



**SPECIAL ISSUE: The European Parliament Elections and the Stakes Involved**

**VOLUME 16 ISSUE 3** May 2019  
BIMONTHLY ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER  
ISSN (online): 2421-8111

Thematic Editor: Dr Christina Hajisoteriou

**Christina HAJISOTERIOU**

**Nicholas KARIDES**

**Soteris KATTOS**

**Georgios CHATZIGEORGIOU**

**Charis POLYCARPOU**

**Christina HAJISOTERIOU**

**Andreas KIRLAPPOS**

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

**VOTING CAPACITY**

**HAS THE EUROPEAN EDIFICE REACHED A FORK IN THE ROAD?**

**"THIS TIME I'M VOTING" - WHY?**

**EUROPEAN UNION AT CROSSROADS; A TIME FOR CHANGE**

**SEARCHING FOR 'EUROPA': BUILDING CRITICAL-VOTING EDUCATION FOR A EUROPE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY**

**COHESION POLICY AND SOLIDARITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**



**CYPRUS CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**  
**University of Nicosia**

**1993-2019** TWENTY SIX YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

---

## EDITOR'S NOTE



*Christina Hajisoteriou*  
*Assistant Professor in Intercultural Education, University of Nicosia*

In the post-modern era, the predominant role of the state in policy-making has been constrained by a wide range of new socio-cultural, political and economic phenomena related to Europeanisation such as intensified migration, modernisation and technological revolution, which are but a few of the contributory factors that are often cited. Europeanisation is rather a Janus-like phenomenon in the sense that it has two 'heads' like the mythical giant Janus; beyond the rise of non-European xenophobia, refuge crisis, economic crisis and far-right propaganda, Europeanisation bears also the potential of sustainable economic development and has humanistic and democratic elements as it may play a substantial role in the re-orientation of minority and immigrant rights in this new 'heated' era.

As a result of European integration, the creation of an internal single market has embodied free market principles and democratic procedures, promising the establishment of social liberalism. However, European integration, both in terms of a single European market and a shared European identity, seems to have reached a dead-end pointing inter alia to the threat of Brexit, the economic austerity of the south axis of Europe, and the negative confrontation of the non-European world. It was only recently at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas in Sydney that Stephen Fry, an English writer, actor and comedian, declared social democracy and classical liberalism as dead. Fry's solution to this new era of politics is for all of us to be kind to one another. In his plea for kindness across humanity, he argued that 'it is not dangerous ideas; it is dangerous realities that threaten us'. Arguably, the forthcoming European Parliament is 'blessed with the burden' to respond to these 'dangerous realities' that threaten the future of Europe.

To begin with, the official removal of the internal borders of the EU has resulted in the hardening of the external borders and suggests the creation of another state apparatus often referred to as 'Fortress Europe'. 'Fortress Europe' describes both the external exclusion of the Islamic world due to the emergence of religious fundamentalism, and also the internal ostracism of migrants of non-European origin within Europe. One may argue that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has been thus unavoidable, leading to terrorist

attacks that threaten the safety of people residing Europe. At the same time, far-right violence stemming from heightened Euroscepticism, economic inequality, and disapproval of European elites is seen by European intelligence services as a growing threat that disrupts the European political landscape.

Secondly, populism appears to prevail in politics across Europe by drawing upon the 'divide and rule' strategy aiming to destabilise and disempower the masses, and thus easily control them. In an era of socio-economic crisis threatening European sovereignty, it is discouraging to observe profound politicians, but also young politicians-to-be to insist on an extreme left- far right divide. Europeans should no longer be divided on the axis of political orientation. On the contrary, they must be united on the basis of 'need'; the need to have their rights safeguarded and respected by both European institutions and their nation states; the need to be treated as dignified human beings; the need to be 'free'. Populists, austerity, and other crises are only causing a divide between European people that European politicians are called to bridge.

Last but not least, Europe is faced with the 'paradox of tolerance' broadly defined as the cultural-relevant paradox of a society that wants to present itself as being fully tolerant of all things, but at the same time, is entirely intolerant of intolerance, so as to prevent intolerance of seizing control over the society. Such intolerance of intolerance seems to take the form of a 'civil war' between what is considered to be 'fascist', on the one hand, and 'illiberal liberalism', on the other hand, that asks for official censure of what is perceived as not liberal and non-progressive. Research in the area leaves us wondering to what extent 'illiberal liberalism' differs from 'fascism'? In their fight to silence all 'illiberal' voices and to prevent them from causing harm, illiberal liberals seem to also employ non-progressive and illiberal views that resemble authoritarianism; eye for an eye and hate speech for hate speech. If hate speech is defined as the act of verbally expressing hateful views; then hate speech shall not only be defined by the mere traits of the person or the group of people expressing such views. To this extent, hate speech may be acted by both (so called) 'fascists' and 'illiberal liberals'.

