

Contemporary Features and Challenges of Democratic Governance of the European Union

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

*European Union,
democracy,
European Parliament,
European Commission,
European Council,
elections*


ABSTRACT

This article describes the structure of the economic and political system of the European Union through the prism of democracy. It analyses the notion of democratic governance of the European Union, grounded on its key institutions - the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. The author highlights the complexity of the EU as a supranational organisation where legislative, executive and judicial powers are intertwined. Consequences of the 2024 European Parliament elections and the growing influence of far-right parties, leading to increased political polarisation, are highlighted. While reviewing methods and theories, the paper examines reforms such as the direct election of the President of the European Commission, the strengthening of the Parliament and digitalisation that could strengthen the EU's democracy and effectiveness. The paper in its approach provides a robust foundation for further research and a deeper exploration of EU democracy.

1. Introduction

The EU is a complex system with several institutions involved in decision-making. Understanding how this system works and how this affects democracy is quite difficult. The European Union brings together 27 sovereign states and the question is whether it is possible to achieve full democracy in such an environment. The question of the democratic nature of the European Union's leadership is a growing issue and one that is reflecting increased interest, particularly in the light of Euroscepticism and divergent opinions on the direction of EU foreign policy.

In this assignment, we seek answers to questions such as: how is EU democracy and the presentational system actually organised? Which elements of the governance system are more or less democratic? What role do EU citizens play in this process? The main research question is: In what ways could EU governance be made even more democratic?

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Cite this article as:

Konc, A. (2025). Contemporary Features and Challenges of Democratic Governance of the European Union. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 8(1): 131-143. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v8i1.1439>

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2. Methods

We think it was appropriate to use both methodological approaches here in the future. Quantitative when we want to assess different aspects of the democratic governance of the EU using quantitative indicators such as voter turnout, citizen satisfaction rates, referendums through surveys; Qualitative when we want to understand the complex aspects of democracy, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the EU, and interviews could explain why and how European governance takes place. We have approached the task ourselves by analysing relevant documents and secondary sources, as there is not enough time for the latter or it is logistically very difficult to do.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Decision-Making Bodies in the EU

The European Union, or EU for short, is an **intergovernmental and supranational organisation of 27 European countries**, whose aims are economic and political integration. The current EU is the result of several treaties signed following the outbreak of WWII. The first phase was to foster economic collaboration, based on the notion that countries trade with each other will become economically reliant and so less prone to have disputes. In 1958, the foundations were laid for the first modern European organisation, the European Economic Community, which was initially an economic alliance of 6 countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, 2022). The Economic Union, which created a comprehensive single (internal) market, has been followed by integration in a variety of policy fields, including the green transition, health, foreign affairs, defence, justice, and globalisation. For more than half a century, the EU has enjoyed peace, stability and prosperity, and living standards have risen considerably. It is founded on the Community's legal system, specifically the founding Treaties, which have been revised and modified, and on general legal principles and the decision-making and competences conferred on the institutions of the European Union. Each of these institutions is assigned a distinct duty in advancing the interest and objectives of the European Union. According to the EU Treaty (Art. 9, 2007), these are the institutions of the Union "European Parliament, European Council, Council of the European Union/Council of Ministers, European Commission, Court of Justice of the European Union, European Central Bank, Court of Auditors".

Unlike other bodies of the Union, its institutions have the right to adopt legally binding decisions in all corners of the Union's functioning and the members of the Union's institutions ought to be elected. Other bodies of the Union operate in specific, strictly defined policy areas, have mainly advisory functions and, if they have decision-making capacity, the nature of their decisions is not general but individual (Đerđa, 2007).

The specificity of the European Union is also reflected in its institutional structure. The traditional **three-way** division of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary is hardly implicit in the supra-governmental institutions of the European Union. Moreover, the various levels of decision-making are interconnected through the institutions of the European Union, which work very closely together at certain stages of the decision-making process. It can be concluded that the institutional framework of the European Union is characterised by its complexity. The complexity of the process makes decision-making procedures time-consuming and characterised by complexity (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024), which has increased since the changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon. It is clearly difficult to imagine a structure that could manage such a large community of 500 million people at a speed

comparable to that of individual nation states. We can see how important it is to take this first decision more quickly. The sole directly elected entity in the European Union is the European Parliament, which, in 2009 with the Treaty of Lisbon, gained significant position among the EU institutions. However, one of the problems that must be pointed out is the low voter turnout, which reduces its legitimacy.

