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Renewable democracy: towards full participation through representation and deliberation

WG “Renewable democracy”

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEPS YOUNG ACADEMICS NETWORK	3
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Theories of democracies in a nutshell: representation, participation, and deliberation.....	7
Chapter 2: Warning signs of participatory and representative democracy deficit in Europe.....	10
Chapter 3: The Party of European Socialists’ approach to democracy.....	15
Chapter 4: Shaping new institutions of people’s power	19
Chapter 5: Heading to a critical renewal of democracy.....	21
Conclusions	24
Bibliography	28
Annex.....	31

FEPS YOUNG ACADEMICS NETWORK

The Young Academics Network (YAN) was established in March 2009 by the Foundation of European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of the Renner Institut to gather progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers, who are ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next Europe. The founding group was composed of awardees of the “Call for Paper” entitled “Next Europe, Next Left” – whose articles also help initiating the FEPS Scientific Magazine “Queries”. Quickly after, with the help of the FEPS member foundations, the group enlarged – presently incorporating around 30 outstanding and promising young academics.

FEPS YAN meets in the Viennese premises of Renner Institut, which offers great facilities for both reflections on the content and also on the process of building the network as such. Both elements constitute mutually enhancing factors, which due to innovative methods applied make this Network also a very unique project. Additionally, the groups work has been supervised by the Chair of the Next Left Research Programme, Dr. Alfred Gusenbauer – who at multiple occasions joined the sessions of the FEPS YAN, offering his feedback and guidance.

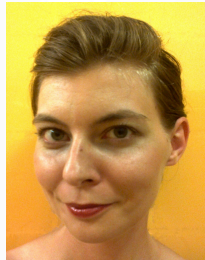
This paper is one of the results of the third cycle of FEPS YAN, (the first one ended with three papers in June 2011, while the second one led to five papers in spring 2013), in which six key themes were identified and were researched by FEPS YAN working groups. These topics encompass: “*Precarious employment in Europe*”; “*Full employment: A progressive vision for Europe*”; “*Get the party started: Modernizing progressive politics*”; “*The 2014 European elections*”; “*Enhancing EU enlargement*” and “*Young and easily allured? A comparative analysis on the relationship between populism and youth in Europe*”. Each of the meetings is an opportunity for the FEPS YAN to discuss the current state of their research, presenting their findings and questions both in the plenary, as also in the respective working groups. The added value of their work is the pan-European, innovative, interdisciplinary character – not to mention, that it is by principle that FEPS wishes to offer a prominent place to this generation of academics, seeing in it a potential to construct alternative that can attract young people to progressivism again. Though the process is very advanced already, the FEPS YAN remains a Network – and hence is ready to welcome new participants.

FEPS YAN plays also an important role within FEPS structure as a whole. The FEPS YAN members are asked to join different events (from large Conferences, such as FEPS “Call to Europe” or “Renaissance for Europe” and PES Convention to smaller High Level Seminars and Focus Group Meetings) and encouraged to provide inputs for publications (i.e. for FEPS Scientific Magazine “Queries”). Enhanced participation of the FEPS YAN Members in the overall FEPS life and increase of its visibility remains one of the strategic goals of the Network for 2014.

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Executive Summary

While it should be kept in mind that the socially constructed concept of 'democracy' might have different meanings for the citizens across the EU-countries, it is clear now that the classic forms of representative and participatory democracies in Europe are in different types of crisis. With a few exceptions, turnout rates both in national and EP elections show a constantly decreasing level of voter turnout that undermines the most well-known participative element of modern democracies. This sign of absence can be linked to the general dissatisfaction of European citizens with the democracies in the EU. In some EU-member states, like Hungary, France, Italy, Finland or the UK, the levels of public support for antidemocratic, far-right, populist and/or EU-sceptic parties are worryingly high and showing a growing tendency. But the picture is not simply black and white. On the contrary, we can see that EU-citizens still believe in local and participative forms of democracy: in a Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2013, a majority of EU-citizens stated that voting in local elections is an effective way of influencing politics and were engaged in at least one traditional form of expressing their political views.

According to our results, it seems that the European social democratic parties do not address significantly the problems of democracy much. Based on a document analysis investigating different party documents and public debates involving representatives of PES and others, we conclude that the general dissatisfaction of citizens is indeed somehow reflected in the current European social democratic discourse, above all, by means of a general (although not unanimous) appeal for more transparency of public institutions and new forms of democratic participation beyond the polls. Nonetheless, although the multiple crises, the relevance given to democratic issues is undoubtedly secondary in relation to other concerns, such economic and social issues, being this at best described as "moderate".

In this paper, we argue that the local level of social participation in politics (in a broad sense) is a crucially important element for those projects that aim to renew democracies and how democracies work in the 21st century. As in the first chapter we demonstrate, EU-citizens in general still believe in local elections and are more attached to local ideas and issues. Hence, we suggest that a good start in constructing a more compelling democracy will primarily be linked to the local arena. That is why we propose, especially to social democratic parties and progressive forces, the organisation of open forums of deliberation, public events and the creative usage of public spaces at this level. Besides, based on the analysis conducted about the social democratic discourse, we recommend a more ambitious and resolute discourse on democratic innovations and participatory democracy. The use of the tools of e-democracy, some modifications in the inner organization of the political parties and a broad alliance among progressive social parties and movements to foster democratic innovations are other recommendations offered.

Keywords: crisis of democracy, participation, representation, deliberation, progressives

Introduction

“Democracy” with its participative and representative components is an important and meaningful value connected to the workers movement since the 19th century. The founding fathers and mothers of social democracy underlined that the right to vote is a crucial and nonnegotiable demand of the workers. Only in that way working masses had a real opportunity to change policy and the labor law, thereby making their life more bearable and fair. At the end of the long process of introduction of the general and secret suffrage many people may have thought that now everyone has the same right and opportunity to take part equally and fully in the life of local and more global level of politics. We all know that it was more an illusion – even that time.

Although between the mid-1970s and the last decade of 20th century one can witness an increase in the number of democracies, recent years show a kind of setback¹. The illusion of living in a wealthy and democratic world should be critically examined and revised taking into consideration that in 2012 only 60 percent of the existing countries worldwide could be considered as democracy². One can say that regarding this issue Europe is a safety zone, but worrying signs are alarming us that this region also faces serious democratic challenges. As we will show it soon, citizens living in different types of democracies are also quite critical about the way democracy works and they are more and more open towards anti-democratic, populist and radical political groups, movements or even political parties.

As we will present shortly, on the one hand a remarkably large group of European citizens disillusioned and disappointed in traditional forms of democracy, on the other, they still feel like taking part in public activities, especially if we take a closer level of it, namely local politics. That is the reason why we argue that if someone would like to renew democracies, s/he has to pay serious and primary attention to the local level of it. One needs to experiment and shape new institutions of participatory and deliberative democracy, linked to the classical institutions of representative (parliament, council) and direct (referendum) democracy³, towards a new integral democracy.

One can easily observe that the current crises of certain democracies in Europe are intertwined with the weak public support of classic and traditional political leftist parties. However, more radical leftist grassroots movements, like the Podemos or even the Syriza, are having a growing, or at least not declining support from new or former supporters of traditional left. Instead of being angry at their success, politicians of the traditional left should learn from these movements of new left in Europe. What these movements benefit over the more classical forms of political parties are that they are closer to their voters, representatives are easier to be reached out and participants are more involved in decision-making processes by applying different techniques of direct democracy.

¹J. Møller, S-E. Skaaning, *The Third Wave: Inside the Numbers*, Journal of Democracy, No. 4., October 2013, p. 97

²Ibid., p. 99.

³Dieter Roth, *Democracy: a beginner's guide*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford 2005

⁴See Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Oxford 1998.

Institutional social democracy in Europe should revise its meaning of democracy. Voting and political acting via political party in 21st century is not enough. Current reality gave us, citizens, more possibilities of participation in decision-making processes. This is one of the most important reasons why social democracy should be more open to new ways of creating its political agenda. Party chairmanship does not have more important voice than all the people who declare themselves as progressives. In one 'slogan', we need a renewable democracy: a democracy capable to renew itself, giving to the citizens the role of protagonists of policy making, through parties and through institutions, reconnecting elites and people.

Chapter 1: Theories of democracies in a nutshell: representation, participation, and deliberation

Firstly, one should make a distinction between democracy as an 'ideal type' and democracy as a concrete form of government.⁴

Democracy as pure ideal type, is the form of government where the governors, as those who hold the administration of political power, coincide with the governed, according to a principle of *auto-nomy* (the *demos* giving the *nomos*, the law to him/herself). This happens when a group of people join together in an organized community and agree on the fact of having to consider all the associated as equals in the determination of politics of the association.

For this reason Dahl indicates five requisites, to whom must correspond adequate institutions: (1) the associates have to possess equal and (2) effective opportunities to participate to decisions; (3) in consequences, their votes must to have the same weight; (4) they must to be conditions of control to control the political agenda; and at the end, (5) in that particular form of association who is the State – in which the obedience to the laws it's obligatory – all the adults subjected to the government must have equally recognized the right to participate: must “have the same rights, freedom, opportunities and resources implicated from the others conditions”.⁵

In the real world a system of government – on a state level – which is respected, these conditions probably never existed. And we can consider that fact as the basis of the contemporary citizens' critic of a big *democratic deficit*.⁶ But also in the celebrated ancient Athenian democracy, at least the fifth condition was not respected: not all those to whom the law was applied – considering women⁷, strangers, slaves – participated to the determination of it in assembly.

