conception of European integration grounded not in democratic participation but in technocratic performance. Building on his earlier theory of the European Union as a regulatory state, Majone argues that the Union's legitimacy derives primarily from its output, thus its capacity to produce effective, credible, and welfare-enhancing policies; rather than from input mechanisms such as electoral accountability or parliamentary control (Majone, 2014, pp. 9–12). For him, the distinctive feature of the EU lies precisely in its separation from the partisan and majoritarian dynamics that dominate national politics, which enables the EU institutions to insulate policy-making from transient political pressures and to secure credibility over time (Majone, 2014, p. 15). This is exactly why, according to Majone, the European Union constitutes an innovative system of governance characterized by an integrated form of governance that departs significantly from the classical separation of powers found in national constitutional regimes (Majone, 2014, pp.66-68).

This conception of output legitimacy rests on two core assumptions. First, the European project emerged historically as a solution to problems requiring long-term coordination, such as competition law, monetary stability, environmental regulation, where expertise and predictability matter more than electoral responsiveness (Majone, 2014, p.6). Second, the fact that the Union's democratic deficit, frequently decried by federalists, is in large part a

functional necessity, as according to Majone the EU was not meant to be a democracy in the same sense as the member states, but a regulatory polity whose legitimacy depends on the quality of its outcomes (Majone, 2014, p. 18). From this standpoint, direct elections to the European Parliament add little to legitimacy because they neither enhance the effectiveness of policy-making nor strengthen citizens' trust in European institutions (Majone, 2014, p. 21).

Majone therefore distinguishes between input legitimacy, or government by the people, and *output legitimacy*, or government for the people (Majone, 2014, pp. 22–24). The latter, he maintains, is the most appropriate criterion for evaluating a multi-level polity such as the EU, whose competences are largely regulatory and depoliticised. In his view, the post-Maastricht and post-Lisbon expansions of the Parliament's powers risk blurring this functional clarity (Majone, 2014, p.4). By introducing electoral and partisan logics into an institutional system designed for expertise and consensus, the Union may undermine the very efficiency on which its legitimacy depends (Majone, 2014, p. 27).

Majone's analysis also reflects a broader scepticism toward the feasibility of a European demos. Given the heterogeneity of public opinions, political cultures, and welfare regimes across member states, he argues, attempts to build a supranational democracy are likely to produce paralysis rather than accountability (Majone, 2014, pp. 30–31). In place of majoritarian responsiveness, he advocates a model of "non-majoritarian institutions" safeguarded by the rule of law, professional expertise, and judicial review. These institutions would generate legitimacy through results rather than through representation (Majone, 2014, p. 33).

From the standpoint of Fernand Dehousse's federalist thought, Majone's reasoning represents almost a mirror inversion. Dehousse's entire project was premised on the conviction that input legitimacy, such as citizens' direct participation through universal suffrage, constitutes the indispensable foundation of European governance. In his Report, Dehousse highlighted that no authority could claim democratic legitimacy without the people's consent expressed through direct election. (Dehousse, 1960a, pp.10-12) For Dehousse, popular participation was not merely symbolic; it was the constitutional mechanism through which supranational authority could become politically and morally accountable (Dehousse, 1960b, pp. 7-9).

The contrast between the two thus encapsulates a deeper normative divide in the philosophy of European integration. For Majone, legitimacy flows downstream, from outcomes to citizens; for Dehousse, it flows upstream, from citizens to institutions. The former privileges

stability, the latter sovereignty of the people. Majone's technocratic defence of the status quo therefore appears as the inversion of Dehousse's post-war optimism: the belief that a politically responsible yet functionally competent supranational government could be constructed through law and democratic representation.

Fernand Dehousse's vision for the European Parliament and broader EU institutions cleared the way for generations of scholars to tackle the same issues of democracy in the EU. Through the assessment of the proposals and works of these new generations of scholars we can better encapsulate Dehousse's political visions into a larger literature on EU institutional integration. While opinions may diverge among scholars on the topic, the intellectual legacy of Dehousse, although not mentioned as it often as perhaps it should be, fed the brains of new generations of scholars and resulted sometimes in emulation, other times in radical ways of thinking the European democratic integration.

3.3. Dehousse's Federalist Legacy in Contemporary Perspective: The European Movement International, the Union of European Federalists, and Volt Europa

Fernand Dehousse's contribution to the institutional imagination of European integration laid the ground for contributions that, as we have seen, are relevant until today. Particularly, his proposals for a democratic, supranational and federal Europe continue to shape, inspire, and challenge contemporary federalist organisations. As they have done for a long time.