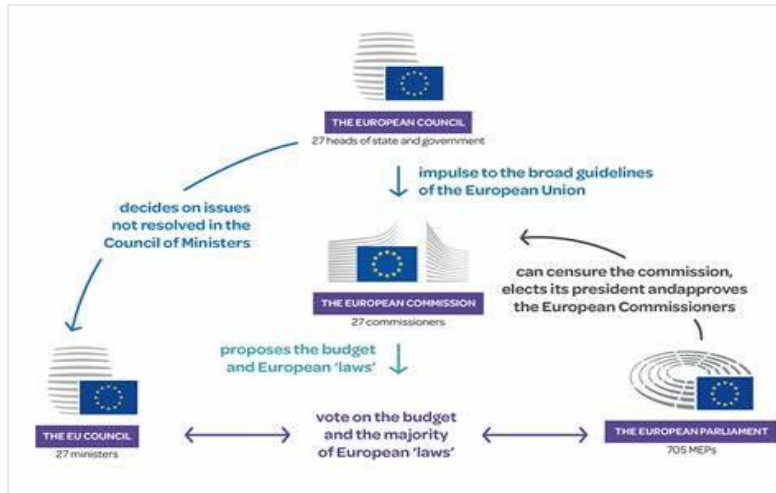


Figure 1. The European Union's decision-making scheme (Europe Direct, 2024)

The European Commission serves as the primary body overseeing the EU's daily operations. It holds the exclusive authority to propose new laws, frequently acting upon request from the European Parliament or the Council, which then vote on it. Most of the Commission's staff work in Brussels or Luxembourg, but the Commission has representations in all EU capitals (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, 2022). The Commission is formed of a group of 27 Commissioners, one per each EU Member State, including the President and Vice-Presidents. The sitting President of the European Commission is Ursula von der Leyen of Germany. Commissioners do not represent their countries. Instead, they have areas of responsibility. When the President or President of the Commission has been appointed, the Council of the European Union, in agreement with the President or President-designate, selects and assigns the remaining members of the Commission. The Members and Commissioners collectively as one entity must be approved by a voting of the Parliament. The Commissioners represent the political leadership of the Commission during their five-year term of office. The President assigns responsibility for specific policy areas to each Commissioner. The Commission's staff is comparable to the civil service in the Member States and "is organised into departments called Directorates-General and services similar to ministries at national level" (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, 2022). All Commissioners hold equal standing in the decision-making process and share collective responsibility for the outcomes. They do not possess the power to take individual decisions unless they are empowered to do so in specific cases. Eight Vice-Presidents, which include three Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, carry out these duties alongside their regular roles as Commissioners (Brooks, 2023). Acting on the President's behalf, the Vice-Presidents collaborate with certain Commissioners to manage responsibilities within their designated areas. While decisions are typically made by consensus, voting may occur when necessary. In such instances, a simple majority determines the outcome, with each Commissioner holding one vote. The European Commission is a politically independent body, accountable to Parliament, which can dismiss the Commission by adopting a decision to wind it up. It is the body that attends all sessions of the European Parliament, where it has the opportunity to explain and justify its own policies. It is obliged to

give regular answers to written and oral questions in Parliament from MEPs (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, p. 60, 2022).