⁴See: Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 1998.

⁵Own translation from Robert A. Dahl, *Intervista sul pluralismo*, a cura di G. Bosetti, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002, p. 13.

⁶See also: P. Norris, *Democratic Deficit. Critical Citizens Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2011.

⁷Some political scholars even call our attention to the worrying lack of women in politics as an extreme but well-known sign of the crisis of representative and participative democracy, even in Europe. As Georgina Waylen highlights it⁷, “*contemporary democracies remain male dominated*”, and while the ‘crisis of democracy’ more or less increased the possibilities for women to take part in politics, she also emphasizes that it does not necessarily mean substantive and non-sexist or balanced representation of women and women’s issues. See G. Waylen, *Engendering the ‘crisis of democracy’*, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2015, pp. 514-515.

Something similar happened to the modern liberal representative democracy, until the beginning – and in the most part of cases until the middle – of the 20th century, when the universal suffrage was finally introduced. But it is possible to say that the fifth condition is really respected until the end, also today that the right of vote is guaranteed to all? In reality the opportunities (think about the right to a transparent information) and the resources (for example those necessary to an electoral campaign) implicated from the others four points we are still far to guarantee, without considering the principle of effective participation in the political decision.

Here, we have also to introduce a crucial distinction between participation and deliberation. In fact, *participation* is an ambiguous word, and in any case is *per se* not the same thing of *deliberation*⁸: we can have for instance a form of *direct* democracy without equal discussion in assembly, but just through plebiscitarian vote with hands after the speech of one to the multitude⁹. The assemblearist model of participatory democracy heritage of the '68 movements is quite problematic and failed a lot of promises¹⁰. But it had a good renewal with the interesting new technics of debate experimented by the *indignados* and *occupy* movements: giving to all the participants of an *acampada* – or sit-in or speaker's corner- the real possibility to have voice, escaping the dynamic of a charismatic-populist emersion of only one person or few people in the debate – a dynamic which has the likely risk that who speak do not represent at all who do not speak, and the assembly become in that way not exactly democratic. That is somehow a first step in the direction of an ideal deliberation where, according to Habermas, “no force except that of the better argument is exercised”¹¹ and all the people take part to the discussion. But the problem remains: how to build full democratic institutions overcoming the *naivité* of a spontaneous movement and extending these opportunities to all the citizens, not only the students and workers part of a mass demonstration or assembly.

Moreover, we all know that since the birth of the ancient version of modern democracy, the topic of ‘crisis of democracy’ seems to be a evergreen story: new and new worrying tendencies are detected in different parts of the world. As Ercan and Gagnon underline¹², the expression itself is confusing and not clear, thus we must address the following questions: What is crisis? What kind of democratic crisis are we talking about? What kind of democracy is in crisis? As they highlight, both terms (democracy, crisis) can have very different meanings in different social and political contexts and times. They call the attention to the fact that if someone would like to shed light on democratic deficit, s/he needs to precisely elaborate that which constitutive element of democracy is in crisis and what this crisis means. As we will shortly present, we argue that the European democracies are suffering from

⁸ See: D. Held, *Models of Democracy*, Polity, Cambridge 2006, pp. 236-237.

⁹ Schematizing, that was that the fundamental idea of the political-theoretical project of the right-oriented thinker Carl Schmitt. Nevertheless, the schmittian perspective is in some way stressed also from a influent progressive philosopher as E. Laclau, author of *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London 2005.

¹⁰ See: N. Urbinati, *Democrazia in diretta. Le nuove sfide alla rappresentanza*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2013, pp. 122-125.

¹¹ J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Heinemann, London 1976, p. 108.

¹² S. A. Ercan- J-P. Gagnon, *The Crisis of Democracy. Which Crisis? Which Democracy?* Democratic Theory, Vol. 1., No. 2., Winter 2014, p. 1-10.

participative and representative. It is also important to keep in mind that sometimes the crisis of one constitutive element can easily lead to solutions that causes other crisis tendencies in the democracies. A good example for that is when the participative crisis leads some to argue for more direct forms of participation, like holding referendums more frequently. In this case others can easily argue against the plan saying that it is not democratic but populist solution.

While from time to time one can read worrying articles about the quality of democracy in some European countries, according to the latest reports of Freedom House (FH) on democracy, Europe is still one of those few places where the level of democracy is relatively high. However, it is obvious that the countries of the European Union show relatively different qualities of democracy. By analyzing the absolute scores of political rights¹³ and civil liberties¹⁴ along the FH index we can see that while in 2014 all the Western and Northern European old member states provided the most expanded political rights and civil liberties to their citizens, the former state socialist countries and the Southern European old member states were much diverse – even from each other – along these two dimensions¹⁵. Some post-socialist countries like Estonia or the Czech Republic are much closer to their Western European counterparts while, for example, Greece is more similar to some ex-communist countries. This should make us reconsider the possible cleavages among the EU countries when it comes to the quality difference of participative democracy in Europe, too.

By following the overview of Wolfgang Merkel¹⁶ on the different groups of democratic theories, one can distinguish between three types of them: (1) *minimalist theories*: claiming that free, equal and periodical elections are standing in the core of democracy, (2) *mid-range model*: that expands the minimalist model to the importance of civil participation and the rule of law, (3) *maximalist model*: that includes the consequences of having a well-functioned or malfunctioned democracy, like social security, welfare, income (in)equalities. Our approach follows the third model because we also claim that theories on democracies and analyses of crisis tendencies have to focus not just on the mere structure or certain basic elements, like elections, of democracies but on the wider scene as well. If we would like to understand the way representative or participative deficits cause serious structural problems and lack of democratic establishment, we have to focus on the global structure in which we include the consequences of democratic deficit, most importantly the rising social inequality.

The well-known political scientist Colin Crouch makes a distinction between the ideal and the scaled-down approach on democracy¹⁷. According to him the ideal model of democracy can be portrayed as a system where “there are major opportunities for the mass of ordinary people actively participate, through discussion and autonomous organizations, in shaping the agenda of public life, and [...] they are actively using these opportunities. [...] It is an ideal model, which can almost never be fully achieved, but,

¹³ Composed by the democracy of electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and the democratic functioning of government.

¹⁴ Containing the evaluation of freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, personal autonomy and individual rights.

¹⁵ For the exact numbers and interactive chart see: https://infogr.am/renewable_democracy (own creation)

¹⁶ W. Merkel, *Is There a Crisis of Democracy?* Democratic Theory Vol.1., No. 2., Winter 2014, p. 11-25.

¹⁷ C. Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Polity, Cambridge 2004, p. 2-4.

like all impossible ideals, it sets a marker”. Crouch argues that by the early 2000s we arrived to the era of *post-democracy* in which elections are just empty technical tools for changing or not-changing governments, politics is shaped by politicians on the top and the elites, citizens are pushed into an apathetic, passive, voting-once-in-4-years, if indeed, position. Similar to this, other political scientists, like Frank Vibert calls the attention about the worryingly emerging power of unelected political bodies, even in the EU, however, he sees the solution in unelected bodies with special expertise and knowledge and takes them as bodies that can provide the most up-to-date knowledge on certain public policy issues to the citizens¹⁸.

We agree with the prediction of Crouch that the current situation of (post-)democracies can be even worse. In our paper we are going to present the warning signs of the so-called democracy deficit in Europe and some possible actions that should be taken to renew democracy.

Chapter 2: Warning signs of participatory and representative democracy deficit in Europe

Participatory deficit

While it should be kept in mind that the concept of ‘democracy’ might have different meanings for the citizens across the EU-countries it’s clear now that the classic forms of representative and participatory democracy are experiencing a crisis in Europe. With a few exceptions, turnout rates both in national and EP elections show a constantly decreasing tendency on the EU average (see Table 1).

Table 1. Average voter turnout in national and EP elections in Europe (%)

EP elections (year)		1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
EU average (changing composition)		56.7	49.5	45.5	43.0	42.5
National elections (cycle)	1990-1993	1994-1997	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2009	2010-2013
EU28 average	76.5	74.9	71.9	71.3	70.6	68.5

Source: EUROSTAT, own calculations

It is a well-known pattern that participation in EP elections is usually lower than in national ones. However, it is easy to read out from the numbers that from year to year both elections move lower and lower ratio of citizens to use their democratic right to vote.