This subchapter examines the resonance of Dehousse's ideas in three key actors that actively engage with the question of supranational democracy in Europe: the European Movement International (EMI), the Union of European Federalists (UEF), and Volt Europa. While none of these actors explicitly refers to Fernand Dehousse's work or political thought, their programmes and practices display significant points of convergence and divergence with his institutional vision. Each of these three projects is analysed with regard to its history, programme, and strategic orientation, with the core objective of identifying continuities, transformations, and tensions between Dehousse's thought and today's federalist landscape.

The objective of this analysis is to comparatively assess their programmes, activities, and institutional visions in light of Dehousse's political thought. By situating these contemporary initiatives alongside Dehousse's proposals, the chapter aims to contextualize his political activity within a broader and evolving framework, and to evaluate the extent to which his

vision of European democracy has endured, transformed, or been challenged in present-day debates on European integration.

One of the first European platforms to engage in European integration was the European Movement International (EMI). The European Movement International was founded in the wake of the Second World War, emerging from a constellation of pro-European networks, such as the "La Ligue Européenne de Coopération Economique" (LECE), "l'Union européenne des Fédéralistes" (UEF), "l'Union parlementaire européenne" (UPE) and the Anglo-French United European Movements, that came gathered in the Committee for the Co-ordination of the European Movements in Paris, on 17th July 1947, to come together into The Joint International Committee for European Unity. The group will maintain this name until just after the 1948 Congress of The Hague, when they will change it into the European Movement (Kaiser, 2007, p. 67).

The first President of the newly formed European Movement was British politician Duncan Sandys, with Léon Blum, Winston Churchill, Alcide De Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak elected as Honorary Presidents (European Movement International, 2025a).

To put it broadly, EMI was founded with the objective of promoting peace, democracy and European integration in a devastated post-WWII Europe. While it never had a precise political ideology or political mandate, EMI's founding documents and early publications consistently argued that European integration required not merely diplomatic cooperation but the creation of common institutions, including, significantly, a representative assembly and a set of political competences that could address issues transcending national boundaries (Burgess, 2000, pp. 119–123). The Movement operated as a bridge between political elites, civil society, and emerging supranational institutions (Kaiser, 2007, p. 5).

Its advocacy was instrumental in sustaining public and governmental support for initiatives such as the Council of Europe (1949), the College of Europe (1950), the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), and subsequently the Treaties of Rome (1957) (Westlake, 2016, p.20).

As we explored in the previous chapter, it is exactly at the dawn of the European Movement, in the environment of European idealists ready to change the politics of the Old Continent, that Fernand Dehousse entered in contact with the movement. Starting from January 1949, after being officially invited to join the European Movement by Jean Drapier, beginning a nearly life-long partnership (Dehousse, 13 May 1949). This nearly thirty years long period

marked the most prolific intellectual and political activities of the Belgian professor, whose thought was to deeply influence and guide the general direction of the Movement. Far from being an echo-chamber, the European Movement has always been a gathering that left the necessary intellectual freedom to its members. As it's evident from the archives and documents of the Movement's meetings. disagreements and discussions were normal among members, whose spirits and inclinations moved them sometimes towards a certain solutions, sometimes towards another (Dehousse, 1952b, p.204). However, taking into consideration the normal divergences among members of the same group, it is evident how Dehousse's thought and the Movement's actions were synchronized almost completely from the period that spanned from 1949 until the 1960s. This synchronization becomes most evident in the already cited proposal for a European Political Community, where Dehousse alongside its comrades of the Movement tried to shake significantly the political institutions of Europe. The proposal itself, that of the EPC, was a political victory of Dehousse's ideas within the movement itself, after long discussions within its members.

Aside from the proposal of the EPC, Dehousse successful engagement within the European Movement can be traced also by following the Movement's long standing support in favour of the direct election of the European Parliament by all European citizens, which they actively helped materialize in 1979 (European Movement International, 2025a).

Despite this shared origin, EMI evolved into an organisation whose primary mission became the promotion of European integration rather than the articulation of a detailed constitutional project. As the Communities institutionalised themselves through successive treaties, EMI increasingly assumed a civic and consultative role, acting as an interlocutor between the EU and organised civil society (European Movement International, 2025b). Perhaps, having lost the capacity to attract talents such as the founders of the movement and shying away from realpolitik, the Movement rarely advanced specific institutional models comparable to the bold federal architecture spearheaded by Dehousse in the early 1950s.