The European Parliament is chosen through direct elections by EU citizens every five years, with seats distributed based on the population of every EU Member State - each country, regardless of size, is entitled to a minimum of six representatives. The Parliament is where the will of the citizens should be expressed through their elected representatives. Till 2024, 705 MEPs sat in Parliament, but after the 2024 elections, 720 will continue to work there. Parliamentary parties are organised by political orientation, not by nationality. Parliament sits in Brussels and Strasbourg. The sitting President of the European Parliament is Roberta Metsola from Malta. MEPs are organised into political groups, as well as committees, which review proposals for new laws across various policy areas. As far as governing is concerned, The Parliament is tasked with the listed responsibilities (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, p. 58, 2022): approving, amending or rejecting EU laws jointly with the Council on the basis of subject matter from the Commission. The Parliament, alongside the Council, shares responsibility for approving the EU budget (as proposed by the Commission), making decisions on international agreements and EU enlargement, electing the Commission President based on a proposal from Member States, approving the Commission as a whole, and evaluating the Commission's work programme and asking to propose legislation. The European Parliament has the right to approve the European budget, to review and approve the budgetary framework, and to ensure that EU funds are properly targeted on the European Union's priorities, in consultation with the Council. The European Parliament's limited role is a consequence of the legal foundations and the type of tools or measures used in EU policymaking system (Fasone, 2022). However, the European Parliament and the Council jointly make laws and policies for the European Union, trying to ensure a balanced consideration of the interests of individuals and Member States in the decision-making process (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, p. 58, 2022).

The Council of the EU is based in Brussels, where it meets at ministerial level and in working groups and committees. They are positioned by the minister or representative of the Member State holding the Presidency. The exclusion is the Foreign Affairs Council, which is usually chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Every six months, a different Member State takes over the Council presidency in a pre-determined order. In order to ensure greater coherence of action, the presiding countries work together in groups of three, called trio presidencies. The Council, in conjunction with the Parliament, functions as the principal decision-making entity of the EU. Commonly known as the Council of the European Union, it is the assembly where government ministers from all Member States convene to discuss, amend, and ratify legislation, in addition to coordinating policy. Ministers have the authority to commit their governments to the activities established during these meetings. The Council has following duties: negotiate and adopt EU laws with the Parliament on the basis of proposals from the Commission, and also "coordinate EU Member states policies, develop EU foreign and security policy on the basis of guidelines from the European Council, conclude agreements between the EU and other countries or international organisations, adopt the EU's annual budget with the Parliament" (Brooks, 2023). The meetings are attended by ministers who discuss the policy under discussion. For example, when new fiscal rules are agreed, finance ministers encounter at the Finance Council. They meet on a few annual occasions to take EU-related decisions, while meetings of government officials to discuss policy details are held throughout the year. A qualified majority, defined as 55% of Member States representing at least 65% of the EU's total population, is usually required so that decision is taken. However, some topics, such as foreign policy and taxation, require a

unanimous decision (all EU countries must vote in approval), while procedural and administrative matters require a simple majority. The Council should not be mistaken for the Council of Europe, which is an international organization and not an EU institution. "It was set up to promote democracy and the protection of human rights and the rule of law in Europe" and is made up of 47 European countries (Directorate-General for Communication: European Commission, p. 59, 2022).

3.2. European Union Elections

Members of the European Parliament are elected for a five-year term by universal, direct, free, equal and secret suffrage. The first elections of MEPs to the European Parliament were in 1979. Elections follow principles of the declining proportional representation. Each Member State is free to determine the details of the elections, and from 2024 there will be 720 members. The lowest is six (Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta) and the highest is Germany with 98. To give a better idea: a Maltese MEP represents 96 000 people, while Germans represent 870 000 people from their country, according to the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (2023).

European Parliament elections are governed by both EU law and national electoral laws. The applicable EU laws are Article 14(2) and (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Article 22(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). These articles outline the rights of Union citizens to vote, the total number of seats in the European Parliament, and their allocation among Member States. Council Directive 93/109/EC regulates the specific features of the active and passive voting rights of citizens of the Union living in a Member State, which is not state of their origin. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, you have to register beforehand to vote in European elections.

The Act on the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal enfranchisement contains the rules on the electoral system, the basic principles of electoral law, the minimum thresholds, the number of votes, the legislative period and the dates of the elections, which are binding on all Member States. According to Article 8 of the Direct Elections Law, the details of electoral law relating to the European Parliament remain governed by the national law of each Member State. According to a process subscribed by the EU political parties, but not by the Heads of State and Government, the leading candidate from the political group that receives the highest "share of the vote in the European Parliament elections should be the default choice for the next head of the EU executive" (Crum, 2023). Under European law, all countries must use an electoral system that ensures proportional representation, meaning that the number of elected candidates on each list depends on the share of the electoral vote collected by the list. In Slovenia, MEPs are elected to the European Parliament on a proportional basis. Voters can mark one candidate on the ballot paper, giving them a preference over the other candidates on the list, known as a 'preferential vote'. Candidates who collect more preferential votes have a better chance of being elected (Europe Direct, 2023). Candidates can be nominated by political parties and voters. Each list may consider maximum figure of candidates equivalent to the number of seats in the national parliament (in Slovenian case this is 9). Gender quotas require that each gender is represented on the list by at least 40 %. All certified lists of candidates will be available on the National Electoral Commission's website no later than 15 days ahead of the voting day. The election of Members of the European Parliament from Slovenia is governed by the Law on the Election of Members of the European Parliament from the Republic of Slovenia (ZVPEP).