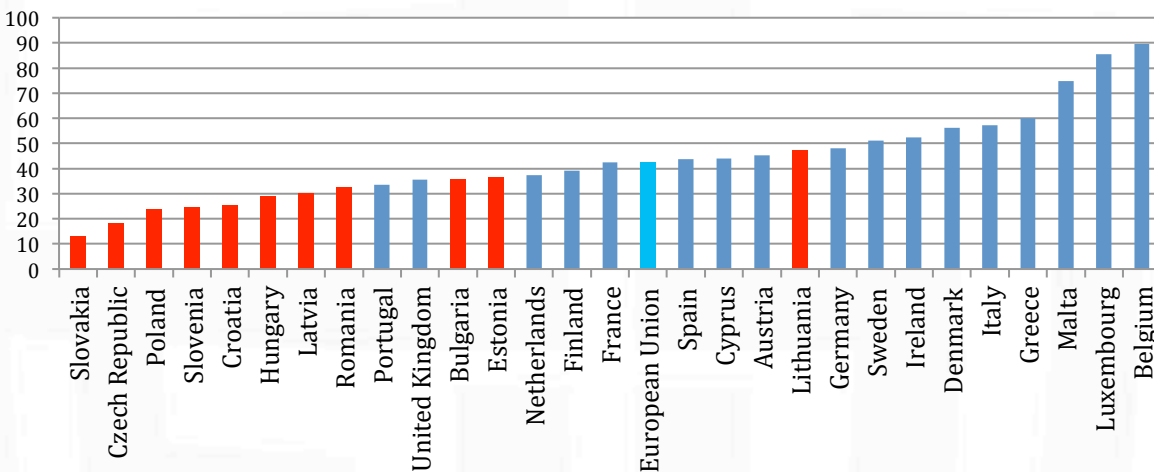
Even if we take into consideration that in some EU countries, like Belgium, voting is compulsory for the citizens, there is a remarkable difference between Western and Eastern European or former state socialist countries in voter turnout rates. If we compare the turnout rates on national elections in the cycle of 1990-1993 and 2010-2013 the decline was more intense in post-socialist countries: voter turnout

¹⁸F. Vibert, *The Rise of Unelected: Democracy and the New Separation of Powers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 3.

declined by more than 50 per cent in Lithuania, 45 per cent in Romania, around one third in Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia, while by only 5-10 per cent in Germany, the Netherlands or Spain (see Annex 1).

This sharp division is also clear if we analyze the level of participation in the EP elections of 2014 (see Figure 1). In the case of Central Eastern European countries participation rates with only one exception (Lithuania) are well below the EU average. This difference makes a sharp division between Eastern and Western Europe and reinforces the global aspect of democratic inequalities within the EU.

Figure 1. Voter turnout in EU parliamentary elections (2014), %



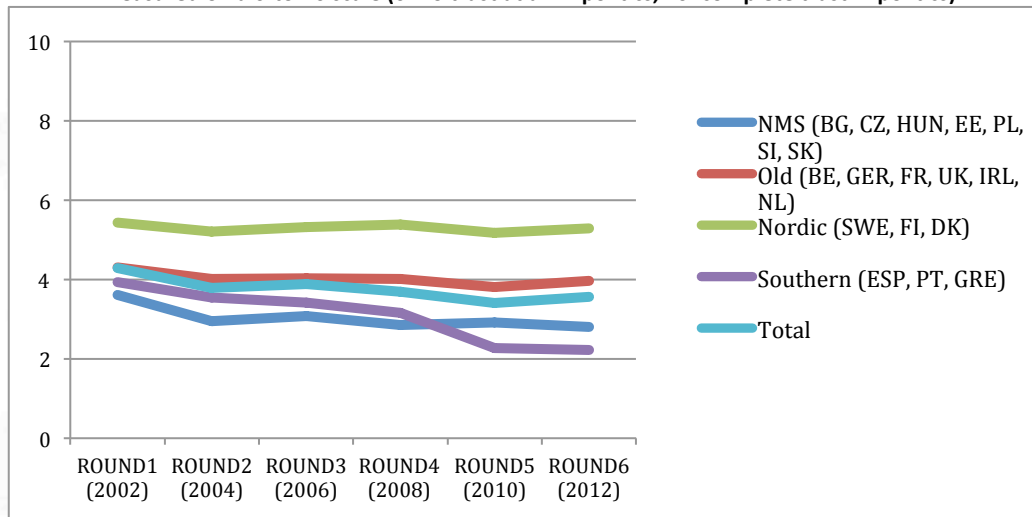
Source: EUROSTAT

Trust deficit

Another alarming sign of crisis of representative democracy is how EU-citizens' average attitude became more and more diverse along general level of trust in politics in the last 15 years (see Figure 2). This tendency in growing diversity is rooted in the sharply declining trust in politics in the Southern European countries like Spain, Greece, and Portugal or with a bit more moderate tendency and in some post-socialist states, like Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary. This decrease became rapid in the last 6-7 years – it is therefore not a surprise that populist parties such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece have become more successful. What is more, right-wing extremist parties such as Jobbik in Hungary could be successful recently in these countries with their critical voiceover the ruling political elite.

Another important conclusion can be drawn from Figure 2 if we take a look at the general level of trust in politics in Nordic countries and the other old member states. It is clear that their advantage over the post socialist and Southern countries is just relative: even in the Nordic countries the average trust in politicians, parliament and parties can be interpreted as moderate.

Figure 2. Average level of trust in politics (index composed by trust in country’s parliament, politicians, and political parties) measured on a 0-to-10 scale (0: no trust at all in politics, 10: complete trust in politics)



Source: ESS Round1-6. Own calculations

According to Møller and Skaaning¹⁹ countries of the EU are divided along the expansivity of definition of democracy, mostly along the level of validity of rule of law. Most of the old member states can be labeled as liberal democracies while most of the post socialist member states belong to the category of polyarchies²⁰. The difference between liberal democracies and polyarchies lies in the validity of rule of law: polyarchies are characterized with a much lower level of it or in some cases the complete lack of it, which makes the quality of democracy worse in those countries.

But repeating the well-known East-West (and sometimes: North-South) differences might blur other types of heterogeneity within the EU: this (geo)political and cultural cleavage can and should be challenged. Besides national and EP-election’s voter turnouts or trust in politics other, more sensitive factors can also give us an important insight to distrust and disappointment in democracy. According to an EU-wide survey (European Social Survey 2012), EU-citizens²¹ have rather different ideas on democracy, democratic values, governance, and preferred political structures. By using five different indicators we were able to differentiate between five more or less different clusters of participating countries along their citizens’ average attitudes towards democracy in general and democratic values.

The indicators presented below cover the considered level of importance of democratic values, the favour of tools of direct democracy, the favour of strong and single party governance, the

¹⁹J. Møller, S-E. Skaaning, *Regime Types and Democratic Sequencing*, Journal of Democracy, No. 1., January 2013, p. 148

²⁰The hierarchical typology contains the following types of democracies: (1) minimalist democracy (lowest level of democracy), (2) electoral democracy, (3) polyarchy, (4) liberal democracy (highest level of democracy). Ibid., p.144.

²¹Participating countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia. [Cyprus participated but was not included into our analysis.]

expectance of use of populist governance techniques, and the satisfaction with the function and operation of democracy in one’s country.

Indicator 1 – influence of masses: *What percentages of respondents think that the government should change its planned policies in response to what people think?*

Indicator 2 – importance of direct participation: *How is it important on the average on a 0-to-10 scale that citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums?*

Indicator 3 – power: *What percentages of respondents think that in general having a structure in which a single party forms the government is the best for democracy?*

Indicator 4 – importance of democracy: *What percentages of respondents think that living in a country that is governed democratically is extremely or almost extremely important?*

Indicator 5 – satisfaction with democracy: *How are citizens satisfied with the function of democracy on the average on a 0-to-10 scale?*

According to our analysis we can separate 5 groups of countries along these dimensions (Table 2)²².

Table 2. Country groups based on the attitudes of citizens towards democracy

Label	<i>Nordic – type (satisfied and committed)</i>	<i>Hesitants</i>	<i>Authoritarian and disillusioned leanings</i>	<i>Quite critical but still committed</i>	<i>UK</i>
Countries	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Ireland	Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Portugal	Belgium, France, Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia	United Kingdom
Importance of Influence of masses	moderate	moderate	higher	relatively higher	relatively higher
Importance of direct participation	higher	moderate	lower	relatively lower	moderate
Power – one party governance	lower (except Sweden)	relatively lower (except Ireland)	higher	diverse	very high
Importance of democracy	high	moderate	moderate	moderate (diverse)	moderate
Satisfaction with democracy	high	moderate	low	moderate	moderate

Source: ESS 2012, own calculations²³

²²For the exact country group averages with visualized sparklines see Annex 2 and Annex 3.

²³Calculations were done in the following way: we aggregated the data based on personal respondents to country level. After that countries meant our basic measurement units where the average value or percentage represented every country along the

As we can see, this categorization in some sense successfully overcame the abovementioned and well-known previous categorizations.

In the group of *Nordic countries* (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) citizens rate democracy as an important political achievement and they are relatively satisfied with the way it works. They also think that direct participatory techniques are important but they don't overrate them. Citizens are committed to multi-party governance but in parallel with the emergence of popularity of the Sweden Democrats a remarkably high proportion (one quarter) of Swedish respondents think that a one party system would be better instead of coalition forms of government.

Citizens of *hesitant countries* (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Ireland) don't show a distinct profile of commitment towards democracy and democratic values but a more moderate in-between attitude. Post-socialist countries' lower level of general support of one party governance in this group can be explained by the bad collective memories of one-party state-socialist period.

People of countries characterized by having *authoritarian and disillusioned leanings* and support of anti-democratic tools express a low level of satisfaction with democracy with a moderate feeling of its importance. The relatively high level of support of one-party governance and the low level of importance of direct participation show a general attitude of dissatisfaction with and disappointment in participatory democracy and a greater distance between citizens and the sphere of politics.

