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Is The European Parliament, Democratic or Non-Democratic?

**Final Essay**

Course: The Political System of the New EU: The Architecture After Lisbon

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1. **Introduction**

Democracy is deep rooted political regime and significant concept for the political science. This important concept emerged with Ancient Greek city states and has been developing, even today. Especially, 20th and 21st centuries, democracy has importance for the states. Also, democracy has very significant mean for the European Union. One of the supranational institution of the European Union is the European Parliament. The EP members are selected by all European citizens, so it represents interest of all European Union (Wessels, 2018). The aim of this paper is to determine democratic and undemocratic functions and features of European Parliament in the European Union.

In the first part, which is Definition of Democracy, there is a basic explanation and definition of democracy. Also, there is some philosophers, who studied on democracy. However, this part tries to explain some key elements of the democracy. There is a very briefly explaining of liberal democracy. On the other hand, the radical division of democracy is explained in this part. In the subtitles of this chapter includes explain of direct and indirect democracy. Also, this part explains shortly definition of parliamentary and presidential democracy. Briefly explaining of liberal democracy is included by first part.

Second part, which is Historical Development of the European Parliament, includes very briefly, when established the European Parliament and how it gained very significant democratic dimension that member of the Parliament elected by the all European citizens. Also, in this part, there is a basic information of today assembly members.

Third and fourth parts explain democratic and non-democratic features of European Parliament. There are many details about statement of democratic and non-democratic. Also, this part shows some articles of treaties, which are related with European Parliament. In this part, we will find some answers of the Research Questions that ‘Is the European Parliament, Democratic or Non-Democratic?’

Last part of this Essay is conclusion that there is a briefly explaining of democratic and non-democratic European Parliament features. Also, in this part, there is a clear answer of the Research Question. The European Parliament has features of both democratic and non-democratic tendencies so there is a fusion. But, non-democratic tendencies are preponderate.

1. **Definition of Democracy and Features**

Definition of democracy is very complex issue for the social scientist, because there are many kind of democracy types and it is very historical concept. This complicated concept emerged in the Greek city states (Mulgan, 1968). Greek city states were very crucial places for the development of political sciences. Also many philosophers supported and studied on this topic, for instance, Jean Jacques Rousseau’s social contract, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill and Montesquieu. However, the democracy is coming from Greek language and its mean is that rule by the people (Miller & Lunn, 2014). The basic meaning of all kind of democracies are same but, the ways are different. There is a certain division of democracy, which is direct democracy and indirect democracy (Mulgan, 1968). Divisions are emerging with historically and result of new international structures.

The minimal requirements of the democracy are regular elections, free election campaigns and participation (Muncka, 2014). Of course, there are many other requirements or key elements, but they are the essential ones. In the modern democracy, there are some important features. One of the important key element is Guarantee of basic Human Rights. Also, separation of power is important for the democracy. The separation of power between government, parliament and court of justice, provides check and balance between state institutions, for example in the monarchies, who can prevents the king against his terrible decisions, but democracy can prevent the terrible decisions. Another important feature of democracy is freedom of opinions (Mulgan, 1968). State should provide political and social area, which have different ideas even against government. Also, freedom of religious is important for the democracy. State should not favour one religion than another. Equality in the elections is another key element for the democracies. The main idea is that one vote should be for one person so every citizen should be equal. There should not be superior of one group of people in the society.

Liberal democracy is a form of democracy based on the limitation of the government against the will of the majority (Morlino, 2008). Liberal features of state are connected with internal and external controlling on the government. This controlling system guarantees freedom and protection of citizens, especially, protection against arbitrary management of governments. The democratic characteristics are same other modern democracies that there are regular and competitive elections. Also, for the liberal democracies economic cooperation and policies are so important.

Democracy has many features and requirements for the ideal governance, also, this term has different definitions. With the abovementioned explanations, there are two important division, direct democracy and indirect democracy, but main idea is that rule by the people.

* 1. **Direct Democracy**

Direct democracy is that all members of society rule their self and they join decision making process collectively, so there is no representatives (Mulgan, 1968). Ancient Greek city states had this type of democracy, actually, Direct Democracy can works ideally only city states (Miller & Lunn, 2014). The basic reason of this statement is population. In the city states, population is low and all participation is not impossible, but, if we imagine direct democracy in the modern France, how nearly 70 million of people come together and take decision. So direct democracy cannot work in the modern states. In the decision making process, finding consensus is unfeasible, so there is a majority voting system.