Whereas during its first decades of life EMI articulated a revolutionary and concrete institutional vision, with Fernand Dehousse being a core of it, their contemporary proposals became more procedural and participatory in nature.

Indeed, more recently EMI has seeked to bring together European civil society, political parties, governments, academia, trade unions, NGOs and employers, to encourage their participation into the development of European solutions to European problems. The aim of

the group was to enhance European integration and develop new ideas for the future of Europe's political and institutional architecture. While the group maintains its original spirit of European federalism and reform, its current advocacy largely focuses on citizen participation, social dialogue, and European public opinion rather than comprehensive constitutional reform (European Movement International, 2018). This tension is apparent in the group's 2024-2026 Policy Priorities, where objectives such as "supporting Treaty reform to innovate the EU's governance, enhance its democratic legitimacy and improve its institutional functioning", "Tackling discrimination, fake news, hate speech and violence online through comprehensive measures to combat their dissemination", and "Supporting the EU's role in championing a rules-based international order"; while betraying a federalist, democratic and pan-european nature; remain broad, general and not anywhere near as detailed as those followed by the EMI at the time of Dehousse involvement in it (European Movement International, 2023, pp. 3-7).

Thus, to conclude, the EMI was a fundamental group in early European integration and in Fernand Dehousse's thought development. During its first years it provided a platform for Dehousse's ideas and its actions were in turn critically shaped by them. However, after the Dehousse's death and the instititutionalization of the EU, the EMI, while maintaining its core ideals, seemed to have abandoned its revolutionary and realpolitik objectives in favour of broader and more general ones. However, while the EMI has lost the clarity on the European institutional architecture it wants to achieve, Dehousse's ideas, which have shaped the Movement for decades, live on in the organization's aspirations for a more democratic, united and supranational Europe.

The Union of European Federalists (UEF), founded in Paris in December 1946, represents the most explicit continuation of the federalist tradition articulated by figures such as Altiero Spinelli, Henri Frenay, and Alexandre Marc. Unlike EMI, which embraced a broad coalition, UEF was conceived as a militant movement advocating a clear constitutional project designed to overcome the failures of interwar diplomacy and nationalist fragmentation (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

UEF's early documents, including the 1947 *Political Report* and subsequent resolutions, argued that only a European federation, established by a constituent assembly endowed with constituent authority, could preserve peace and democratic stability (Pistone**,** 2008, p.12). In fact, UEF saw in the nationalism of the then thirty nations composing Europe's geopolitical

arena, the real reason of the atrocities of the two World Wars (Militant Socialist International, 1944). Throughout the 1950s, UEF campaigned for the ratification of the European Defence Community and actively promoted the institutional design associated with the EMI's European Political Community proposal (Union of European Federalists, 2025). Between 1954 and 1966 the UEF had been a strong critic of the European Economic Community, which they saw as merely an economic project which would have not automatically brought along the political unification of Europe, and thus would have not resolve the European problems (Union of European Federalists, 2025). To counter this idea that Europe would have to be merely a common market, the UEF launched in 1966 the European People's Congress Campaign, one of the first pan-European grassroots movement which aimed to exhort Europeans to vote a self-proclaimed European Constituent Assembly in an attempt of political provocation targeting the lack of a common democratic political sphere in Europe (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

From 1965 to 1984 the UEF, under the slogan "Action Europe!", actively manifested in favour of open borders within the European Communities' countries, effectively giving a crucial political push for the Shengen Treaty of 1985 (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

However, one of the most relevant, and akeen to our research, position of the UEF was its work in favour of the direct elections of the European Parliament. Under the strategy of "constitutional gradualism", based on the idea that pushing national governments to adopt European institutional reform that, by strengthening a limited institutional aspect of Europe, would create contradictions that would force new institutional progress; the Union played an instrumental role in the 1979 adoption of direct elections by universal suffrage for the European Parliament (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

In the early 1980s, the UEF extended this gradualist approach to the question of treaty reform. In parallel with the negotiations that culminated in the Single European Act, the organisation advanced proposals calling for a substantial revision of the Community treaties, including the enhancement of parliamentary powers and the transformation of the Communities into a more explicitly federal structure. These efforts converged with, and helped frame, the 1984 parliamentary initiative known as the Spinelli Treaty, which represented one of the most ambitious federal reform project of the period (Kaiser, 2024, p.2).