At first sight quite different countries compose the fourth group. Though Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia seem to be diverse along political culture (and they are diverse along certain clustering indicators, too), their citizens' general attitudes towards democracy can be described as *critical but still committed*. This group is similar to that having authoritarian leanings along the relatively high level of support of influence of masses on policies and the relatively low level of the importance of direct political participation of citizens, but their satisfaction with the function of democracy is generally higher.

In the last group we can only find the *UK*: our cluster model proved that the political culture of the UK is not just unique in the EU but its citizens also constitute a distinct attitudinal group if we take democratic views and opinions. UK citizens are very similar compared to those having hesitant attitudes but UK citizens' higher level of support of one-party governance and the claim of fitting policies to the broader public opinion are results of the UK's special political arrangements: the voting system favours majority and the resulting two-party system.

But on the contrary to all of these diversities, we have a good reason to argue that EU-citizens in general still believe in local and participative forms of democracy. In a Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2013, an absolute majority of EU-citizens (73 per cent) stated that voting in local elections is an effective way of influencing politics²⁴, even in Slovenia, where this proportion was the lowest (55 per

indicators. We used hierarchical clustering method in SPSS 20.0 in order to create the clusters of countries based on their average values.

²⁴European Commission, *Europeans engagement in participatory democracy. Flash Eurobarometer 373. Report*, p.18. ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_373_en.pdf

cent). This high level of commitment to local politics can be a result of the idea that voters are more attached to local ideas and issues than to certain ideologies or political parties. Voters may feel that on a local level they have more possibilities to influence local politics, they are more interested in having a word in local politics, and thus they have a stronger will to take part in that.

Voting in local elections was considered by far the most influential way compared to national (70 per cent) and European elections (54 per cent). EU citizens are moderately active political actors in everyday life: a slight majority of them (58 per cent) were saying that were engaged in at least one traditional form²⁵ of expressing their political views. Countries like Hungary and Cyprus show a rather low level of direct participation with only one third of citizens with engagement, while countries like France, Slovakia, the UK and Ireland present a remarkably low level of citizens' passivity with the ratio of only one third of not taken part in any of the listed activities.

It seems that local and more participative forms of democracy are able to draw in more people. If one plans to renew old patterns of democracies and attract more citizens and voters, s/he should focus on and empower local and lower levels of politics rather than only national ones.

Chapter 3: The Party of European Socialists' approach to democracy

In the previous chapter we have demonstrated that participatory democracy is facing challenging times in Europe. In spite of national differences, the declining rate of participation both in the European elections from 1994 to 2014 (a drop of around 14 percentage points) and in national polls from 1990 to 2013 (a drop of 8 percentage points on the average) shows that Europeans' attitude towards the representative political system becomes disillusioned, even if the area of the local elections seems to be a valuable exception to this trend. As we have shown, another sign of the crisis is the increasing trust deficit in politics above all in Southern European countries, like Spain, Greece and Portugal. In this sense, in the light of the facts above mentioned, it is worth asking how European political parties, most notably the Party of European Socialists and some of their member parties²⁶, address the concept of democracy in their public discourse. Thus, in this chapter, we will find out whether the idea of general dissatisfaction of citizens with democracy is somehow reflected in the current European social democratic discourse, and if so, in which terms.

With this purpose in mind, primarily we will analyse the public discourses of representatives of the PES during the European Elections of 2014. More precisely, on the EU presidential debate and the PES party platform in order to answer the following questions: What is the idea of democracy that the PES transmitted during the EP Elections of 2014? With which dynamics and actions is it by the PES

²⁵ Listed and asked: signing a petition (online or offline), expressing views on public issues on the internet or in social media, expressing views on public issues with elected representative at local/regional level, taking part in a public debate at local/regional level, expressing views on public issues with elected representative at EU level, taking part in a public debate at EU level.

²⁶ such the German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), the British Labour Party, the French Parti socialiste (PS), the Italian Partito Democratico (PD) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

associated? Can it be considered a central topic in its political campaign? To answer these queries a text analysis has been conducted relying on the qualitative research program of Discourse Analysis of the Sociology of Knowledge²⁷. This approach has been readjusted to tightly fit to the research questions and the corpus considered. The working process consisted of three different methodological steps: a) Selection of text fragments b) Extraction of the content c) Creation of categories of meaning reflecting the diverse concepts of democracy inferred²⁸.

In the following lines, we will summarize the analysis' outcomes inferred from the debate among the candidates at the European Elections and the PES's party platform, starting with the debate. First of all, basing on the analysis, it can be argued that the different political groups (through their candidates) at the EP associated the concept of democracy with different actions and values in their respective speeches.²⁹ Annex 4 (at the end of the paper) illustrates our classification of these different conceptions of democracy. Among them, democracy is associated by the PES' leader, Martin Schulz (S&D), with a more relevant ("concrete", "problem-oriented") debate within the political sphere, as he links democracy to a more relevant and meaningful confrontation among representatives and politicians. Respecting the platform of the Party of European Socialists, there is one paragraph dedicated to 'More democracy and participation'³⁰. This paragraph focuses on the novelty of the democratic elections of the president of the European Commission, on the relevant role for the European Parliament representing European citizens and expresses some rules about the ideal policy making processes ("Decisions must be taken at the most appropriate level"; "All policies must be efficient, respect democratic values, fight corruption and serve citizens in an open and transparent way"). It can be said that in contrast to its title, the manifesto offers a concept of democracy that is mainly associated with (official) political institutions and (institutional) policy making. This coincides with the idea of democracy as a "confrontation among the institutions" already inferred from the debate.

Respecting the role played by the concept of democracy (prominent vs. subsidiary) in the PES discourse during the campaign, it seems to be secondary in relation to other concerns, principally economic issues, and in comparison to its usage by other political groups. As an anecdote, during the debate, Martin Schulz mentioned the word "democracy" only once, compared to Alexis Tsipras (seven times) or Ska Keller (six times). Besides, in his speech, Martin Schulz dedicated the initial opening statement to the campaign topics that are "financial speculation", "tax fraud", "unemployment", and "gender inequality" (in this order), without expressing any proposition related to democracy.

²⁷ R. Keller, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion des Wervollen; die öffentliche Diskussion über Abfall in Deutschland und Frankreich*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen/Wiesbaden 1998; R. Keller, *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse. Grundlegung einer Forschungsprogramms*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2005.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ In contrast, other presidential candidates highlight the need of implementing new forms of participatory democracy, such Ska Keller from the Greens: "Democracy is much more than carrying people to vote. It's about making people's voices heard all the time, not just every five years" (1'05").

³⁰ *Towards a New Europe*, PES Manifesto European Parliament elections 22 - 25 May 2014, Party of European Socialists, Rome 2014.

On the other hand, although it shall sound contradictory, one may easily argue that the political debate and platform of the Party of European Socialists may not satisfactorily and fully represent the program of the European social democratic national parties, at least not by its own. The special political framework in which political families within the EU legal framework are anchored make of its actions and discourse specific, and just comprehensible in relation to the context in which they have been produced. In consequence, for the study of the concept of democracy of the European social democratic parties, it seems necessarily to also include their discourse at the national level. With this aim, as introduced at the beginning of the chapter, we have a look on the most recent party platforms of five different European social democratic parties. The main criterion to select the parties has been the total population of their countries of origin with the intention of representing the highest number of EU citizens possible. In accordance, the five most populous nations have been selected, namely (in descending order) Germany (80,767 thousand people), France (65,835 thousand), United Kingdom (64,351 thousand), Italy (60,782 thousand) and Spain (46,512 thousand), naturally through their corresponding social democratic parties, which are the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Parti socialiste (PS), The Labour Party (LP), Partito Democratico (PD) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE). To accomplish the study the platforms that these forces used to run in their last national elections – celebrated between 2012 and 2015 – have been analysed³¹.

Drawing on the core questions of this study, namely, with which actions and dynamics the European social democratic parties associate the concept of democracy and whether it can be considered a central topic in their political campaigns, we have reviewed the party platforms of the preselected parties. After the empirical work, it is inferable that among all parties considered the most popular ideas associated to “democracy” are the following:

- 1) **Transparency, supervision of public administrations and fight against corruption:** parties often offer precise measures to heighten the accountability of institutions, such moving towards more transparency and openness in their activities. These measures are thought to have a positive effect on the degree of citizens’ trust to politicians. Transparency is likewise associated to the ability of citizens to participate in the democratic process with sufficient and trustworthy information. These ideas are repeatedly mentioned under different formulations in all party platforms except the French Parti Socialiste’s.
- 2) **Creation of new channels of participation beyond polls:** advancing towards a ‘participative democracy’³² by means of digital innovations’ tools (e.g. online platforms) but also traditional means,

³¹Which are the following: *Das wir Entscheidet*. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013 – 2017, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013; *Britain can be better*. The Labour Party Manifesto 2015, Labour Party, 2015; *El Cambio que une*. Programa electoral. Elecciones generales 2015, Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 2015; *L’Italia gusta*. Programma, Partito Democratico, 2013; *Le changement c’est maintenant*. Mes 60 engagements pour la France. Élection présidentielle 22 avril 2012, Parti Socialiste, 2012.

³² PSOE party platform, 2015, p. 40

such referendums³³ and direct participation at local level³⁴. As in the last case, four out of the five platforms (excluding the PS) mention this idea.

3) **Independent mass media:** on one hand, they make an appeal requesting a diverse and plural media system, mostly in relation to the excessive concentration of power, underlined by the Labour Party³⁵, and to lesser extent by the SPD, and the economic dependence that is undermining media companies' freedom of expression during the crisis³⁶.