* 1. **Representative Democracy**

In the Representative Democracies, people choose representatives to rule their self, so they do not rule and joining decision making process directly (Mulgan, 1968). High population societies use this type of Democracy. In the Representative Democracy, people can change their representatives. Those representatives come together in a place, which’s name is parliament or assembly, and take a decisions for the people. There is important things for democratic governance is that representatives should follow interest of people, not their own interest. Modern democracies can be identified as the representative democracies. European Parliament, which is this essay case, is inclusion of Representative Democracy.

* 1. **Presidential Democracy and Parliamentary Democracy**

Briefly, Presidential Democracy is that single president in the state administration and the political system based on governing the state (Mulgan, 1968). Legislative, executive and judicial principles are based on a solid division management. In the Presidential Democracies, legislative and executive bodies do not intertwine (Morlino, 2008). In this system, president is elected by people not parliament. Also, president is not have to member of parliament. Although, President is head of the government and head of the state. On the other hand, in the Parliament Democracy, people chose members of parliament, afterwards, president and his/her government are chosen by parliament (Wessels, 2018). So, president needs assurance of parliament. In this systems, executive and legislative bodies usually intertwine.

1. **Historical development of the European Parliament Elections**

History of the European Parliament started with the European Atomic Energy Community, European Steal and Coal Community and European Economic Community, in this times, there was a General Assembly (Bux, 2018). In 1958 and 1962, there were deepening policies for it and it named as European Parliament. But, until the 1979, members of the EP were not elected by people (Miller & Lunn, 2014). They were elected by national assemblies so there were not democratic Parliament. The EP become more democratic with 1979 elections, because in this elections, members of the Parliament elected by European citizens (Aras, 2017). Today, in the European Parliament, there are 750 member and one president from 28 member states (Wessels, 2018). All those members are representing all European citizens, not notional interests. Because of this reason, we can say that the European Parliament is supranational institution in the European Union. Duties and authorities of European Parliament is shaped by treaties. In the next parts, there are explaining of those treaties, duties and authorities.

1. **Democratic European Parliament**

Previously, as mentioned, the European Parliament members started to elect by directly with 1979 elections (Costa & Brack, 2018). The European Parliament members are elected by all European Citizens, for this reason it is supranational institution of the European Union. So, we can say that after the 1979, the European Parliament provided election feature, which is requirement of democracy. The European Parliament has started to gain crucial powers with 1970s and it has been continuing (Miller & Lunn, 2014). One of the significant power is on the European Union’s annual budget (Miller & Lunn, 2014). New reforms provided veto power on annual budget.

However, legislative powers are important for the parliaments in the democracies. The European Parliament gained those powers with some treaties in time. One of the substantial treaty is The Single European Act. It enhanced the balance between European Parliament and the Council that imposing duty to EP a second reading (Miller & Lunn, 2014). Also, the European Parliament has a power of vote on the accession of new member states. Another importing gaining power is entitled on international agreements (Sprungk, 2013). The Council can make international agreements but, those agreements should receive EP's approval. Especially, legislative power is important for the democratic structure. Normally in the democracies, parliament should have a voice in the process of the making agreements, because members of the parliament are elected by people, so they can guarantee interest of people (Costa & Brack, 2018).

The Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties redress the powers of the European Parliament. With those treaties, EP gained co-decision position and veto power on the legislative proposals (Miller & Lunn, 2014). ‘‘The Maastricht Treaty introduced co-decision and gave the EP an ultimate right to veto a legislative proposal by an absolute majority after two readings of the Council and EP’’ (Miller & Lunn, 2014, p. 28). Co-decision process changed as Ordinary Legislative Procedure, with the treaty of Lisbon and EP’s authority increased on the other areas (Miller & Lunn, 2014). So with treaties, EP’s powers especially legislative powers got better as a democratic parliament. We must not forget that the European Parliament is comprise of 28 member states, and in the European Union it is supranational institution. Also, it is unique example in the history, so it is not easy that bring to perfection.