So what might be the solution to such threats? Just before the 2019 Euro-elections, the current special issue of In Depth is entitled 'The forthcoming elections for the European Parliament and the future of the EU'. The issue focuses on portraying the challenges that Europe faces nowadays which need to be addressed by the next European Parliament. The selection of articles included in this special issue also aims to assess perspectives on the future of Europe including prospects for sustainable development, equality and growth.

## VOTING CAPACITY



*Nicholas Karides*  
*Director of Ampersand Public Affairs and the author of*  
*Knowing One's Place, a collection of essays on Journalism,*  
*Diplomacy and Football. @NicholasKarides*

A citizen's relationship with the voting process is contingent on their understanding of their country's history and of the state of its politics. Above all, however, it is founded on the citizen's notion of how they can affect change.

Citizens who vote in national parliamentary elections usually have a good grasp of their legislature's role and work, but what prompts them to actually make the trip to the polling station is that they feel that their vote will make a difference.

Similarly, when it comes to the European Parliament elections later this month, the ninth such process since 1979, the motivation to vote is likely to hinge on one's understanding of the history and current state of the European Union. But mostly it will depend on whether European voters feel that their vote will make any difference.

Will it make a difference in terms of boosting their country's voice in Europe, or in charting the future direction of what is a deeply troubled Europe Union? Indeed will it make a difference in terms of confirming or salvaging any collective faith in the idea of European integration?

The answer is Yes, a little bit, but still enough for it to matter. And it matters because Europe matters. As with so many things about Europe, its underrated success is matched by its understated bit-by-bit progress. It is a progress that voters have come to take for granted, not paying attention. But it does matter in almost every aspect of their lives from the economy to security and from their data protection to their environment's protection.

These elections are emerging as an undeclared silent referendum on how much more or how much less 'Europe' citizens want. If they do turn out to vote in numbers it will mean that the Germans and the Greeks, the Poles and the Portuguese, and at the time of writing the British too, consider that we

must address our amassing problems collectively even if elements of European decision-making remain democratically deficient.

It is true that the European Parliament itself suffers from this deficiency. Though clearly a force for good it does not yet function as a full-fledged parliament. Unlike national parliaments it has limited power in initiating legislation, a role almost exclusively reserved for the European Commission. But it matters that it is there. It is the closest Europeans have in terms of a substantive representation of the will of the people as it continues to carve its space in favour of the citizen.

But for it to begin to matter more citizens must back it by equipping it with representatives that are able to strengthen its scope and role. Had the European Parliament had a greater say over the last decade, the banking excesses and the austerity which triggered Europe's downward spiral may have been easier to tame. The distortions of the European Council's decisions could have been checked and a greater solidarity between member states would have been achieved.

Democratic deficits breed citizen indifference which then results in the citizens' knowledge deficit. Britain had to suffer the post Brexit referendum ordeal to realize the deep awareness deficit that existed across the country about EU affairs. Years of deliberate neglect by successive UK governments about the European Union and its role in actually making the UK stronger made millions of British voters susceptible to outrageous lies. They became convinced that Europe didn't matter, that it wasn't necessary and that it was holding the UK back.

Standard Eurobarometer results from 2007 show that only 17 percent of Britons felt that they were "well informed" about EU matters. Ten years later, in post-referendum 2017, that figure was up to 47 percent.

In 2016 the majority of Leave voters had been misled by sinister, unqualified politicians who got to hijack and distort the debate on Europe. They were also let down by years of deliberate neglect from their elected governments. In contrast the majority of Remain voters knew that the Europe Union was not working but they still thought that it was good for Britain to stay in and to affect any change by participating, not by abandoning. Now, in 2019, Remainers have – within a short timespan - come to learn more about the value of the European Union than some of their most ardent federalists on the continent.

Brexit showed that an absence of awareness of EU affairs allows anti-Europeans to hijack the public debate and impose their dark narrative. These opportunistic, sinister, unqualified politicians are now everywhere, a swelling

wave of nationalism at odds with the values and principles that the European Union.

It is one thing for Democracy to be deficient; it is another thing for it to be asleep. For a few decades a tired and disinterested citizenry has been hypnotised. To address the deficiencies they now have to snap into action.

Voting in the EP elections will be an affirmation of the admittedly unfashionable but still necessary process of deeper European integration against the dark forces of populism and unthinking nationalism. In this, citizens have a much greater capacity to make a difference than they may think.