4) **Reform of the administrations' structure:** the state apparatus' structure appears to need a redesign to fuel democratic dynamics better. In the French and British cases, increasing the powers of local communities (throughout deeper decentralization) has a key importance. In more general terms, the PD claims for a 'reformulation of a responsible federalism' and 'simplification and lightening of the institutional and administrative system'³⁷.

To the question of the degree of relevance given to democratic questions on the electoral programs, it can be argued that this is, as in the case of the PES' political debate, not foremost in relation to other concerns, such the economy or social state's services, e. g. education or health, but moderate, since for example it has its own epigraph in four out of the five manifestoes, as also had on the PES party platform. On the other hand, another fact to consider is that only the Italian PD devotes a consistent part of the program's introduction, a privilege space within the document, to insist on the need of democratic renovation, fact that can be explained thinking of the domestic circumstances of the general elections of 2013. The former Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was running again to the presidential campaign. The French and the British parties principally focus on explaining their project to overcome the economic crisis, while the Germans evoke their long history and social accomplishments in relation to the party's 150th anniversary.

From the analysis of the documents it can be inferred that the PES principally refers to democracy as institutional policy making, as "confrontation among institutions", such by celebrating "relevant debates", or the implementation of "efficient and democratic policies", although it also shortly mention the need of transparency and fight against corruption. On the other hand, the PES member parties show a wider range of meanings, being the most coinciding: a) Transparency, supervision of public administrations and fight against corruption; b) Creation of new channels of participation beyond polls c) Independent mass media d) Reform of the administrations' structure. The second question of the study queried whether democracy is a relevant topic in their discourses. In both cases, that is, the PES

³³ SPD party platform, 2013, p.97

³⁴ PSOE party platform, 2015, p. 56

³⁵ Labour Party party platform, 2015, p. 68

³⁶ PSOE party platform, 2015, p. 86

³⁷ PD party platform, 2013, p.3. To lesser extent, the rest of concepts associated to democracy in the reviewed electoral programs are the following: Foreign policy, in relation to the consideration of democracy and human rights in external political actions; liberalism, and more precisely, its pervasive effects on European democracies; and the will of empowering women and workers.

and the national parties, the relevance of democratic issues is undoubtedly secondary in relation to other concerns, such economic and social issues, being this at best described as “moderate”.

Recapitulating the first question of this part, namely, whether the general dissatisfaction of citizens with democracy is somehow reflected in the current European social democratic discourse, one could give a positive answer. Although the PES discourse does not address this issue persuasively, it does mention tackling “corruption” and “transparency” when mentioning “democracy”. Respecting the national parties, the two most popular meanings associated to democracy, that is, a) Transparency, supervision of public administrations and fight against corruption and b) Creation of new channels of participation beyond polls, are deemed to be connectable to the general people’s distrust in politics, perceived in this case by the social democratic parties’ leaders.

Chapter 4: Shaping new institutions of people's power

As we presented earlier, while many people are disillusioned from the traditional forms of democracy, they are still committed to the community life on the local level where they spend their lives. However, the question of democracy seems to be a less relevant topic for the left. How can the left attract more people and develop the level of quality of democracy starting from that local level into a broader scale?

The question, at the end of the day, is the following: how to make possible that the parliamentary debate is not perceived, and not detached, from which and whom it must represent? As we know, a fundamental role was historically played by the political parties, which still have today a similar function, particularly the social democratic ones, which have in their name itself the promise of an integral – socialized – democracy. However, it appears like that: democracy to work and pursue its ideal cannot be limited at their enclosures.

To go deeply into the point, let's refer to what Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in the *Social Contract*: the general will of the political body cannot be represented³⁸: the legislative deliberation, to be called 'democratic' must to be acted from citizens in assembly. The essence of democratic process is in fact a deliberation for a resolution after a reasoned debate, face to face, where different ideas and positions can be dynamically expressed, confronted, in case intertwined or fused. The only place where that can happen concretely, and the ideal democracy can become real, is the *assembly*. It is necessary that the *demos* takes its decisions, there convened.

But *self-government* through assembly is possible only if political entities are little enough: there a population can be associated and really participate in the public affairs, not only by covering public roles. And then, how we can solve the “puzzle”? Simply, we have to shape new *participative* institutions,

³⁸J.-J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam 1762; transl. *On The Social Contract*, introduction by Peter Gay, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 1987.

in the sense of a *deliberative democracy*, which can complete, not substitute the *representative* ones (parliamentary) and *direct* (based on referendums), on the way towards an *integral democracy*³⁹.

To begin to achieve the ideal, progressive forces have to start experiments, following for instance the experiences of *participative balance* and *deliberative polls*.

The *participative balance*, born in Porto Alegre and then implemented in a lot of other cities – for instance in Rome and more recently in Paris – consists of the participation of citizens to the decision on investments for services and public structures of a part of the municipal balance, through free access to assemblies of districts.

The *deliberative poll* is an experimental method already promoted in some countries (USA, UK, Denmark, Sweden, Bulgaria, Hungary, just to name a few) by the political scientist James Fishkin⁴⁰. It consists of putting together a casual selection of a 'representative' sample of citizens in order to debate on a specific topic, to reveal “what the electorate would think if, hypothetically, it could be immersed in intensive deliberative process”⁴¹. Concretely it works with 500-600 citizens debating in the same place for some days (generally 3): they are divided in groups of 20 persons with a moderator, to debate about the chosen topic; then they meet all together in a plenary session for a deep discussion with experts; then they come back to the little groups to have a new discussion one more time on the topic; finally take a place a “question time” with political leaders. At the beginning and at the end of the experiment the citizens are involved in a poll on the topic at the centre of the debate. After the dialogical work between them and with the experts of the field, the opinions can change a lot, compared to the previous preferences.

The principle of this experiment is that the opinion of who 'knows a little' can change, if the person is exposed to more information. With this method the competence of citizens can grow: their questions are progressively more pertinent after each discussion. They become a group of very well informed citizens, and they can return to their communities involving and engaging other persons in the debate. There are certainly some problematic questions in this method: organizational and financial difficulties, providing equal access and participation of different social groups, delicate selection of experts who have to furnish impartial data etc. In spite of that, these *deliberation polls* could become a sort of institution in the future which make possible the discussion in assembly, where the dimension of the State doesn't permit the model of Athens. One can imagine to create *forums of deliberation* for each city and region to discuss important topics, an then one also on the national and supranational level, in order to have an official, institutionalized debate with the “political class”, which has to take into account the results in its decisions. That will work in a similar way with the utilization of the normal polls, in order

³⁹See: N. Bobbio, *Il futuro della democrazia*, Einaudi, Torino 1991, transl. *The future of democracy*, University of Minnesota Press 1987; id., *Which Socialism?*, Polity, Cambridge 1987.

⁴⁰See for instance: J. Fishkin, *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009.

⁴¹J. Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation: new Directions for Democratic Reforms*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1991, p. 81.

to get consensus, with the difference here that the citizen has an adequate information before answering to a question on a topic.

With this hypothetic system of *forums of deliberations* we can unify the advantages of the direct dimension – face to face debate, real participation of citizens, control on decisions, transparency – with the representative system of the modern national states, giving “voice” to the people with a sort of new “conciliar” system, beyond the sirens of populism – and his radical critic of parliamentarism began with Carl Schmitt⁴² – and the conflict between fractions, putting the citizen at the centre of political agenda.

Moreover, in combination with *e-democracy* and *primaries* progressive forces have to take into consideration the reintroduction of some system of draw, to be experimented both within the organization of the parties – for instance to choose (part of) the Committee of guarantee and other internal boards; and within institutions – for example to choose (part of) members of the Constitutional Courts within a long list selected by Parliament and judicial body of the State. As well known, drawing was the main method of ancient Athenian constitution to enforce democracy: an instrument removed from the modern representative system - as shown in his studies by Bernard Manin⁴³ - but probably still essential to give to the people the perception that democracy can be really - with a collective strong effort - the *kratos* of the *demos*.

That can be a hypothetical institutional road-map for a democracy conceived as constantly renewable: reconnecting people and institutions starting from the local level, making experiments more and more into an increasing scale, and keeping in consideration the good experiences also from the past, to create new future with, for and by the citizens. In that perspective, it appears no more as an utopia to overcome the historical and technical separation between governors and governed, opening the possibility of an accomplished “true democracy”, with a full participation of the people to the government, also through well organized progressive parties, conceived as a “collective intellectual”.⁴⁴

Chapter 5: Heading to a critical renewal of democracy

In general, in reference to the big need of democratic renewal in the Western world it is good to underline that social democratic parties became co-responsible for the current situation, namely the growing level of disillusionment with democracy. For example, many times traditional social democrat voters left the parties since they allegedly perceived the “betrayal of working class”. More and more often socialists and social democrats disregarded core values of the one-time political movement such as fighting for and representing the interest of the poor, exploited and left alone. European social democracy is not anymore perceived as the “solution to the problem”, but as being a serious part of it.

⁴²See C. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, Duncker und Humblot, Muenchen-Leipzig 1923; transl. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, MIT Press 1988.

⁴³B. Manin, *The principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1997.

⁴⁴ See the unfinished work of A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, a cura di Valentino Gerratana*, Einaudi, Torino 1975 - transl. *The Prison Notebooks*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011.