The Union was then at heart of many other pro-European political initiatives, including a 1989 referendum in Italy calling for the European Parliament to draw a European Constitution, the political pressure for a single European currency, and the campaign for a European Constitution from 1997 to 2005 (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

More recently, the Union has been occupied with providing European solutions to contemporary problems. In 2009, during the outbreak of the Euro-crisis, the UEF pulled the "Who is your President?" campaign across Europe, inviting Europeans to vote for who they'd prefer to see as Commission President and thus advocating that Europe needed a political union alongside an economic one (Union of European Federalists, 2025). However, they have not lost their focus on providing Europe with institutional reforms, through initiatives such as "For a new European Reform Initiative - The Berlin Declaration" in 2018 (Union of European Federalists, 2018, pp.1-2), the "I CHOOSE EUROPE" campaign for the 2019 European elections (Union of European Federalists, 2019), and the Conference for the Future of Europe, between 2021 and 2022 (European Commission, 2022, pp. 1-8). These initiatives were all focused on treaty reforms for a more democratic, united and federal Europe.

An active federalist force at heart of Europe, the Union of European Federalists has really been one of the main forces coordinating the efforts of European federalists. The UEF as an association comes from a different background than Dehousse and EMI. In fact, although historically politically close to Altiero Spinelli and the Italian federalists political forces, UEF has always been a grassroot organization, that made the ability to politically mobilize people from across Europe its point of strength. Unlike Dehousse, an elected socialist politician, the Union has never meddled with national politics out of fear of creating divisions in the movement itself.

However, the ideological and institutional programme of the UEF demonstrates a profound alignment with Dehousse's constitutional federalism. This strong convergence is identifiable across four primary dimensions. First, regarding the constitutional foundation, both Dehousse and UEF maintained that European integration must necessarily culminate in a constitutional settlement, moving beyond dependency on temporary intergovernmental treaties. Dehousse specifically argued that supranational institutions necessitated a cohesive constitutional framework to guarantee coherence and legitimacy (Dehousse, 1953a, p.3). Correspondingly, UEF's persistent advocacy for a European Constitution, established through a dedicated constituent assembly, reflects this identical conviction (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

Moreover, the emphasis on a bicameral parliamentary structure is central to both perspectives. Dehousse's theoretical model, featuring a *Chamber of the Peoples* and a *Chamber of the States*, closely parallels UEF's long-standing support for a system based on dual legitimacy, integrating both demographic and state-based representation (Spinelli, 2016, p.97). This institutional convergence was particularly evident in the UEF support for Dehousse's lead EPC proposal (Union of European Federalists, 2025).

Moreover, later proposals such as the "Who is your President?" initiative and the Conference for the Future of Europe proposal, represent on one hand an attempt to give make the President of the Commission democratically accountable, and, on the other, to reform EU institutions in order to give the European Parliament a stronger institutional position vis-avis the other EU institutions (Union of European Federalists, 2025). Both initiatives resonate with Fernand Dehousse's wishes for a strong and democratically accountable European Parliament, which would be able to guid and decide on European politics much more than what it can do today (Dehousse, 1953d, p.4).

To conclude, UEF's vision for the future of the EU aligns drastically with those of Fernand Dehousse's. Although ontologically different, one playing in the political arena, the other outside of it; the UEF and Dehousse brought forward the same political fight. The Union of European Federalists carries today the same spirit, ideals and proposals that animated Fernand Dehousse and its companions. The core of such proposals can be identified in fighting for EU institutional reforms that bring about federal institutions based on a bicameral pan-European parliament who is sovereign and directly accountable to European citizens.

More recently, Volt Europa has come to constitute one of the most significant recent developments in the landscape of European party politics. Founded in 2017, the movement emerged as a direct response to the multiple crises shaping the European project in the mid-2010s — most notably the rise of right-wing populism, the Brexit referendum, and the perception that national governments lacked the capacity to address transnational challenges. Volt defines itself as the first pan-European and transnational political movement, operating on the premise that European-level problems require European-level governance solutions (Volt Europa, 2025a).

Officially launched in March 2017, Volt was founded by activists from Germany, Italy, and France who sought to channel civic disillusionment into a constructive political alternative (Otjes & Krouwel, 2023, p.727). The founders argued that Europe's crises revealed structural

weaknesses in the EU's governance system and demonstrated the need for a democratic force capable of operating simultaneously across member states (Vitali, 2024). By 2018, Volt had established national sections in nearly every EU member state.