## HAS THE EUROPEAN EDIFICE REACHED A FORK IN THE ROAD?



*Soteris Kattos, PhD, Political Sociology  
Senior Fellow, CCIEA*

The process of supranational dominance in the EU in contradistinction to the weakening nation-state is taking place in a period where the European Edifice is under intense political pressure. This pressure which is twofold, emanates from a) Brexit and b) the growing disenchantment of increasing segments of European society regarding the reigning authoritarian political culture in the EU with its elitist orientation of socioeconomic outcomes. The Brexit process brings to mind the lyrics of the song 'Hotel California' by the Eagles in 1977. In the last part of the song the lyrics go:

*Last thing I remember, I was running for the door  
I had to find the passage back to the place I was before  
'Relax' said the night man, "We are programmed to receive".  
You can check out any time you like, But you can never leave!"*  
(Songwriters: Don Felder / Don Henley / Glenn Frey)

The Treaty Of Lisbon which came into effect on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, 'for the first time provides for a formal procedure to be followed by Member states wishing to withdraw from the European Union in accordance with their constitutional requirements, namely Article 50 TEU.'  
[www.euparl.europa.eu/factsheets/en](http://www.euparl.europa.eu/factsheets/en)[2019].

Yet, what has been observed so far, the politico-bureaucratic core in the EU, utilizing the Anglo-Irish historical cleavage and the so called notion of 'backstop' is trying to make the exit process for the UK hard to digest politically. In essence, the EU intransigence is derived from the Irish historical narrative. In a subtle way, Ireland has been converted into its Trojan horse. To the satisfaction of the current Irish government, through the 'backstop' which the EU is using as a bargaining chip, 'threatens' the constitutional and territorial integrity of the UK. So naively they think.

In fact, this political message is not only targeting British society. The EU factionaries are sending a message across, to all those that might also contemplate to leave the EU authoritarian enslavement, how difficult and

complex it is to exit the 'Club'. 'You can check out any time you like but you can never leave'. It reflects a 'frivolous' depth of their democratic endowment and political mindset: authoritarian and incessantly totalitarian in its blind veneration to the neoliberal economic doctrine.

Indeed, it couldn't have been otherwise. The root cause of this predicament originates from The Maastricht Treaty and its arbitrary criteria, which lack any known and reasonable economic foundation and scientific justification. The treaty just intends to reestablish a balance of politico-economic power on a global scale within the context of a global austerity regime. Although The Treaty of Lisbon professed of being 'more democratic, more transparent and more efficient', and despite the cosmetic political changes in issues of justice, foreign policy and defense, this is far from being the case. The European Parliament still wears 'dentures', unlike the institutional empowerment and consolidation of EMU and its unequivocal and intact transposition into the Lisbon Treaty.

The imperative for European capital to secure its global accumulation and reproduction intensifies social conflict in Europe. Checks and balances have shifted into a new (dis)equilibrium that undeniably favours the forces of capital. This disequilibrium is the outcome of the current ideological dominance of the 'free' market system as the fundamental organizing principle of the global economy. It only takes a quick look on IMF's 2017 Economic Outlook, April 2017 to see the trends over the respective share of labour in developed economies but also to emerging markets and developing economies. Labour according to the report 'is losing out' and 'labour income shares now are almost 4 percentage points lower than they were in 1970'. From close to 55% has dropped nowadays to 51% in the developed economies, where as respectively in the emerging economies has shrunk from 41% to 37%. The report further states that Labour 'have not recovered materially ...since the global financial crisis of 2008'.

The social safety net which European labour has been enjoying since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, no longer operates as a counter-force mechanism to capitalist intentions to redefine relations of hegemony.

The current historical conjuncture of the core states in Europe with its socio-economic and political characteristics is under the political pressure of the new phase of the globalization of capital. This pressure has led to a gradual erosion of the European nation-state's relative autonomy. Even worse, it has become capital's political instrument.

On January 4, 1999, participating member states (19 as of today) have handed over to the European Central Bank (ECB) their national sovereign right to manage monetary policy. The loss of national control over monetary policy to the ECB which lacks political accountability and democratic



legitimacy, by itself constitutes a huge politico – economic setback towards the much needed democratizing process in the EU. This is in stark contrast to the US Federal Reserve, which although it enjoys extensive autonomy on monetary policy, yet it is accountable to Congress.

Participating members in the Euro-zone have lost political control over monetary policy which has been removed from national politics. EMU with its common currency has also removed from participating member states two major instruments that would otherwise enable them to exercise effectively national economic policy. The right of the nation – state to independent monetary policy and its capacity to alter the exchange rate of the national currency, as this might be deemed necessary given prevailing economic conditions, have been lost for good.