If we assume the European Union as a state, the Commission is the government. In the democracies, parliaments have a role that check and control government actions (Mulgan, 1968). Although, usually parliaments can dismiss governments with vote of confidence. The European Parliament has this power, which is vote of confidence (Miller & Lunn, 2014). If EP can ensure two-thirds majority, it can dismiss all commission with president of commission (Wessels, 2018). It is very important democratic power. Another power is that, European Parliament elects president of the commission. It is also significant dimension for the democratic structure.

1. **Non-Democratic European Parliament**

The European Parliament provides many requirements of democracy, but, there is also some non-democratic situations. The concept of separation of powers is important for the democratic structure. We can analyse that legislative functions of European Union disperses on the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament (Shackleton, 2017). In the normal standards, legislative power only should be under the EP. So this structure of the European Union shows us the European Parliament shares its legislative powers with other institutions and it is not proper for the democracy (Holzhacker, 2007). The European Parliament has a power of dismiss against the Commission, but when we look general structure, the EP has not certain and binder control mechanisms on the Commission and the Council (Wessels, 2018). This can be identity as a Democratic Deficit of European Union (Açıkmeşe, 2003).

On the other hand, there is an important problem for the European Parliament, which is the second-order election situation. People can use the EP elections as a warming their national governments (Wessels, 2018). This situation damage legitimacy and importance of the European Parliament elections. Also, another crucial problem is participation of elections. When we look 2004-EP elections, participation was %42,61 and it is very low participate, when we compare it with national elections of member states of European Union (Aras, 2017). Elections of the EP provides legitimacy but, there is many democratic problems. Another problem is equality of votes that election system supports some member states, which has low population. According to Wessels, ‘‘the representation of citizens is ‘degressively proportional’ and favours smaller Member States. Smaller Member States have relatively more parliamentarians compared to the overall share of their population. As a result, Germany has 96 seats meaning that one seat in the EP represents around 800.000 German citizens, while one member from Malta represents around 80.000 Maltese’’ (Wessels, 2018, p. 55). This election system is not proper for the democratic structure.

As previously mentioned, the president of the Commission is elected by the European Parliament. The problem is that candidate name is nominate by the European Council. So, the European Council can elects only, the European Council wants. In the democratic structure, it is terrible feature of the European Union. All those problems, undermine democratic value of the European Parliament.

**Conclusion**

The European Parliament, which is institution of the European Union, is representing all European Citizens, nearly 450 million people (Miller & Lunn, 2014). The members of European Parliament are elected by the European Citizens directly (Wessels, 2018), so we can say that it is the supranational institution in the European Union. The features of democracy has been developing since the Greek city states (Mulgan, 1968). The development is shaped by political changes such as monarchies, republics, nation states. When we compare the European Parliament with requirements of democracy, we should consider that the European Parliament is the first and unique case in the history of democracy as an empirical institution.

When we look requirements of democracy, the European Parliament proper some of them, but not totally. The significant problem is elections system. There is a free and fair elections, but there is not equality of votes (one person-one vote (Wessels, 2018)). Also, other problem is European citizens do not care the EP elections as a second-order elections (Wessels, 2018) and participation. On the other hand, the most important democratic parliament feature is legislative power. The European Parliament shares this power with the Commission and the Council of Europe so it is not democratic (Miller & Lunn, 2014). Lastly, the EP has not binder power on Commission and the Council of Europe.

The European Parliament fulfils some features of Democracy, it has power on the legislative process. Also, the European Commission President is elected by the EP (Costa & Brack, 2018). They are important functions to legitimacy of democracy for the European Parliament. One of the important legitimacy dimension is that with 1979 elections, the European Parliament members are elected by the all European citizens (Wessels, 2018). This election system provides democratic legitimacy, also it provides a feature of supranational institution in the European Union. Before, in the many areas, the EP was only consultant in the decision making process, but after the treaties, which mentioned before chapters, the European Parliament gained important powers and for this reason democratic deficit of the European Union is reducing.

Consequently, the European Parliament has democratic and non-democratic features, but non-democratic tendencies are preponderate. This type of parliament is not represents modern democracy majorly. As previously mentioned, the European Parliament is the unique case, so it needs progress and developments. However, this paper suggest that the European Parliament has non-democratic tendencies and those tendencies preponderate then democratic tendencies.

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