Volt achieved its first major breakthrough in the 2019 European Parliament elections, when Damian Boeselager, running on Volt's German list, was elected as the party's first MEP, marking the first time a pan-European party won representation with a shared, unified programme rather than through a European political family composed of national parties (Kaiser, 2024).

Volt's organisational architecture reflects its ambition to transcend the traditional model of fragmented national parties. At its core lies Volt Europa, the transnational entity registered under the EU's Regulation on European Political Parties (Volt Europa, 2023, p.1). Volt Europa sets the overarching programme, establishes governance procedures, and coordinates cross-border campaigns.

National sections, such as Volt France, Volt Deutschland, or Volt Nederland, are legally distinct but programmatically and organisationally integrated. They are required to align their national programmes with Volt Europa's "Amsterdam Declaration" and the European policy platform (Volt Europa, 2023, p.2). Allegedly, policy development follows a deliberative and participatory process involving digital platforms and transnational working groups (Volt Europa, 2025b).

Volt's General Assembly, composed of delegates from all national sections, constitutes the highest decision-making authority. It adopts the party programme, elects leadership, and sets long-term strategic priorities (Volt Europa, 2023, p.7). The European Board, elected by the membership, functions as the executive body responsible for daily coordination and compliance. Scholars note that Volt's model constitutes a qualitative innovation in European party organisation because it follows a unitary logic of one programme, one identity, and one campaign; rather than a federation of national parties (Knodel, 2023, pp.11-15).

Volt Europa's institutional agenda is grounded in a normative commitment to European federalism, democratic deepening, and the strengthening of supranational institutions. These principles are articulated in the "Amsterdam Declaration" (Volt Europa, 2018, pp. 1-10) and they take the form of policy objectives in the "Volt's Mapping of Policies" (Volt Europa, 2025c).

Particularly, the party advocates convening a Convention on the Future of Europe to revise the EU treaties, in line of what request by other supernationalists actors such as UEF. The goal is to establish a clearer division of competences, enhance democratic legitimacy, and create a more coherent federal structure (Volt Europa, 2025c, pp. 6-20). Volt argues that intergovernmental vetoes and unanimity rules impede the EU's ability to act, particularly in crises (Volt Europa, 2025c, p.16).

Moreover, Volt proposes significantly expanding the powers of the European Parliament, including granting it full legislative initiative and equal legislative authority with the Council in all areas (Volt Europa, pp.7-9). This aligns with Volt's broader view that the EU's democratic legitimacy must rest more directly on its citizens.

Another proposal is transforming the European Commission into a fully political European executive, akin to a federal government, accountable to the European Parliament rather than appointed through intergovernmental bargaining (Volt Europa, pp.9-10). This includes reducing the number of Commissioners and allocating portfolios on functional rather than national criteria (Volt Europa, 2025c, p.10). Volt also strongly supports abolishing unanimity in Council decision-making, and expanding the Parliament's powers, in fields such as foreign policy and taxation (Volt Europa, 2025c, p.19,34,35).

Another political objective of the party would be to harmonise electoral laws and transnational political lists for the European Parliament elections, seen as the only way to achieve a real pan-European democratic election (Volt Europa, 2025c, p.8). Volt argues that European democracy remains structurally incomplete without cross-border political competition (Otjes & Krouwel, 2023, p.734).

Finally, Volt's institutional proposals are directly linked to its policy priorities in climate governance, digital innovation, migration, defence, and fiscal policy. Volt supports expanding the EU's competences, at the expenses of Member States, to address these challenges through integrated and binding frameworks, reflecting its belief that only a federal Europe is capable of delivering effective solutions (Volt Europa, 2018, pp.2-8).

Volt Europa represents, in toto, a novel experiment in European political organisation, marked by its transnational structure, its unified programme across member states, and its explicitly federalist agenda. Its proposals for institutional reform reflect a clear inspiration from thinkers such as Fernand Dehousse, yet in some respects they go beyond them.