Hence the member states, at least those who participate in the Euro-zone have been stripped off of any meaningful participation in order to influence overall economic policy. With the removal of national monetary policy and the capacity to decide on the exchange rate of the national currency, what remains at the disposal of the central government in a member state, theoretically is fiscal policy. But even fiscal policy is constrained by the so-called Stability and Growth Pact. Governments are being disabled politically to use as they see fit national fiscal policy because of the Stability and Growth Pact. This pact imposes on governments the obligation to maintain budget deficits at 3 per cent of GDP or below that limit. The stability and Growth Pact with its anti-inflationary drive “deprives governments ... of the ability to use national fiscal policy to counteract recessions which affect one member state more than the others. They have not lost the ability altogether, but it will be severely curtailed” (*The Economist*, January 2, 1999, p. 15). But the most severe criticism towards the ECB is its political insulation from any institutional control within the EU. This is sanctioned by the Maastricht Treaty. The irrevocable lock of the exchange rates against the Euro without an escape – clause, and the transfer of monetary policy to the ECB with one overriding objective, to attain price stability through a virtual zero inflation, is tantamount to the surrender of national sovereignty to an unaccountable, secretive and undemocratic institution. Surrendering one’s currency automatically means surrendering the right to set independent monetary policy for domestic reasons, such as boosting the economy or improving social conditions. This of course raises serious questions as to the intentions of the so – called Stability and Growth Pact. Its political target as far as the new economic policy is concerned in the Euro-zone area is essentially threefold: (a) The deregulation of the labour market; (b) the imposition of an austerity regime on fiscal policy as this is dictated by the Pact, hence applying pressure for the continuous curtailment of social welfare in Europe; and (c) what I have said above, the exercise of monetary policy is the sole privilege of ECB.

Social welfare in the EU is under a constant political screening of neo-liberal economics. Capital has exacted greater flexibility in labour markets. That is, less security for labour, the trimming down of wage costs and the improvement of productivity. In other words it has commodified European labour. This has led to the emergence of a new social class, the neo-poor. Social convergence is not a criterion for EMU. Therefore the way social policy is exercised is viewed as an additional instrument which leads to improvements of the competitiveness of the national economy. European capital correlates social policy with competitiveness. The limited regulation over the mobility of capital, as well as capital's evaluation of social expenditure as a contributing factor to the increase of production costs, has differentiated the political nature of welfare. The generous social policy in Europe, particularly in the core, and its universalistic orientation has been replaced. This is due to international pressures from competitors whose welfare regimes do not match EU standards and they are not equivalent welfare systems compared to the existing ones in the EU.

Welfare in the EU is measured by the least common social denominator. Capital thus has imposed the curtailment of welfare through the linkage of social policy to income criteria. That is, European capital has redefined the philosophical orientation of social welfare in EU, by converting it into a particularistic welfare regime.

In sum, the institutional protection of European oligarchy by the EU has led into a resurgence of national identity as a safeguard mechanism against the EU's democratic derailment. It comes as no surprise the EU has branded this resurgence populist and far right. Yet given the structural nature of the European Edifice in its entirety, we are confronted with a *sui generis* abolition of competitive politics and the political negation of the necessary debate regarding the democratic selection of the conception of the good. At this EU conjuncture an arbitrary imposition regarding the single conception of the good reigns supreme: Neo-liberal totalitarianism. And it is the source of the political cracks that we currently bear witness in the EU. The EU factionaries *ipso facto* have reached a fork in the road. Any acknowledgement on their part however, threatens their neoliberal vision. What is at stake in the upcoming European elections is the future of western liberal democracy and the peril is from within the Edifice. Western liberal democracy has been crippled by the inherent totalitarianism of the Treaty of Maastricht. And it is this treaty that requires an urgent democratic remedy.

## "THIS TIME I'M VOTING" - WHY?



*Georgios Chatzigeorgiou*  
*Lawyer*  
*Vice-President, Council of Europe Youth AC*  
*Former President and Honorary President of EDS*

Under the slogan "This Time I'm Voting", the European Parliament is currently running one of the biggest political campaigns in the European Union (EU) in order to increase voter turnout which has been extremely low at the last European elections in 2014. In this vein, the purpose of this article is to elaborate on why voting in the European elections matters?

In the last years, we hear that the European project is not having its best times and if we want to be honest with ourselves, indeed, the EU is currently facing an unprecetended crisis. Since 2010, the European debt crisis had an immense impact on the socio-economic development of many European countries and has sparked wave after wave of political uncertainty. In addition, the renewed terrorist threats and the disagreement between Member States over the standards of support and distribution of asylum-seekers have allowed populist parties to attract voters with their nativist and eurosceptic positions. After a crisis, voters are particularly attracted to the political rhetoric of populists, which usually attributes blame to foreigners or minorities. As long as the above topics remain high on the agenda of the governments, the EU will continue to be criticised and the populist parties will prolong their presence in the Party systems.

Without a doubt, European citizens want to see more actions against unemployment, more actions against terrorism, more actions against illegal immigration. They want to see real solutions to the real problems that concern their everyday lives. Despite the fact that Europe has gone through a series of crises in the last years, we should not allow the dark clouds cover how important and beneficial the European integration has been for all of us.

The European integration process has been a success story, we should be proud of our achievements and we should point out more often what good Europe is doing for its people. First of all, the European Union is a guarantor of peace and we must be grateful that we live on a continent of peace thanks to the EU. Nothing should be taken for granted. Nowadays the agenda of the EU is determined largely by Germany and France, two countries which before their co-existence within the Union, they had been in 2 centuries of deadly

wars, with culmination the 2nd World War. The EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for over six decades of contributions towards the advancement of peace and reconciliation in Europe.

