

The EU on Democracy

The term ‘democracy’ appears just seven times in the consolidated treaties underpinning the EU (TEU/TFEU – 412 pages).

From the **PREAMBLE** (p.17):

DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, **democracy**, equality and the rule of law,

CONFIRMING their attachment to the principles of liberty, **democracy** and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law,

Article 2 (p.19)

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, **democracy**, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

From **Article 10** (p.22):

1. The functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative **democracy**.

From **Article 21** (pp.30f):

1. inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: **democracy**, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

2. (b) consolidate and support **democracy**, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law;

From the **Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** (p.395):

Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of **democracy** and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice.

The first thing we notice is that the treaties do not provide a definition of ‘democracy’, nor even much of a guide to what the EU means by the term. However, they do tell us that they hold it dear. We can learn a little more from Article 10:

2. Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament.

Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of State or Government and in the Council by their governments, themselves **democratically accountable** either to their national Parliaments, or to their citizens. (Our emphasis)

3. Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.

Is it reasonable to consider the EU as democratic because (they claim) citizens are indirectly represented in the Council by governments that are themselves democratically accountable? We think not. But in the absence of any clearer statement we must assume that this is the basis of the EU’s claim that it is democratic. And why national governments go along with the claim.

Further clues to the EU’s view of democracy can be found in their Glossary of Summaries:

(https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/democratic_deficit.html)

Democratic deficit

‘Democratic deficit’ is a term used by people who argue that the EU institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem

inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity. The real EU democratic deficit seems to be the absence of European politics. EU voters do not feel that they have an effective way to reject a 'government', they do not like, and to change, in some ways, the course of politics and policy.

The current form of European governance is such that there is no 'government'. ...

Disaffection with Europe has been expressed in the low turnouts at European elections, which reached an all-time low in 2009 with an EU average of just 43 %.

If the EU is not a government, why does it need to claim that it is democratic? But they have at least noticed the objection.

Here is our alternative definition of 'democratic deficit': 'EU voters do not have any way to reject a system of governance they do not like, or to change the course of politics and policy.'

We would replace the second part of "*EU institutions and their decision-making procedures...seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity.*" with "...are inaccessible to the ordinary citizen by deliberate design."

The list under 'European governance' gives a clear indication of the arm's length distance that the EU has been designed to keep its ignorant citizens from interfering in the works.

European governance

Since 2001 and the European Commission's White Paper on the subject, the issue of governance has become an EU imperative. The expression 'European governance' designates the body of rules, procedures and practices that relate to the way powers are exercised in the EU. The objective is to strengthen democracy at European level and to bring citizens closer to the European institutions.

European governance is based on the following principles:

- opening up and transparency of the EU institutions;
- involving civil society in decision-making;
- framing and implementing consistent and well-managed policies;
- ensuring a clear, stable and predictable regulatory framework supporting growth and jobs
- respecting the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity;
- ensuring that each of the EU institutions and EU countries explains and takes responsibility for what it does in Europe;
- contributing to the global governance debate with a view to improving the operation of international institutions.

Note: "*do not feel that they have...*" should, more honestly, read "do not have...".

For more details and comments on some of this, see [Subsidiarity and Competence](#).

EU mandarins seem to view low voter turn-out as a manifestation of voter ignorance, and they blame the governments of their member states for not doing enough to portray the project in a friendly way.