4. Results

4.1. European Union Elections in 2024

In Slovenia, the European Parliament elections were held on 9 June 2024 (Europe Direct, 2023). Any EU citizen who is a resident of Slovenia and at least 18 years old can vote. Voters elected 9 MEPs in 2024, one more than in 2019, due to the new distribution of European seats after the withdrawal of the UK.

The European Parliament **elections**, conducted between 6 and 9 June 2024, brought important changes to the political composition of the European Parliament. In this context, 2024 is a crucial year for the future of the European Union, as the results of these elections have shaped the political landscape of the Union for years to come. The total number of MEPs in the European Parliament has increased to 720 as a result of the redistribution of seats following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This has revealed important political changes that will influence European law and policy-making in the years to come. The European People's Party (EPP) retained its status being largest political group in the European Parliament, but its seats were reduced. The EPP gained 188 seats, representing 26.11% of the total vote. This means that it has experienced a slight decline in support compared to previous elections, due to the growing influence of far-right and Eurosceptic parties. The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) won 136 seats, representing 18.89%, which means that these two groups are still the dominant political players, albeit with a lower relative strength compared to 2019. However, a significant political shift was caused by the far-right parties, which experienced a surge in the 2024 elections. Although polls had suggested that far-right parties would make significant gains in the June 2024 European Parliament elections. It can be forecasted that this will still somewhat affect political stance on issues such as immigration, climate change and EU enlargement (EIU, 2023). The Patriots for Europe (PfE) group gained 84 seats (11.67%), which means that this political orientation will have a greater influence on decision-making in the European Parliament. At the same time, other political groups such as Renew Europe, with 77 seats, and the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), with 53 seats, also increased their influence. These political shifts point to a dramatic reshaping of the political space in the EU, as parties that have supported pro-European policies in the past are now facing increasing resistance from Eurosceptic and nationalist parties. After the 2024 elections, it has become clear that the European Parliament will be more divided than ever, which will affect the dynamics of decision-making within the EU. With the significant rise of far-right parties, pro-European actors such as the EPP and S&D will have to adapt to new political realities if they want to maintain their influence on key policy decisions. In the current mandate, the European Parliament is likely to become more polarised, which will have a significant impact on key EU policy-making. The increasing influence of far-right parties is likely to have an impact on key issues such as migration, climate change, EU enlargement and changes to the European Green Deal. In short, the EPP and S&D tend to support the European Commission as they are moderate and pro-European, so the position and role of the EPP will be important (von Breithen Thurn, 2023). The effective majority, together with the centrist Renew Europe, is expected to shrink, giving the ECR more influence in decision-making as a new key political actor in Europe. Some other major difficulty facing the EU is its relatively slow productivity growth, especially when compared to the United States, where productivity has been increasing at a faster pace, highlighting a significant gap in economic efficiency and innovation between the two regions.

The first challenge European Union will face after the **2024 elections** is the issue of migration. Far-right parties are known for their opposition to EU migration policies, which is likely to