Furthermore, the economic integration process has succeeded and Europe is functionally a single market with mainly a single currency that is the 2nd most traded currency in the world, behind only the U.S dollar. The single market based on the 'four freedoms' of people, goods, services and capital moving freely between all Member States, has brought enormous benefits to our lives - over 500 million EU citizens are free to move and settle where they wish in the EU, we became a powerful economic area, we reduced costs and prices for consumers and more that 3 million European jobs were created.

These are just a few of the achievements so far. The EU through thousands of directives and regulations is making our lives better and more prosperous in 35 different policy areas. It is not the purpose of this article to explore all those policy areas; nevertheless, I will briefly elaborate on what the EU is doing for its youth. The field of youth is a national policy area therefore harmonisation of Member States' legislation is excluded. Nonetheless, the EU has established several programmes aiming to give young people more opportunities in education and the job market.

For example, "Erasmus+" is a programme of €14,7 billion which supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe and provides opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train and gain experience abroad. Furthermore, we have the "Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs", a programme which provides the opportunity to aspiring new entrepreneurs to work with successful business owners in other European countries in order to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to start their own business in their home countries. A new initiative of the EU is the "European Solidarity Corps" aiming to provide opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people in their own country or elsewhere in Europe. Finally, the "Youth Guarantee", with funding of €8,8 billion, supports youth employment by ensuring that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality job or continued education within 4 months of completing formal education or becoming unemployed. Although, I consider the Youth Guarantee to be a social policy which cannot effectively tackle the problem of unemployment by creating new jobs, the reports indicate that the programme is starting to bear fruits, therefore we should observe its results and its proper implementation by the Members States.

Last point I want to touch upon is what is the EU doing for us Cypriots? First of all, we belong to an alliance consisting of few of the strongest countries in the world. Specifically, Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom are in the Group of Seven (G7), with the most advanced economies in the world. Furthermore, we receive hundreds of millions in EU-funding, we have the

strong EU currency, we have progressed in many areas including equality, health and safety at work and pension systems, as well as, we have significantly developed our services sector, attracting many international companies and enabling legal and accounting firms to serve European and international companies.

Finally, the two most important benefits that come with Cyprus membership of the EU, is first, that the Cyprus Problem has become a European one, evidenced by the active role of the EU in the negotiations, such as the presence of a delegation of the EU led by Jean-Claude Juncker and Federica Mogherini during the negotiations on the Cyprus problem in Geneva in January 2017. Second, as a member of the European Union, Cyprus has aligned its interests with the Western countries with nothing preventing us from having excellent relations also with the countries of the East.

At the same time, the European Union is currently encountering several issues and the next European Parliament will have to work hard to challenge the challenges. The rise of populism and euroscepticism, threats to the rule of law, the changing international environment, the European perspectives of the Western Balkans and the challenges to further European integration are few or the areas that the Members of the next European Parliament will have to provide effective answers.

Therefore, in the next years we will need ambition and stronger cooperation within all the levels of society in order to help Europe progress beyond slogans. The traditional political parties have to re-engage with the public, increase accountability, introduce reforms better adapted to modern society, boost job creation and growth, provide economic opportunities to the young and properly integrate refugees. We have to draw lessons from our mistakes and look for new approaches to stop populism from gaining ground in Europe.

I provided some short views on why the European elections are not elections of secondary importance. We should therefore carefully choose the ones that we believe can better represent us and fight for our national interests in the European Parliament. I conclude with a message - especially to young people. Young Europeans today have experienced a long-standing period of crisis, without having had a say in the creation of the system that caused it. At the same time, we are the children for whom the European project was made for and now we should be the ones to decide about the future of the European Union. In the 2014 elections, 72 per cent of 16/18 to 24 years old did not vote, while more than 50 per cent of 65+ olds did. Such figures are unacceptable. If young people want politics to change, we must also be willing to participate. This is not merely good, but necessary for the society.

## EUROPEAN UNION AT CROSSROADS; A TIME FOR CHANGE



*Charis Polycarpou*  
*Head of Economic Policy Bureau - AKEL*  
*PhD Candidate, Department of Politics and Governance,*  
*University of Nicosia*

The European Union is at crossroads. Territorial and demographical expansion created a Union that covers the majority of the European area. At the same time for the first time in its history a member State is in progress to withdraw from the Union. Economic development and trade expansion aimed to develop the European Union as a global economic leader. However, a number of Member States face today significant economic problems and challenges. The economic crisis left huge imbalances in national economies and raised social injustice and tension. Free movement of people created expectations and new opportunities but was also combined with migration flows to Europe, as a result of rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and brought European countries against exceptional circumstances. These challenges fueled controversy about the future of the European Union.

Accessing this situation one might argue that there were no indications that the European Union would be so heavily unstable. After all the European Union was built on the premise of stability, peace, safety and above all economic and social cohesion. Voices that raised concerns and doubts about the European project were characterized as unreal and out of context at those times. Recent developments seem to demolish that arrogance.