Indeed, Volt presents political ideas akin to those of Fernand Dehousse. Particularly, the idea that the European Parliament should be the sole legitimate body to represent European citizens and that the European Commission should be depended on it, effectively becoming an executive body responding to the Parliament. However, Volt does not express a clear -cut vision on how the Parliament should be structured, whether through a single chamber or a bicameral structure, and envisions an harmonized electoral law amongst the various member states which would better represent and give space to trans-national political parties. Dehousse on the other hand, was explicit in its support for a bicameral system for the European Parliament, and defended differences in Member States' electoral laws as national prerogatives (Dehousse, 1960b, pp.7-9).

The staunchest difference however, lies in Volt greatest novelty: that of being a pan-European and transnational party. Dehousse, himself representing the Belgian Socialist Party at national level, had never envisioned such a possibility to become reality; and we are left but wondering what he would have thought about it. Experiments such as that of Volt clearly take the Dehoussian legacy and develop it in an interesting manner—namely, by using novel approaches such as the idea of a pan-European party and calls to address, at the European level, problematics such as climate change, migration, and fiscal matters, in order to confront the new challenges facing European democratic integration, all toward the shared goal of a European supranational democracy.

As such, Volt contributes both empirically and normatively to debates about the legacy of Fernand Dehousse and about the future of European integration, embodying an emerging model of political mobilisation that goes beyond the nation-state.

The institutional journey from the first direct elections of 1979 to the post-Lisbon era reveals a complex dialectic between federalist aspiration and intergovernmental pragmatism. While the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, and Lisbon have progressively transformed the European Parliament from a consultative body into a central pillar of the Union's architecture, this evolution remains an incomplete realization of Fernand Dehousse's vision.

Dehousse's core contribution was not merely the advocacy for direct elections, but the proposal of a constitutional framework where a Chamber of the People and a Senate of States would provide the democratic foundation for a truly independent European executive. The introduction of the ordinary legislative procedure and the not-used practice of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system represent functional echoes of this model, yet they are constrained

by a "dual constitutional regime" where intergovernmental logic still dominates core state powers.

The contemporary academic debate over the democratic deficit, from Christopher Lord's multidimensional audit to Giandomenico Majone's "regulatory state", underscores that the challenges Dehousse identified in the 1950s remain the primary friction points of European integration today. The persistence of executive dominance and the Commission's monopoly on legislative initiative highlight the "amputated" nature of a Parliament that, while powerful, still lacks the full constitutional agency Dehousse envisioned for a sovereign supranational assembly.

Ultimately, Dehousse's legacy is found in the very tension that defines the modern Union. His thought provides a standard for a "Europe of the peoples" that current institutional compromises have yet to meet. By comparing his historical proposals with modern movements like Volt Europa or the Union of European Federalists, we see that the quest for a democratic, federal Europe is not an antiquated dream but an ongoing political necessity. The "luck and considerable goodwill" Dehousse called for in 1959 (Dehousse, 24th December 1959a, Interview), it appears, are still the missing ingredients for completing the transition from a hybrid institutional order to a genuine transnational democracy.

Conclusions

This thesis reconstructed and analysed the political thought of Fernand Dehousse by situating his federalist and democratic project within both its historical context and the longer trajectory of European integration. Against the tendency to overlook the work of Fernand Dehousse and relegating it to the margins of European intellectual history or to treat him as a secondary actor overshadowed by more canonical federalist figures, the study has shown that his institutional imagination constitutes a coherent, ambitious, and still relevant contribution to the debate on European democracy. By reconstructing Dehousse's biography, ideas, and concrete governance proposals, and by tracing their partial realization and transformation within the evolving architecture of the European Union, the thesis has sought to demonstrate that Dehousse's thought offers not merely a subject of historiographical interest, but a critical lens through which to understand the Union's enduring democratic tensions.

At its core, this research was driven by a central concern: the persistent gap between the development of European integration and the development of democratic legitimacy at the supranational level. This concern, often framed today in terms of the European Union's "democratic deficit," is not a novel diagnosis. As this thesis has shown, Dehousse identified and addressed this problem at an early stage, when the contours of European integration were still malleable and institutional outcomes far from predetermined. His political thought emerged from the conviction that integration without democracy would remain fragile, technocratic, and ultimately contested, while democracy without supranational institutions would be incapable of governing an increasingly interdependent Europe. The originality of Dehousse's contribution lies precisely in his effort to reconcile these two imperatives through concrete institutional design.

Most importantly, this thesis has produced three central findings. First, it has successfully reconstructed Fernand Dehousse's biography and political thought in a comprehensive and coherent manner, tracing his trajectory from his early years in Liège through his engagement in national and international politics, and culminating in his proposals for European institutional reform. By connecting Dehousse's intellectual formation, political activity, and policy output, the study has shown the internal consistency of his federalist vision and its close relationship with concrete political practice.