cause tensions in Parliament. At the same time, the EU will face increased pressure to develop a more coherent external migration policy and policies to manage migration flows from countries in crisis. Another major challenge will be its sluggish productivity growth, particularly when compared to the United States. Despite solidification of green political actors in the European Parliament, the **increased influence of far-right parties** will mean greater opposition to environmental and climate action, making it more difficult to achieve the majorities needed to pass ambitious climate legislation. Opposition to environmental regulation is likely to become a key political battleground in the coming years. In addition, the European Parliament will face difficult debates on EU enlargement. Although some political actors remain in favour of enlargement, the growing influence of far-right parties can be expected to increase opposition to the entry of new Member States, in particular from the Balkans and other crisis areas where increased migration could become a key topic of debate. Another important change following the 2024 elections is the new leadership in key EU institutions. The biggest issues that will arise with these changes are related to the appointment of the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council, being responsible for shaping political direction of the EU, especially on legislative proposals relating to key issues such as climate change and migration. The role of these figures will be crucial in finding the compromises between the different policy orientations that will be needed for the further development of the EU. Decline in voter turnout among young people raises questions about their engagement in European political processes; therefore, digital platforms and social media will play an increasingly significant role in facilitating political participation and disseminating information.

4.2. Kind of New Leadership of European Union

The question of whether the **EU leadership** is democratic could be established by analysing the rules and the current state of European democracy, and that, despite the indirect selection of some leaders, there are mechanisms of representative democracy that sufficiently guarantee the legitimacy and accountability of the EU leadership. The EU operates a complex governance system with several institutions with respective roles. Key leaders include the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Parliament (EU Directorate-General for Communication, 2024).

President of the Commission is "the head of the European Commission, which is the executive branch of the European Union" (EUR-Lex, n.d.). The President determines the structure of the Commission, allocates portfolios to individual Commissioners, establishes the Commission's agenda, and represents the Commission at European Council meetings, G7 and G20 summits, and meetings with non-EU countries. The European Council, acting by a qualified majority of the Parliament, puts forward a candidate for the President of the European Commission, considering the outcome of the European Parliament elections. The President's term of office is five years. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EUR-Lex, n.d.): formulates and manages "the EU's common foreign and security policy, including the Common Security and Defence Policy, chairs the Foreign Affairs Council, heads the European Defence Agency and is one of the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission". The High Representative is selected by the European Council and in cooperation by President of the Commission, for a five-year term. Each of the 27 European Commissioners is nominated by an EU country (EUR-Lex, n.d.). The President of the European Commission will then assign them a specific policy area. The election of all Commissioners, including the President, must receive approval from the European Parliament. After being appointed to office, Commissioners and the President remain accountable to the Parliament, which alone can remove the Commission. The Commission is a unique organisation, more than a civil service

but less than a government. This does not mean that the Commission is not powerful - for example, the EU Competition Commissioner can block mergers and impose huge fines on large corporations (European Court of Auditors, 2020).

Ursula von der Leyen, who became President of the European Commission in 2019, continues to lead the Commission. Despite her presidency being marked by various challenges like the pandemic handling, Brexit and poor productivity, she remains a key player in European law and policy-making. After the 2024 elections, where more right-wing parties have gained significant influence, the Commission will have to continue to coordinate policies relating to climate change, migration and EU enlargement, while facing increased tensions due to the growing influence of Eurosceptic policies. António Costa, former Portuguese Prime Minister, was appointed President of the European Council, where his term of office will run from December 2024 to May 2026, focusing on the EU's foreign and security policies. Roberta Metsola, elected President of the European Parliament, will be overseeing the legislative process and representing Parliament at international level. All three leaders will have the difficult task of meeting the new challenges posed by the EU's political restructuring, balancing their different interests and working to ensure that the European Union is more powerful and influential on the geopolitical stage, and responding to issues such as climate change, migration, security and EU enlargement.

The balance of power represents these vital institutions in the governance system. The President of the European Commission leads the body tasked with proposing and implementing legislation. The European Council consists of the Heads of State or Government from each of the Member States and provides strategic guidance and overall political direction (Nielsen et al., 2020). Directly elected by EU citizens, the European Parliament participates in the adoption of legislation and in monitoring the activities of other EU institutions.

5. Hypothetical Possibilities for Changing Democratic Futures EU

At a critical moment, the European Union is under **pressure to rethink its governance structure** to make it more democratic and operationally efficient. As the EU has faced challenges such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and then climate change, some are calling for reforms to make it more efficient and transparent. Below are some guiding ideas that are useful in uncovering potential reforms that would help strengthen the democratic nature of the EU and streamline its decision-making processes.