More and more now, even academics and politicians that are not even positioned to “Eurosceptic” side, are very concerned about the future of European Union. Even societies start to grow disbelief. At the recent Eurobarometer survey of March 2019<sup>1</sup> when EU citizens asked on what feeling first comes to their mind when they think of the EU, the most populous answer was doubt with 33%. In the case of Cyprus results are even bleaker since not only doubt is the most populous answer but also over a half of respondents

---

<sup>1</sup> European Parliament. Flash Eurobarometer: Emotions and Political Engagement towards the EU. April 2019.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/emotions-and-political-engagement-towards-the-eu/national-factsheets/cy-en-flash-2019.pdf>

have negative feelings about the EU. Euphoria has steadily been replaced with fear and concern.

If we want to search for the roots of this behavior a primary area is policy making. Recent years initiate a new era for the European project where benefits for member states are offset from increasing threats. Current economic and social policies at European level fail to respond to the needs of the population of the European Union as unemployment and poverty levels are at historic high. Take for instance the newly formed banking Union. With the banking union, the EU has gained control over systemic banking institutions, arguing that it will improve the forecasting, monitoring and prevention of future crises. But these changes may hinder growth of the real economies as new rules comes with new conditions.

A sample case is the Cooperative Cyprus Bank. A bank that was created as the evolution of the cooperative sector in Cyprus, with the promise of continuing a century history of the cooperative sector in Cyprus. In the end, among other problems and faults, the huge compliance burden for the bank as the result of the new framework of the banking union, led to its resolution. After all the banking union is not about supporting the local economies. It is crafted to demand increased profitability for the banks, more rules and higher capital ratios. Thus less banks will be able to carry the additional burden leading to concentrations and mergers therefore less diversification of the banking sector, higher costs for consumers and even less negotiating power for consumers and borrowers when it comes to bargaining with the banks.

But is not only about policy direction, it's also about decision making process, Current policy making process incorporates crucial democratic deficits that fail to inspire trust over European societies. Take for instance decisions about the different Memoranda that combined financial assistance of Member States that were hit by the crisis. The European Parliament was left aside of any discussion regarding the terms and conditions. As if the European Parliament is not the representing body of the European citizens. As a result people's perception about the European Union affects their willingness to participate in elections and social dialogue. The fact that citizens do not believe that their voice really counts in the EU and the fact that are not satisfied with democracy in the EU are even reflected in recent opinion polls.

That's why the European Union face a big dilemma. It may decide to continue act as if nothing has to change, especially when it comes to influence decisions affecting European societies. It may continue to act as "business as usual" as bureaucrats often like to whisper in Brussels corridors. It may decide to ignore people's demand for greater participation and accountability. But if that's the decision, the Union should not expect to solve the structural problems that such decisions and behaviors initiate.

If the target is to advance democracy in the European Union, in order to make the European future potentially better, now it's the time to face the above and change policy orientation. Voting in the forthcoming elections is a crucial milestone.



## SEARCHING FOR 'EUROPA': BUILDING CRITICAL-VOTING EDUCATION FOR A EUROPE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY



*Dr. Christina Hajisoteriou,  
Assistant Professor in Intercultural Education, School of  
Education, University of Nicosia*

As the legend has it, Europa, the godmother of Europe, was abducted by Zeus who was captivated by her beauty and developed a strong desire to possess her. Zeus turned into a mesmerising snow-white bull with gem-like horns to approach her, and later seduce her to climb on his back. As soon as Europa did so, Zeus ran to the sea and carried her away from her home-country Phoenicia to the island of Crete. In the light of the forthcoming Euro-elections, I find myself wondering: is this fable a foreshadowing of Europe's future? From the ashes of Second World War, Europe seemed to re-birth more 'beautiful' than ever by drawing its 'charm' from peace, liberal democracy and European solidarity, sustaining its 'enchanted' by protecting labour through social welfare, and building its 'attractiveness' on the basis of cultural diversity and interculturalism. However, the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent international monetary controls and austerity measures, along with the 2015 refugee crisis and islamist terrorism have set Europe's 'beauty' at stake, allowing right-wing extremist to sophisticatedly 'seduce' European people. Under the masquerade of confronting people's grievances that have been exacerbated by economic inequality and broader dissatisfaction with neoliberal institutions, far-right populist politics – often reinforced by both traditional and social media - seem to take the form of a 'mesmerising bull' carrying Europe down the lane of heightened Euroscepticism, European disintegration under the threat of Brexit, neo-xenophobia, violence and extremism. The far-right jump in numbers is indeed evidenced across Europe; to cite only but a few examples of the ground-breaking electoral gains of far-right parties, I will just refer to Italy and Lega Nord's success in taking control of the immigration policy agenda of the Ministry of Interior, Spain and Vox's achievement in Andalucia, and lastly to Germany and the Alternative for Germany becoming the largest opposition party since 2017, while already gaining seven seats at the 2014 European elections.