Particularly, the thesis has presented several decisive stages in Dehousse's political endeavour: from his early engagement with federalist thought through the Walloon movement and his collaboration with Georges Truffaut; his formative experience in public international law under Ernest Mahaim; his wartime resistance and subsequent alignment with the Belgian Socialist Party; his participation in the San Francisco Conference and involvement in the early structures of the United Nations; his contribution to the Council of Europe and to the drafting of the European Convention on Human Rights; his active engagement within the European Movement, through which he helped shape proposals for a European Political Community in 1953; and finally, his central role within the European Parliamentary Assembly, culminating in the 1960 Report advocating direct elections.

Second, the analysis has demonstrated that Dehousse's ideas did not vanish with the failure of the European Political Community or with his death in 1976, but continued to exert a durable influence on the evolution of European institutions. The introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament by universal suffrage in 1979 constitutes the most tangible realization of one of his core demands and confirms the long-term validity of his insistence on electoral legitimacy as the foundation of supranational democracy. Beyond institutional developments, Dehousse's relevance also persists in the intellectual debates that followed, as later discussions on democratic legitimacy, parliamentary empowerment, and federal constitutionalism repeatedly revisited problems he had already identified.

Finally, the thesis has shown that Dehousse's legacy extends into contemporary political practice. While movements and parties such as the European Movement International, the Union of European Federalists, and Volt Europa never cite him explicitly, their programs and ideological orientations echo central elements of his thought, particularly his emphasis on federal structures, democratic accountability, and a politically empowered European Parliament. In this sense, Dehousse's proposals, most notably those articulated in the European Political Community project and the Report Dehousse, continue to inform the grammar of European federalism, even when his name is absent from the discourse.

The first part of the thesis reconstructed the intellectual and political foundations of Dehousse's federalism by situating him within the broader context of post-war Europe. His trajectory, from Belgian academia and domestic politics to the transnational arena of European institutions, reveals a thinker deeply shaped by both the traumas of the twentieth century and the opportunities opened by the post-1945 moment. Dehousse's engagement with

federalist ideas was not abstract or doctrinaire; rather, it was grounded in legal expertise, parliamentary practice, and a strong normative commitment to democratic accountability. The analysis of his role at the 1948 Hague Congress illustrated how Dehousse belonged to a generation for whom European integration was inseparable from the lessons of war, occupation, and authoritarian collapse. Federalism, for him, was not a utopian ideal but a pragmatic response to the failures of the nation-state system.

This historical grounding proved essential for understanding the institutional imagination explored in the second chapter. By focusing on the drafting of the European Political Community Treaty of 1953 and the Report Dehousse of 1960, the thesis highlighted the extent to which Dehousse translated federalist principles into detailed constitutional proposals. These documents reveal a consistent vision centered on the European Parliament as the cornerstone of democratic legitimacy at the supranational level. Far from conceiving the Parliament as a consultative or symbolic body, Dehousse envisioned it as an institution endowed with genuine legislative authority, democratic representation, and political responsibility. His insistence on direct elections by universal suffrage was not merely procedural; it reflected a deeper understanding of democracy as a lived political practice rather than a technocratic supplement to integration. Truly, an universal, powerful and democratic European Parliament is Dehousse's solution for Europe and for the "democracy deficit".

By analyzing these proposals as political manifestos, the thesis underscored the normative ambition embedded in Dehousse's work. The failure of the European Political Community and the limited reception of the Report Dehousse did not signal the incoherence of his vision, but rather the political constraints of the time. Intergovernmental resistance, Cold War dynamics, and divergent national interests curtailed the realization of his project. Yet, as the analysis demonstrated, many of the ideas he advanced would resurface decades later, often in attenuated or transformed forms. This apparent paradox, early articulation followed by delayed and partial implementation, emerges as a recurring pattern in the history of European integration.

The third chapter extended this analysis by examining the evolution of the European Parliament from the first direct elections in 1979 through the major treaty reforms of Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, and Lisbon. This diachronic perspective revealed both continuity and divergence between Dehousse's original proposals and the institutional reality

of the European Union. On the one hand, the gradual empowerment of the Parliament confirms Dehousse's intuition that democratic legitimacy could not be indefinitely postponed. The expansion of co-decision procedures, budgetary powers, and parliamentary oversight represents a slow but tangible movement in the direction he had anticipated. On the other hand, the persistent limitations of parliamentary authority, particularly in areas dominated by executive or intergovernmental decision-making, highlight the incomplete nature of this evolution.