"The European Commission has a monopoly on legislative initiatives in the EU" (van Dam, 2016). The Commission proposes laws, which are subsequently decided through the ordinary legislative procedure in the Council of Ministers, yet its composition is not determined by democratic elections. We cannot recall any other democratic system where this occurs, with the exclusive right to propose laws resting solely with a group of unelected officials. This so-called democratic deficit can be, we believe, improved. One proposal is for the European Parliament to elect the Commissioners, ensuring the Commission's accountability to it as a whole. Alternatively, Commissioners could be directly elected by the Member States while perhaps be held accountable by their national Parliaments for their votes in the Commission, as well as by the European Parliament for managing their European portfolios.

Another idea is the direct election of the President of the European Commission directly by EU citizens, which could increase democratic legitimacy (Blokker & Šlosarčík, 2021). Currently, the selection of the Commission President is done indirectly, which arguably creates a legitimacy problem. Such a change in the EU would give citizens a more tangible interest in its leadership, as it would promote ownership and cohesion. Under the ordinary legislative

procedure, the Council of Ministers is required to act in public when formally adopting EU legislation. However, the actual discussions and negotiations for most of these laws occur within the Council's 300 confidential working groups and in the EU's "real secret government" (Bonde, p. 149-150, 2017), the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is made up of the EU ambassadors from the 27 member states and their deputies. It is reckoning that almost 3/4 of all laws are in fact finalised in these working groups within the Council of Ministers (Bonde, p. 149-150, 2017).

Strengthening the powers of the European Parliament could also be a good way to develop European democracy. The Parliament does not have the right to access documents related to this pre-legislative process and relies largely on lobbyists and informal contacts for information regarding proposals for pre-legislation (Bonde, p. 150, 2017). By expanding its legislative powers and control over the budget, it may become a more important representative body, making the European Parliament a powerful centre of power (Ahrens & Agustín, 2021). **A stronger Parliament** could balance the executive branch of government and ensure that all important matters are implemented according to the will of the population. In addition, the right of legislative initiative would underline the role of the Parliament in EU policy-making.

The EU's foreign policy leadership is unique and complex. This complexity lies in a paradox of leadership based on different notions of what constitutes legitimate, while also trenchant EU foreign policy leadership. In one respect, Member States seem to recognize, as highlighted in the Lisbon Treaty, that the devolution of certain leadership roles is crucial for tackling the EU's collective action challenges as a global actor. As the Union has expanded and brought in a broader range of foreign policy priorities and traditions, the need for more coherence and consistency in its external relations and foreign policy has become increasingly urgent. As the EU's recent Global Strategy makes clear, there has also been an increased demand for effective leadership "in response to global power shifts and new emerging threats" (European Union, 2016). Responsibilities should be distributed and intersect across various institutions, with the extent of delegation authority differing depending on the policy field and issue. As an example, the EU has delegated considerable autonomy and agency to the European Commission in the domain of foreign relations, such as trade and global warming policy (da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014), while this role is more limited in some very "self-serving " areas. Second, political legitimacy is anchored at the national level. In particular, foreign policy enjoys a strong connection with the executive function of national government as an arena where "national politicians display decisive leadership skills for domestic consumption" (Hill, p. 69, 2003). EU foreign policy must therefore adjust to the powerful intergovernmental tendencies and social practices that arise from its member states (Aggestam & Johansson, 2017).

Improving the functioning of subsidiarity - a principle that effectively leads to the devolution of powers to the most suitable level, be it local, national or European, can boost the EU's effectiveness (Schout, 2023). By devolving certain competences to Member States where appropriate, decision-making can become more efficient, as sub-national authorities are generally better placed to understand and address problems that arise on the ground.

It is highly unlikely, but interesting nonetheless, that the proliferation of transnational political parties can lead to the development of a genuine European political space. At present, politics confined to EU affairs is almost exclusively drowned in national concerns (Brändle, Galpin & Trenz, 2022). Rising above such divisions could be offered by the creation of pan-European political parties that would provide voters with clear ideological choices and reinforce the notion of being citizens of the European Union.