What I argue is that during the last decade the European context is rather portrayed by a set of challenges, Europe and its people are called to take advantage of the 2019 Euro-elections and move forward to a new paradigm

of governance. For such reasons, over the last years, the European Union has paid increased attention to an alternative and progressive vision of combating inequalities that stems from sustainable development. In 2015, all EU member states and other countries in the United Nations have adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This policy agenda has inspired the Independent Commission of Sustainable Equality to call action for a radically different Europe in their 2018 (first) Report for Sustainable Equality (2019-2024). According to this Report, a new Sustainable Development Pact will allow well-being for everyone to grow in a sustainable Europe. The Report also urges for the development and implementation of radical policy action to face several crises that are mutually reinforcing, namely: economic, social, environmental and political. Last but not least, the report cautions that the failure of Europe to combat the aforementioned crises 'will lead to democratic collapse, either because authoritarian populist and extremist forces will gain decisive power across Europe, or because these economic, social or environmental crises will have reached a destabilising stage for society.

In order to enable change by building policies that will allow Europe to face all these crises, Europe needs to endorse a different approach to European governance that draws upon sustainable equality and development. What I suggest is that in order to bring about the desired change in European governance, it is necessary to breed and empower critical voting both at the level of national EU member states and at the European level. This need becomes even more imperative if we take into consideration that populists on the back of disinformation try to impose their detrimental agendas across Europe through the media and news. In this context, I claim that media and news literacy may play a pivotal role in empowering people, and especially the younger ones, to become critical voters who are 'armored' against populism, while raising their interest in participating in national and European elections. We should not forget that during the 2014 European elections the biggest level of abstention was among young people, despite of most of them view being part of the Union as positive (more than 70% according to the last Eurobarometer survey). At the same time the Eurobarometer surveys indicate that the interest shown by 15 to 24-year-olds in the European elections remains significantly lower than that of their elders.

First and foremost, what previous research has shown is that fake news, disinformation, and mainstreaming of populism through both the traditional media and social media entail threats to democracy. They lead to non-educative knowledge that either influence voting in wrong ways, rise apathy or produce lack of trust to European values, institutions and structures. Secondly, media literacy may help people identify feelings in self and others with regards to socio-political problems, while also helping them to develop both problem-solving skills and conflict-resolution skills. Media and news literacy is thus important to critical young voters in order to identify and vote the political candidates who are the most able to launch policies and provide

best solutions to meet the socio-political, economic and even ecological challenges faced by the EU. Last but not least, examining the issue of social justice through media and news literacy is an essential stepping stone to build a Europe of democracy and sustainable equality and development. Social justice is usually associated to the ethos of democracy, in terms of transparency, good governance and accountability. Social-justice aims to empower all people and help them develop skills to engage with and adapt to changing medias, contexts, and social-justice problems, which are fundamentally important in exercising democratic citizenship.

In conclusion, the huge increase of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, terrorism, the mass influx of refugees, and ecological destruction are only few of the contributory factors heading Europe to a general crisis. Back to the myth, Europa's father Agenor sends out her four brothers to search the whole world until they find and rescue her. Moving to the present, it is our duty to search out and safeguard a democratic Europe. Both the EU and member-state institutions ought to fund and disseminate research and best practices, and to advice for policies and interventions that will reinforce the development and implementation of successful initiatives in critical-voting education. Drawing upon the 2018 Sustainable Equality Report, the goal of political research and education should be to empower people, and young adolescents in particular, through media literacy to become critical voters so as to act as agents of change for building a Europe of sustainable development and equality. It is by the means of developing critical-voting education, that we may counteract the detrimental consequences of populism to the values that define us as Europeans, and mainly sustainable equality, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, tolerance, pluralism and non-discrimination.

## COHESION POLICY AND SOLIDARITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL



*Andreas Kirlappos*  
*Part-time Faculty, Department of Politics and Governance*  
*and Research Associate of the Cyprus Center for European*  
*and International Affairs*

While the Treaty of Rome underlined the need to cope with regional inequalities, no significant steps took place to establish a European level regional policy in the early phase of European integration. Yet, as the two parallel processes of widening and deepening increased the pace and scope of European integration, they also enhanced inequalities among the continuously increasing EU member-states. In the following years, the goal to reduce economic and social disparities was incorporated into a wider fully-fledged EU level policy named Cohesion Policy. This would have specific principles, objectives, and means, aiming at reducing the differences in wealth between member-states and among regions within member-states. The guiding principle has been to identify countries and regions whose GDP lags behind the EU average and to utilize funds for projects to encourage economic, social and territorial cohesion.<sup>1</sup> With time, Cohesion Policy would become the EU's most significant policy, reaching one-third of the latter's overall budget. The table below illustrates the evolution of Cohesion Policy's budget over the years.