The Third Way of New Labor Party and Die Neue Mitte of SPD were clear examples of such phenomenon. Both Tony Blair's and Gerhard Schröder's governments implemented neoliberal policy to the government agenda created by social democratic parties. For example, working-class and trade unionist left when free market oriented reforms were introduced by mentioned politicians.

One of the ways to describe that state of affairs is to define the shape of the liberal and representative democracy as a system with strong corruptive potential in ideological and political sense. Social democracy did not change the system as Eduard Bernstein thought⁴⁵. It is vice versa!

The traditional or so-called "old left" wrongly believed that social democracy embedded in a system of liberal democracy and capitalist market economy would be able to reform them. The peak of this faith was reached with the period of the Third Way, when the vast part of the European social democratic politicians believed in the neoliberal illusion of continuous economic growth, which would serve all members of society in the economic rule of the "trickle-down". It soon became clear that the thesis of universal and uniform enrichment of all in times of economic boom turned out to be completely untrue and has brought terrible consequences in terms of rigid stratification and growing social inequality to which special attention was paid by Joseph E. Stiglitz⁴⁶. Such centrist shift of social democracy and getting out from traditional left-right political struggle have serious consequences for democracy itself. As Chantal Mouffe rightly described: "*A well functioning democracy calls for a clash a legitimate democratic political positions. This is what the confrontation between left and right needs to be about. (...) A confrontation should provide collective forms of identification strong enough to mobilize political passions. If this adversarial confirmation is missing, passions cannot be given a democratic outlet and the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered*".⁴⁷

The outbreak of the current global economic and financial crisis serves as a chance for the left-wing circles in Europe for basic and serious political change. Scale exposed abuses and mistakes made by the U.S. and European financiers not only should but have to shake up our perspective. Both the progressive part of the Europeans and their political representatives should not save the failed system of neoliberal capitalism but ought to establish a new socio-economic system based on social ownership and universal, egalitarian social policy and true democratic control of political and economic processes taking place in the European Union.

Such descriptions as "participatory", "deliberative" and "direct" should be always linked to the term "democracy". Only in that kind of system people can escape from the vicious circle of establishment dependency. It is also crucial for the European societies to become really sovereign of the political processes taking part in the European Union. In true democracy everybody has equal rights and practical possibilities to express loudly their objections, opinions and proposals. Because of it all forces which would like to bring back to previous, speculative form of capitalism should confront millions of individuals who strongly refuse to live in such malfunctioned system. "Fat cats" should have limited

⁴⁵See: E. Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (United Kingdom) 1993.

⁴⁶See: J. E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York/London 2013.

⁴⁷Ch. Mouffe, *On the Political*, Routledge, New York/London 2005, p. 30.

access to corrupt policymakers and others in political and economical way. Participatory democracy where every member of society has the same voice, vote and influence has a strong potential of transparency, which is absolutely crucial for social and political regeneration. Many activists of alter-globalization movement have discovered it pretty long time ago. Since 1999 when thousands of protesters led to break the meeting of the World Trade Organization, we witnessed their on-going fight for control over the process of constitution of global trade but also the primacy of society over the economy. 9 years later, it turned out that the alter-globalists were right and ignoring their warnings resulted in disastrous consequences not only for finance sector but also for all the everyday citizens whose taxes often serve rescuing banks and financial institutions.

Alter-globalists use of policy innovations in democratic participation and deliberation attracted a number of people in their activities who otherwise would have stayed away from politics. They were able to modify the discourse of the Left, mainly asking for a major change in the treatment of neoliberal capitalism so far recognized as a no-alternative system. The phrase "We are the 99%" carried around the world in the occupied spaces, symbols of global capitalism permanently inscribed in the social consciousness. A similar expression of dissent to the economic and political *status quo* we observed in the main squares of Cairo, Madrid, Kiev and Hong Kong. World public opinion is slowly starting to associate ruling economic system with the growth of authoritarian and undemocratic tendencies in the world. European countries of course are still democratic but the lack of transparency can be very dangerous in the future. The process of establishing TTIP agreement, its technocratic and exclusive procedure require political contestation from the European social democracy and its American allies to make public the possible negative effects of its implementation on both sides of the Atlantic.

The requirement of radical change in the approach towards democracy is also associated with a significant revolution in the relationship between capitalism and democracy itself. Slavoj Žižek was right saying that the current crisis has highlighted an interesting phenomenon: "*The marriage between democracy and capitalism is over*"⁴⁸. With the on-going fall of the ideology of neoliberal capitalism the delusion of liberal democracy has been fallen, too, by assuming that a representative entity could represent the interests of all social groups in a balanced way in the political process of law-making. Rather, it turned out that, regardless of ideological program of politicians and policy groups, politics remained unchanged, where the interests of the world of capital and stockbrokers were far more influential than the will of the majority, namely society. In some sense, the idea of liberal democracy has become outdated with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers.

The objectives of democracy do not match frequently with the goals of capitalism. The main difference can be found in the approach to redistribution of wealth and power. As an American economist Lester Thurow noted "*Democracy and capitalism have very different beliefs about the proper distribution of power [...] One [democracy] of believes in a completely equal distribution of political power, 'one man, one vote', while the other [capitalism] believes that it is the duty of the economically fit*

⁴⁸S. Žižek, *Today Liberty Plaza had a visit from Slavoj Zizek*, <http://occupywallst.org/article/today-liberty-plaza-had-visit-slavoj-zizek/> (07.03.2015).

to drive the unfit out of business and into extinction [...] To put it in its starkest form, capitalism is perfectly compatible with slavery. Democracy is not⁴⁹. Thus we see that the debate on renewable and participatory democracy is of vital importance for the progressive circles in Europe and around the world.

Often the debate on the wider implementation of direct democracy practices clashes with the fear of institutional collapse of social democracy as a main political representative of the progressive part of the society. This fear is not only justified but also based on true premises. Yes, the Social Democrats will have to give way to individual citizens to play the main role in political decision-making processes. Only by ensuring this possibility, in alliance with all the progressive forces, can social democracy become the *avantgarde* of a major political change, which hopefully will allow the creation of a new reality based on the following principle: "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

Conclusions

As we presented it above, the question of democracy seems to be a secondary concern for the social democratic parties, even if at the EU-level the level of trust and election turnouts are disappointing and the public support to social democratic parties in Europe is increasingly absorbed by populist newly emerged parties. With this panorama, it is worth asking how can the left forces recover their partly vanished public support and attract more people to their organizations. Our view is that, first of all, it would be helpful to articulate and shape new participative institutions within and beyond the parties.

Primarily, one may presuppose that one factor contributing to the current alleged distrust of people towards social democratic political parties has been the hermetic and at times obscure character of their decision-making processes and the actual dynamics existing in their organizations. In this sense, their political programs recurrently reflected a sort of disconnection and even neglect of their constituency's preferences, many times in favour of corporatists ones⁵⁰. Today, in light of the poor performance of many social democratic parties at EU polls, a specific plan to bolster participation within and beyond the organisation in an open and transparent way it is deemed to be of use. In the following lines we will offer some recommendations.

As we have shown in chapter one, although the disillusionment, with politics is broad among EU-citizens, people still feel that they can influence effectively at the local level⁵¹. One can suggest accordingly that social democratic parties may use local level politics to attract new members to their organisations. In this work we propose the organisation of open forums of deliberation, public events and the creative usage of public places in which people who may feel ideologically close to these forces,

⁴⁹F. Goldin, D. Smith, M. Steven Smith (ed.), *Imagine: Living in a socialist USA*, HarperCollins, New York 2012, p. 18-19.

⁵⁰See C. Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Polity, Cambridge 2004, Chapter 4.

⁵¹Demonstrated in this work by the high proportion of people who believe that voting at the local elections is a useful way of influencing politics.

besides activists and supporters, can freely join and contribute to the public debate. At the national level, although the organisation and logistics are inevitably more complex, this possibility also exists.⁵²

Additionally, the active use of the available e-democracy tools is unnegotiable for a present-day political party or leader. Nowadays, there are plenty of platforms specifically conceived to increase political participation and interaction, some of them referring to national domestic policy and representatives (e.g. in Spain: Osoigo), European (Debating Europe) or worldwide (such Change.org).⁵³ Also online office hours or chats to discuss on-going projects and answer questions and proposals are an astute although time-consuming option. Naturally, social networks, such Facebook and Twitter, allow a straight channel of communication between the governed and the governors. New progressive parties, such *Podemos* in Spain, the *Die Piraten* in Germany and the new left party *Possible* in Italy are developing participative and open web-platforms also as tools to discuss topics, programmes and reach some internal decisions.

Moreover, due to the uniqueness of the moment in which we are now, social democratic parties can take the chance to combine all the progressive forces not only in Europe or the United States but also in other democratic countries in the World in a common struggle for the establishment of a new system based on universal and participatory democracy. A broad alliance of social democracy, green political parties, trade unions, employee's cooperatives and social movements can provide an important counterbalance to the groups who want to maintain the status quo, leading to an international impulse to democratic innovations. This can be feasible (gradually) by means of the organisation of international conferences, symposiums and working groups with the intention of enabling the expansion and transfer of knowledge among the different organisations and worldwide.