Referendums, which are a very common political lever in Slovenia, would in fact undermine the European Union's power to bind EU citizens to the decisions it takes on their behalf as their

trustees. Even when there is a strong consensus in favour of additional European integration, each referendum vote reveals a deeper division among citizens than is not seen in the unanimous decisions made by the EU institutions. Moreover, nearly 25 percent of them reject decisions taken in Belgium capital (Rose, 2013). Referendums are often used to recognise proposals related to the European Union. Since 1972, a total of 46 EU-related referendums have been held, excluding referendums by third countries on EU-related matters. While referendums in some countries are constitutionally mandated for the ratification of new treaties, others are held for normative or political reasons. Referendums address issues that are often less familiar to the electorate, and the key issues are usually not related to internal political divisions. This means that it may be further important in shaping the content than in national first-past-the-post elections. For example, an issue that takes centre stage in media coverage can shape how voters assess a candidate or political party (Beach, 2018). However, confusion can derail them, and the irony of a referendum is that although "it typically asks voters to check a simple yes or no, it is actually one of the most complex forms of voting" (Lowe & Sutter, 2016). The policy matters at stake are complex, the phrasing of the ballot question is frequently technical, and throughout the campaign, voters are often overwhelmed with information from political figures and advocacy organizations they are unfamiliar with. Another problem can be lower turnout. This suggests that, despite resembling direct democracy in practice, referendum outcomes often rely less on the actual distribution of public opinion and more on which side can mobilize the most active supporters. If the intention is for people to make decisions, the reality is that minority views can easily overwhelm majority beliefs (Lowe & Sutter, 2016).

Rationalisation of decision-making is, in my view, essential. There are more than 30.000 laws in the EU, but the total number of rules and regulations is far greater due to the addition of international agreements and standards, which have the same legal effect and precedence over national laws as full EU legislation. The democratic deficit is closely tied to a growing lack of information. For instance, between 1998 and 2008, the number of articles about the EU in major Danish newspapers decreased by 18%, while the number of European laws increased by 72% during that time, from 17,574 to 30,255 pieces of legislation (Bonde, p. 155, 2017). Simplifying and speeding up EU decision-making procedures is important to address urgent problems in a timely manner. The main objective would be to reduce bureaucracy, which occurred through certain areas of activity that were indicative of less democratic processes. The possibility of qualified majority voting in some policy areas and unanimous decisions can speed up the process without reducing inclusiveness.

Digital transformation: effective transformation in the EU requires the capitalisation of digital technologies that could ensure better communication, coordination and decision-making (Kraus et al., 2021). Secure digital platforms for consultation, debate and voting need to be put in place to make Member States' interaction with EU institutions more efficient and to ensure that all types of communication take place in real time.

6. Conclusions and Imminent Implications

First, there was the introduction of the main political institutions within the European Union and their distribution of power and competences. We then went on to explain how EU elections are conducted, with a particular focus on this year's elections. We analysed the role of the main political functions and the current political actors, which will be replaced after five years, after the elections. The strengths and weaknesses of the current management of European politics have been shown. In the empirical part, based on secondary sources and synthesis, we answered with my own conclusions the research question posed in the introductory part of this thesis; In what way could the governance of the EU be made more democratic?

In my opinion, the results of the study have revealed the complexity of this topic, in which some aspects of EU governance are democratic, while others are less so. Reforming the EU's governance structure is a difficult task that must be approached with great attention to democratic principles and operational efficiency. This could perhaps be done indirectly, including by introducing direct elections for the President of the Commission, strengthening the role and powers of the European Parliament, encouraging transnational political parties, streamlining the decision-making process, adapting to the challenges of digitalisation that bring new threats, or improving the principle of subsidiarity. The aim of the reforms is to strengthen the EU's leadership in tackling the challenges of the 21st century, while at the same time gaining more decisiveness and making decisions that are in line with the diverse interests and aspirations of European citizens. In the longer term, a stronger and more accountable EU leadership structure can help the Union to continue on its path and give it the fuel it needs to remain viable and sustainable in the face of an ever-changing global environment. Support for the EU is likely to grow if there is increased integration in important sectors that affect the public, such as healthcare, education, migration, job creation, social welfare, and public safety, rather than focusing so much on trivial matters such as the appropriate size of pickles. The involvement of national parliaments in decision-making and a better-informed public is also crucial to ensure that we do not undermine European democracy. The European Union is a model for the world in terms of democracy, but there is room for improvement.

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