### The Evolution of the Cohesion Policy Budget 1988-2020

| <b>Programmatic Period</b> | <b>Total Budget ECU/€</b> |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1988 - 1992                | 64 billion ECU            |
| 1994 - 1999                | 168 billion ECU           |
| 2000 - 2006                | €213 billion              |
| 2007 - 2013                | €347 billion              |
| 2014 - 2020                | €351 billion              |

*Source: European Commission 2019*

<sup>1</sup> European Commission Flash Eurobarometer 423: Citizens' Awareness and Perceptions of EU Regional Policy. (Brussels/Luxembourg: 2015) Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/eurobarometer/423/citizen\\_awareness\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/eurobarometer/423/citizen_awareness_report_en.pdf)

Since 2000, local government has been participating in Urban Development projects. This has been an important development, making the EU more visible at the local government level, which is the closest political and democratic institution to citizens.

Empirical research on the relationship between citizens' support for the EU and Cohesion Policy has produced increased evidence during the last years. The significant growth in Cohesion Policy's budget was associated with an increase in citizens' support for the EU since the late 1990s<sup>2</sup>, particularly among direct beneficiaries of EU funds.<sup>3</sup>

More recent studies have indicated that the effects of Cohesion Policy may have a positive impact on European identity. In particular, the funding deriving from Cohesion Policy may act as a determinant of European identity by establishing solid associations between the citizens and the EU.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the perceived economic benefits that improve citizen's daily living conditions, along with regional and urban development incentives, may contribute to an improved conception of European identity.

During the last ten years, a number of critical developments have been creating both problems as well as challenges for the EU. In particular, the global financial crisis of 2008 in combination with the Eurozone crisis have consequently increased national debt, unemployment and poverty rates, as well as social inclusion. More recently, the rise of nationalism and populism, along with the deadlock of Brexit negotiations have been generating additional sources of a long-lasting and general crisis. All these developments have been worsening the relationship between the EU and its citizens, deteriorating the former's already problematic legitimacy.

Preserving Cohesion Policy as the most important policy of the EU in terms of budget allocations seems to be a significant task in order to safeguard solidarity in the EU. It remains to be seen if this is secured in the upcoming budget negotiations, although a shift to increasing the overall efficiency of the allocated funding should be expected as well.

---

<sup>2</sup> A.P Brinegar, S.K. Jolly, and H. Kitschelt. "Varieties of Capitalism and Political Divides Over European Integration." In *European Integration and Political Conflict*, eds. G. Marks and M. R. Steenbergen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 62–89, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> S. Osterloh, *Can Regional Transfers Buy Public Support? Evidence from EU Structural Policy*. ZEW Discussion Papers. (2011). Available at: <http://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/44462>

<sup>4</sup> G. Borz, H. Brandenburg and C. Mendez. *The Impact of EU Cohesion Policy on European identity: Results from the COHESIFY citizen survey*. European Policies Research Centre, School of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde (2018). Available at: [http://www.cohesify.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cohesify-survey-report\\_-final1.pdf](http://www.cohesify.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cohesify-survey-report_-final1.pdf)

The recent adoption of the future Regional and Cohesion funding rules (2021-2027) by the European Parliament<sup>5</sup> does not necessarily increase confidence. While there has been an increase of the percentage that will be allocated to Sustainable Urban Development (from 5% to 10%), this is still far from being an adequate allocation to have a meaningful impact on the daily living conditions of the citizens.

Therefore, Cohesion Policy should focus more on Urban Development projects as a means of further improving EU's face to the ground. In this way, further participation of local government will be granted in the multi-level governance structures of Cohesion Policy and thus to increased European funding. Since local government is the closest political and democratic institution to citizens, its participation to European funding should be further secured highlighting the effects of European solidarity at the local level. Despite recent progress, this cannot be realized if the current budgetary limitations, that characterize Urban Development programs, continue to exist.

---

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament, Press Release: MEPs Agree on Future Regional and Cohesion Funding. (March 27, 2019). Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32117/meps-agree-on-future-regional-and-cohesion-funding>

Editorial Team:     Andreas Theophanous (Editor)  
                          Michalis Kontos  
                          Christina Hajisoteriou  
                          Andreas Kirlappos  
                          Christoforos Christoforou  
                          Styliana Petrou



**IN DEPTH**  
**Bimonthly Electronic Newsletter**

**Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs (CCEIA)**  
**University of Nicosia**

Makedonitissis 46, CY-2417, Engomi, Cyprus

P.O. Box 2405, CY-1700 Nicosia, Cyprus

T: +357 22841600 F: +357 22357964

E: [cceia@unic.ac.cy](mailto:cceia@unic.ac.cy)

W: <http://cceia.unic.ac.cy> [www.emgr.unic.ac.cy](http://www.emgr.unic.ac.cy)

ISSN (online) 2421-8111



9 772421 811107

---