Respecting the inner organization of the parties, we believe there is also still some room for democratic innovations. The most intuitive measure relates the compulsory celebration of primaries for the selection of candidates to elections -for premierships, national and European Parliament, regional councils, or even elections of mayor candidates-. Progressive forces can consider implementing mandatory primaries both in the national and in the EU law. The corresponding legal framework– and as well the norms included in the proposal for a national law – must provide equal opportunity of access to the media platforms, common public tribune of debate for all the candidates, and strict limits to the resources to be utilized during the campaign, in order to avoid excessive disparity and strong influence of lobbying interests. Primaries for the selection of candidates to elections - for premierships, European Parliament, regional councils, mayorship - have to be considered by all the member parties of PES

⁵² As 'The SPD Bürger-Dialog' demonstrated it (The SPD' dialogue of citizens): a project to implement a collaborative party platform in the 2013 German national elections. People were mainly asked 'what should in Germany be improved' in the over 350 events organised around the country. The participants answered the mentioned question in a card (they gathered around 40.000 suggestions, ideas and critiques) and some of them were finally invited to the national SPD-Bürgerkonvent to work on concrete projects. Source: *Das wir Entscheidet*. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013 – 2017, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013.

⁵³ On the web, in order of appearance in the text: <https://www.osoigo.com/>; <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/>; <https://www.change.org/>

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the European national social democratic parties do endorse new forms of participation in their public discourses, being this, together with the need of a higher transparency and fight against corruption, their favourite claim when talking of democracy. Conversely, the PES in its last political manifesto in 2014 and at the electoral debate represented by the by then candidate for the European Commission Presidency, Martin Schulz, omitted any reference to them. In this sense, the general relevance given to these questions sought to be likewise secondary in relation to other concerns, such the economy or the social rights in both the PES and the considered social democratic parties. Hence, we strongly recommend all social democratic forces to articulate a more determined and ambitious discourse on their defence of democratic innovations and participatory democracy and we encourage the PES help this discourse to arise. Sponsoring intellectual work and events on democratic innovations and articulating a common and persuasive basis at the EU level may undoubtedly contribute.

Policy and Action Recommendations

Specific actions to bolster participation

- Politicians on the local level should be catalysts of citizens' participative political actions. In this work, the organization of forums of deliberation with an open and equal engagement of individuals is suggested. Representatives of social democratic parties should be visible, easily and directly accessible, and should organize open forums, public events, consultations (online or offline) with the citizens. Creative usage of public places, squares, streets can bring many people together.
- Using effectively, innovatively and supporting the tools of e-democracy: local and national representative should organize online office hours or chats, should report the results of different negotiations and projects and provide e-platforms for questions and ideas coming from the citizens and voters. We similarly recommend the PES and its member parties to start experimenting with participative and open web-platforms also to discuss internal topics, as the newly emerged movements like *Podemos* in Spain, the *Piraten* in Germany and *Possible* in Italy already do.
- A broad alliance of social democracy, green political parties, trade unions, employee's cooperatives and social movements can provide an important counterbalance to the groups who want to maintain the status quo, leading to an international impulse to democratic innovations. This can be feasible –gradually - by means of the organisation of international conferences, symposiums and working groups with the intention of enabling the expansion and transfer of knowledge among the different organisations and worldwide.

Modifications in the inner organization of the parties

- Primaries for the selection of candidates to elections - for premiership, European Parliament, regional councils, mayorship - have to be considered by all the member parties of PES. Progressive forces can also consider implementing in national and EU-law the primaries as mandatory for all the political organizations. Moreover, the PES and its member parties should include experimental forms of drawing democracy for the selection of part of its bodies and boards. For instance, the committees of guarantee can be elected – at least the half of its composition- by draw within the members of the party satisfying given criteria of eligibility. Last but not least, their political work should be transparent by all means. Transparency can serve as a political credit, especially in those countries where political corruption is widespread. Reports of campaign and party finance should be easily accessible for everyone (via internet, for example).

Communication issues

- The Party of the European Socialists and its member parties should rebuild a stronger and more forward-looking discourse on democracy. This must include a direct call for democratic innovations and new forms of democratic participation. The PES has to lead and inspire its national member parties towards a renewed discourse on democracy, one that situates participatory innovations in the centre of the policy making process.

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Today Liberty Plaza had a visit from Slavoj Žižek


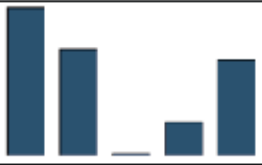
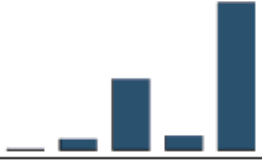
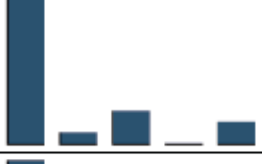
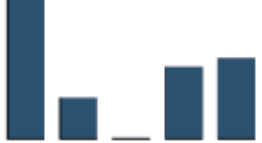
Annex

Annex 1. Voter turnout rates in different cycles in national elections, %

	1990-1993	1994-1997	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2009	2010-2013	change between 1990-1993 and 2010-2013 (%)
EU (28 countries)	76.5	74.9	71.9	71.3	70.6	68.5	-10.5
Lithuania	75.2	52.9	58.2	40.2	32.4	35.9	-52.3
Romania	76.3	76.0	65.3	58.5	48.6	41.8	-45.2
Bulgaria	83.9	67.1	66.6	55.8	60.6	52.5	-37.4
Slovakia	90.5	75.4	84.2	70.1	54.7	58.9	-34.9
Czech Republic	90.5	76.3	74.0	57.9	64.5	61.1	-32.5
Latvia	85.5	71.9	71.9	71.2	61.0	59.5	-30.4
Croatia	75.6	68.8	76.5	61.7	59.6	54.2	-28.3
Greece	83.0	76.3	75.0	76.6	72.5	62.5	-24.7
Slovenia	85.9	73.7	70.4	60.6	63.1	65.6	-23.6
United Kingdom	77.8	71.5	59.4	61.4	N.E.	65.8	-15.4
Portugal	68.2	66.3	55.5	63.5	60.6	58.0	-15.0
Hungary	75.4	68.9	56.3	70.5	67.6	64.4	-14.6
Cyprus	93.3	90.1	91.8	90.5	89.9	80.1	-14.1
Italy	87.4	84.5	81.4	N.E.	82.1	75.2	-14.0
Estonia	73.0	68.9	57.4	57.9	61.9	63.5	-13.0
Austria	86.1	84.3	80.4	84.3	78.7	74.9	-13.0
Spain	77.0	78.1	68.7	75.7	75.3	68.9	-10.5
Germany	77.8	79.0	82.2	78.4	70.8	71.5	-8.1
Netherlands	N.E.	78.7	73.2	79.5	80.4	75.0	-4.7
Belgium	92.7	91.1	90.6	94.0	91.1	89.2	-3.8
Malta	96.0	97.2	95.4	95.7	93.3	93.0	-3.1
Sweden	86.7	86.8	81.4	80.1	82.0	84.6	-2.4
Finland	68.4	68.6	65.3	66.7	65.0	67.4	-1.5
Ireland	68.5	66.1	N.E.	62.6	67.0	70.0	2.2
Poland	47.6	47.9	46.2	40.6	53.9	48.9	2.7
Luxembourg	N.E.	88.3	86.5	91.7	90.9	91.1	3.2
Denmark	82.8	84.3	86.5	84.5	86.6	87.7	5.9
France	68.9	73.8	N.E.	79.7	84.0	80.4	16.7

Source: Eurostat, own calculations (if two national elections were held in one cycle, we calculated the average of turnouts)
N.E.: no elections were held in that cycle

Annex 2. Cluster centres and sparklines

	<i>Nordic – type (satisfied and committed)</i>	<i>Hesitants</i>	<i>Authoritarian and disillusioned leanings</i>	<i>Quite critical but still committed</i>	<i>UK</i>	
Countries	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Ireland	Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Portugal	Belgium, France, Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia	United Kingdom	sparklines
importance of influence of masses (average % of those thinking that the government should change its planned policies in response to what people think)	56	56	74	69	68	
Importance of direct participation (average importance on a 0-to-10 scale of citizens having a final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums)	6,6	5,8	3,8	4,4	5,6	
Power – one party governance (average % of those thinking that in general having a structure in which a single party forms the government is the best for democracy)	12	15	33	16	56	
Importance of democracy (average % of those think that living in a country that is governed democratically is extremely or almost extremely important)	80	55	59	53	57	
Satisfaction with democracy (average satisfaction on a 0-to-10 scale)	7,1	4,7	3,8	5,4	5,6	