Interpreting these developments through Dehousse's lens allows for a more nuanced understanding of the European integration and the democratic deficit debate. Rather than framing the deficit solely as a problem of citizen apathy or institutional complexity, Dehousse's perspective emphasizes the structural imbalance between supranational governance and democratic control..

The political normative dialogue developed in the thesis, particularly the comparison between Dehousse and Jürgen Habermas, further clarifies the specificity of Dehousse's contribution. While Habermas offers a sophisticated account of deliberative democracy and constitutional patriotism, Dehousse's focus remains firmly anchored in institutional procedures and electoral legitimacy. This difference does not diminish the value of deliberative theories, but it raises important questions about their practical implementation in a polity as complex and diverse as the European Union. Dehousse's emphasis on direct elections and parliamentary authority appears, in this light, as a more immediately actionable path to legitimacy, one that does not presuppose high levels of pre-existing political integration or shared identity.

At the same time, the thesis does not claim that Dehousse's vision offers a complete or definitive solution to Europe's democratic challenges. Several limitations and unresolved tensions emerge from the analysis. Dehousse's focus on parliamentary democracy begs the question of how it can be achieved in current times. With treaty-changing power steadily in the hands of Member States, it seems difficult to imagine national leaders pushing for supranational reforms, particularly during a period that is seeing an increase in Eurosceptic political parties' popularity. Moreover, his proposals were formulated in a context marked by a smaller number of member states, more homogeneous political cultures, and a different balance between national and supranational authority. The applicability of his ideas to today's enlarged and geopolitically strained Union therefore requires careful adaptation rather than direct transplantation.

These limitations, however, should not be read as reasons to dismiss Dehousse's thought. On the contrary, they open fertile avenues for further research. Comparative studies could examine how Dehousse's federalist democracy relates to other European traditions of supranational thought, from Spinelli to less-studied figures whose contributions remain underexplored. Our study aimed to be a frontrunner in this sense. Institutional analysis could further investigate the conditions under which parliamentary empowerment translates into increased citizen engagement, especially in an era of digital politics and transnational mobilization. Finally, future research might explore how Dehousse's ideas intersect with contemporary debates on European sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and enlargement, particularly in light of recent geopolitical shocks.

Ultimately, this thesis has argued that Fernand Dehousse's relevance lies not only in what he proposed, but in how he understood the relationship between institutions and political imagination. European integration, as his work reminds us, is not a self-sustaining process driven solely by economic necessity or functional efficiency. It is a political project that requires conscious design, democratic commitment, and the courage to envision alternatives to existing arrangements.

Taken together, these findings answer the research question by demonstrating that Fernand Dehousse's political thought not only contributed to shaping the historical development of the European Parliament, but also continues to provide relevant analytical and normative insights for understanding its democratic role within the European Union today.

In re-engaging with Dehousse's federalist vision, this thesis does not advocate a return to a lost past, but rather invites a reconsideration of paths not fully taken. Dehousse's thought stands as a reminder that Europe's institutional future is not predetermined, and that democracy at the supranational level remains a project in the making. The work of Dehousse invites us all to engage practically to address the problems affecting European integration with conviction and solidarity, in order to create a new future for the Old Continent. As Dehousse put it "This gives me the opportunity to emphasize a feeling I experience deeply. It is the sense of recognizing and feeling that the collective we constitute truly forms a family. A family within which there can certainly exist, as in all families, nuances in affection. A family within which there are also certainly many wounds to dress and many scars to heal. But it is a family, nonetheless, that has reformed itself, that affirms its vitality, and which I am delighted to see constantly expanding [...] Our Assembly will certainly play the role it has

always played: that of a laboratory. A laboratory within which ideas are born and developed, only to then propagate across Europe. It is this role, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I invite you once again to fulfill. I hope that we shall all succeed together" (Dehousse, 1956, Audio Recording).

If the European Union is to overcome its present distress, it may need not only new policies or treaties, but a renewed willingness to think boldly about its institutional form. In this sense, Fernand Dehousse's legacy endures—not as a blueprint to be replicated, but as an intellectual resource for imagining a European order that is genuinely federal, democratic, and capable of commanding the loyalty of its citizens.

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