Source: ESS 2012, own calculations

Annex 3. Country averages along cluster dimensions/indicators

		Importance of influence of masses (average % of those thinking that the government should change its planned policies in response to what people think)	Importance of direct participation (average importance on a 0-to-10 scale of citizens having a final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums)	Power – one party governance (average % of those thinking that in general having a structure in which a single party forms the government is the best for democracy)	Importance of democracy (average % of those think that living in a country that is governed democratically is extremely or almost extremely important)	Satisfaction with democracy (average satisfaction on a 0-to-10 scale)
Nordic - type (satisfied and committed)	Denmark	47	6.7	8	85	7.3
	Finland	59	6.4	3	73	6.8
	Sweden	61	6.7	25	82	7.0
Hesitants	Czech Republic	57	4.5	13	47	5.0
	Hungary	53	5.3	11	59	4.5
	Slovenia	61	6.4	16	55	3.6
	Ireland	53	7.2	21	60	5.5
Authoritarian and disillusioned leanings	Bulgaria	70	3.5	32	61	3.1
	Spain	79	4.0	33	58	4.0
	Italy	73	4.0	34	70	4.1
	Portugal	75	3.7	32	46	3.9
Quite critical but still committed	Belgium	69	4.1	13	52	5.9
	Germany	74	3.8	10	72	6.2
	Estonia	73	4.5	10	50	4.9
	Lithuania	68	4.3	9	38	5.0
	Netherlands	63	4.8	8	51	6.3
	Poland	72	4.9	24	54	4.9
	Slovakia	66	4.5	20	51	5.0
	France	70	4.5	27	55	5.1
UK	United Kingdom	68	5.6	56	57	5.6

Source: ESS 2012, own calculations

Annex 4. Concepts of democracy during the EP presidential debate

<i>CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY</i>	<i>POLITICAL GROUP</i>	<i>EXAMPLES</i>
<i>ACTION OF VOTING</i>	<i>EPP</i>	Jean Claude Juncker (EPP): “Citizens should go and vote so it becomes a democracy” (1’13’)
<i>CREATION OF NEW CHANNELS OF PARTICIPATION BEYOND POLLS</i>	<i>GREENS/EL</i>	Ska Keller (Greens): “Democracy is much more than carrying people to vote. It’s about making people’s voices heard all the time, not just every five years” (1’05’)
<i>RESPECTING THE POLLS AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS</i>	<i>ALDE/EPP/GREENS</i>	<p>Jean Claude Juncker (EPP): “If the European council do(es) not do this (disregarding the Lisbon Treaty concerning the democratic election of Commission president), this would be a denial of democracy” (1’20’)</p> <p>Alexis Tsipras (EL): “The citizens must decide on the big things with referendums, not backroom deals behind closed doors” (1’26’)</p> <p>Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE): “(About the possibility of electing another person as Commission president) I think it’s unthinkable it can only be one of the candidates, because otherwise we can close the doors of this European Parliament and we can close the doors of European democracy” (01’19’)</p>
<i>SOCIAL / SOLIDARITY</i>	<i>GREENS/EL</i>	<p>Ska Keller (Greens): “I offer a Europe of solidarity, of democracy and of the people” (09’)</p> <p>Alexis Tsipras(EL): “We need a Europe which belongs to the people, a Europe of people. We want to support solidarity and democracy” (1’26’)</p>
<i>ENDING AUSTERITY</i>	<i>EL</i>	Alexis Tsipras(EL): “We want to support solidarity and democracy. (...) We must prepaid to the Troika, banish it from the European institutions” (1’26’)

<p>MEANINGFUL CONFRONTATION</p>	<p><i>S&D</i></p>	<p>Martin Schulz (S&D): “The debate here shows we are changing in the European Union to more democracy for more controversial debate” (...) “The debate of concrete proposals” (1’09”)</p>
<p>TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p><i>EPP/EL</i></p>	<p>Jean Claude Juncker (EPP): “For all members and commissioners to publish the list of their contacts and their meetings so citizens know who they have been dealing with, is the way and citizens should go and vote so it becomes a democracy” (1’13”)</p> <p>Alexis Tsipras(EL): “The citizens must decide on the big things with referendums, not backroom deals behind closed doors” (1’26”)</p> <p>Martin Schulz (S&D): “The debate here shows we are changing in the European Union to more democracy for more controversial debate” (...)</p>

Source: own analysis of the “Eurovision debate”

Annex 5. Concepts of democracy of European social democratic parties between 2012 and 2015

CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY	POLITICAL GROUP	EXAMPLES
<p>TRANSPARENCY, SUPERVISION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS AND FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION</p>	<p><i>SPD, LP, PD, PSOE</i></p>	<p>“Gleichzeitig ermöglicht mehr Transparenz auch Kontrolle” (SPD, p.97) (“At the same time, more transparency enables more control”)</p> <p>“(…) Mehr Offenheit und Transparenz politischer Entscheidungen und der politischen Entscheidungsträgerinnen und –träger” (SPD, p.96) (“(…) More openness and transparency of political decisions and the political decision-makers”)</p> <p>“We will safeguard our democracy by repealing the Lobbying Act (...) and replace it with a tougher statutory register of lobbyists.” (LP, p63) “We will ban MPs from holding paid directorships and consultancies. And we will reform the legislative process to strengthen the public’s voice and to better hold the government to account.” (LP, p63)</p> <p>“Rafforzamento della normativa contro la corruzione.” (PD, p.3) (“Strengthening of anti-corruption legislation”)</p> <p>“El combate y la prevención de la corrupción para recobrar la confianza” (PSOE, p.36) (“Fighting and preventing corruption to restore trust”)</p> <p>“Una democracia más cercana a la ciudadanía tiene que (...) hacerse más transparente (...)” (PSOE, p. 35) (“A democracy closer to citizens needs to become more transparent”)</p> <p>“Un gobierno abierto que garantice una mayor participación y transparencia” (PSOE, p. 35) (“An open government that ensures greater participation and transparency”)</p>
<p>CREATION OF NEW CHANNELS OF PARTICIPATION BEYOND POLLS</p>	<p><i>SPD, LP, PD, PSOE</i></p>	<p>“Für die Sozialdemokratie ist Demokratie mehr als Wahlen und Abstimmungen.” (SPD p.96) (“For the social democracy democracy is more than elections and voting.”)</p> <p>“Die digitale und technische Innovation eröffnet zusätzliche Mitwirkungsmöglichkeiten (z.B. durch Internetplattformen, liquid democracy und soziale Medien) (SPD, p.97) (“Digital and technological innovations open up additional opportunities for participation (e.g. through internet platforms, Liquid</p>

		<p>Democracy and social media)")</p> <p>“Wir wollen darum unsere klassisch-repräsentative Demokratie um neue und weitergehende Formen der demokratischen Partizipation auf allen politischen Ebenen ergänzen.” (SPD, p.97) (“We therefore want to complete our classical representative democracy with new and more extensive forms of democratic participation at all political levels.”)</p> <p>“Reform government to give more power to people“ (LP, p. 61)</p> <p>“Riconoscere il limite della politica e dei partiti significa anche aprire il campo alle richieste d’impegno e mobilitazione” (PD, p3) (“Recognizing the limits of politics and parties also means opening up the field to the requests of commitment and mobilization”)</p> <p>„(...) Desarrollo de nuestra democracia exclusivamente de carácter representativo hacia una “democracia participativa” donde la participación política directa del ciudadano se equilibre con la representativa“ (PSOE, p. 40) ((...) Advancing from our exclusively representative democracy towards a "participatory democracy" in which direct political participation of citizens complements the representative”)</p> <p>“(...) participación de la ciudadanía en las decisiones más importantes de los ayuntamientos.“ (PSOE, p.56) (“(...)citizens participation in the most important decisions of the city councils”)</p>
<p>INDEPENDENT MASS MEDIA</p>	<p><i>SPD, LP, PSOE</i></p>	<p>“Unabhängige und vielfältige Medien sind ein Grundpfeiler für eine lebendige Demokratie” (SPD, P.64) (“Independent and diverse media are a cornerstone of a vivid democracy”)</p> <p>“(…) The concentration of media power in too few hands is damaging to our democracy” “Labour will take steps to protect the principle of media plurality” (LP, p.69)</p> <p>“Estado debe actuar como sujeto activo para garantizar su preservación (la información y comunicación)” (PSOE, p. 86) (“The State must act as an active subject to ensure its preservation (information and communication”)</p> <p>“Los medios de comunicación en España (...) están viviendo una crisis de credibilidad que proviene en gran medida de su dependencia económica.” (PSOE, p. 86) (“The media in Spain (...) are experiencing a crisis of credibility that largely comes from their economic dependence.”)</p>

<p>REFORM OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S STRUCTURE</p>	<p><i>LP, PS, PD</i></p>	<p>“Our governing mission is to (...) devolve power and decision-making to people and their local communities.” (LP, p. 62)</p> <p>“J’engagerai une nouvelle étape de la décentralisation associant les élus locaux. Je ferai voter une loi sur le renforcement de la démocratie et des libertés locales.” (PS, p.35) (“I will engage in a new era of decentralization by involving local representatives. I will pass a law on strengthening local democracy and freedoms.”)</p> <p>“Riformuleremo un federalismo responsabile e bene ordinato che faccia delle autonomie un punto di forza dell’assetto democratico” (PD, p. 3) (“We will reformulate a responsible and well-ordered federalism making of autonomies a strength of the democratic order”)</p> <p>“Bisogna agire per la semplificazione e l’alleggerimento del sistema istituzionale e amministrativo.” (PD, p. 3) (“We must act on the simplification and reduction of the institutional and administrative system.”)</p>
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Source: The following party platforms: Das wir Entscheidet. Das Regierungsprogramm 2013 – 2017, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, 2013; Britain can be better. The Labour Party Manifesto 2015, Labour Party, 2015; El Cambio que une. Programa electoral. Elecciones generales 2015, Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 2015; L’Italia gusta. Programma, Partito Democratico, 2013; Le changement c’est maintenant. Mes 60 engagements pour la France. Élection présidentielle 22 avril 2012, Parti Socialiste, 2012.