

Understanding the “EU democratic deficit” . A two dimension concept on a three level-of-analysis.

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This paper acknowledges the still unsettled debate on the EU democratic deficit by arguing that divergences among the scholars emanate from the methodological and the conceptual difficulties that the concept itself have when applied to the case of EU. Given the lack of a common ground for understanding the EU democratic deficit debate I propose an all-inclusive model ('Democratic Deficit Space') of how to understand the EU democratic deficit arguments in the enormous already existing literature. As a last but not least point this paper will suggest how we need to look at the EU democratic deficit, putting the emphasis on the 'deficit' term rather than on the 'democracy' term.

Introduction

It was David Marquand who originally coined the famous phrase 'democratic deficit' as a term to underline the weakness of the democratic components in then European Community Institutions (Bouwen, 2003, p. 3, footnote 4; Mény, 2002, p. 8). Since then the debate started “to be a more vibrant topic of discussion as it links up with very real concerns about the future of the EU in light of enlargement fatigue and constitutional rejection”(Schmidt, 2007). But despite the importance of the issue and the vast literature written on the EU democratic deficit we still have a perplexed rather than an illuminated understanding on the topic. This is because the democratic deficit literature not only encompasses great disputes about whether there is a democratic deficit or not, it rather has created more ambiguity and confusion on what the concept is really referred to. Such confusion is primarily and foremost a matter of methodological and conceptual difficulties. If the former difficulty is related more to the preferences and viewpoints on EU, the latter problem is more a result of the undefined character of the concept of democracy itself adding here also the impreciseness of the 'deficit magnitude'.¹

¹ “First, the democratic deficit is a powerful catchword, which can be easily manipulated by all those who are not fully satisfied with the working of European institutions” (Mény, 2002, p. 8), “a second problem stems from a false conception of what democracy is” (Mény 2002, p. 9). Mény (2002, p. 9) puts also forward the argument of the “imprecise character of the 'deficit' concept” that can be found in the literature.

Many of the scholars recognizing such shortcomings have return over and again to the debate of EU democratic deficit. Most of them tackle the issues of conceptualization as a second order concern; while even fewer stress the importance of methodologically correctness (Majone 1998 is an exception)². The main concern and importance of this enormous literature seem to be the outcome (the *what* question) rather than the process to arrive at it (the *how* question). Scholars are preoccupied and concentrated more on refining and/or adding more other arguments in support or against a democratic deficit in EU. But as Majone stresses out "regardless of their substantive merits, all proposed solutions are methodologically flawed because they take for granted what is, in fact, contestable and in need of justification" (1998, p. 6). Given the state of art, adding other arguments on whether EU suffers from a democracy deficit or not seems worthless discussing unless the methodological and conceptual issues have been primarily clarified and looked up in details.

Speaking of a democratic deficit we need to understand firstly, what the concept means since only "few clarify what exactly constitutes a 'democratic deficit' in their opinion" (Crombez 2003, p. 103) and secondly but also equally important is to clarify the context in which such concept is applied. That is why in this paper I focus mostly on what 'democratic deficit' does mean *per se* and in the EU context. To be more specific, what scholars refer to when they speak for or against an EU democratic deficit? This paper will have fulfill its aim if it gets to help the reader direct on how one need to read and understand the already existing literature and arguments put forward so far on the EU democratic deficit debate.

Acknowledging that consensus remains obscure at the level of diagnosing if there is or not a 'real' democratic deficit in the EU I will suggest that we better reject this white or black portrait and rather look at the democratic deficit as a term conceptualizing the need for improving the institutions and polity building in EU.

The challenges and how to deal with the issue

Dealing with the democratic deficit question two issues need to be highlighted and explicitly said. The first concerns the concept itself and the later refers to the meaning and characteristics attributed to the European Union. Reading the literature on democratic deficit these two issues seems to be widely open and problematic. From the one hand, there is the conceptual problem of what democratic deficit is itself. On the other hand, there are methodological difficulties, related to the unit of analysis, on how to assess this concept in the case of EU. Unless these two crucial issues are settled and get a wide scholarly consensus we may endlessly debate on the issue losing the point. In order to address these challenges I will unfold the concept of democracy into its

² "The key question which has been raised in [his] paper... is whether it is realistic and methodologically correct to assess the legitimacy [(democratic deficit)] of present institutions and policy-making processes with reference to norms that are largely irrelevant today and may not become relevant in the future" (Majone 1998, p. 27).

compound elements as well as distinguish between different levels-of-analysis EU is approached. For doing so I review and make use of the already existing literature with a final aim at mapping the debate into a three-dimension model, which I will call the '*democratic deficit space*' in the EU context. The '*democratic deficit space*' in the case of EU is nothing but a simplified representation of both the academic and political debate focusing on the two main elements of the concept of democracy (institutional and socio-cultural dimension) and on the three levels-of-analysis EU has been considered (state-like, sui generis or international organization-like). In order to picture the complexity of the issue I will begin by discussing separately each term of the '*democratic deficit*' concept. The first task will be to analytically distinguish the two dimensions of the democratic concept found in the academic literature while the second will be to argue on the term deficit. Then I will move to relate this two terms in a graphical representation, that of a '*democratic deficit space*'. The subsequent step will be to put the concept into the context of European Union since academics have been referred to EU in many different ways.

Two dimensions of democracy and the meaning of deficit

As Føllesdal and Hix (2006, p. 534) have observe "there is no single meaning of the democratic deficit". That is why to decipher the claims and counter-claims of the debate one has to go beyond the label and observe *the content* behind these claims. Mény (2002), in trying to provide an understanding of the democratic deficit concept makes a useful distinction between *demos* and *check-and-balance* element. As he has argued, these two elements are the two fundamental pillars of democracy as "all of the today's democracies are made up of a mix of popular and constitutionalist elements" (Mény, 2002, p. 3). Pointing to these elements of democracy may be a useful starting tool to map the already existing literature into two main categories since the debate on "the EU's democratic deficit has usually centred on the absence of a European demos and [or] the shortcomings of its institutional arrangements" (Bellamy, 2006, p. 725). From the one side there is the *institutional approach* stressing the institutional imbalance of the EU institutions and from the other side it is the *socio-cultural approach* pointing the absent of a European demos. Although it has to be admitted that the arguments on both, demos and check-and-balance element sometimes are mingled and do not always have a clear cut. At this present time I prefer to portray them separately, re-taking them at a later moment where I will build the '*democratic deficit space*' model as a trade off between the two (institutional and socio-cultural) dimensions.

Institutional dimension of democracy

Scholars that have employed in their analysis the *institutional dimension* particularly argue on the (non)weakness of *the structure and/or the functions* of the EU institutions. The structure of EU institutions and the way they function has raised the concern about the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of EU itself.

The argument about the *structure* of the EU institutions refers to the balance of power between the EU Commission, Council and European Parliament. The overall question is if the present balance of the three EU institutions leaves enough room for the 'citizens voice' to be heard since, "democracies are, above all, the expression of popular will and choice" (cited in Mény, 2002, p. 3). Those who support the present EU configuration have been arguing that "all EU institutions are under direct or indirect democratic control" (Moravcsik-ECSA Review 2000). The 'will of the peoples' can and is expressed, indirectly and strongly through the national executives sitting in the Council of Ministers and directly, although much more weakly, through the elected members of the European Parliament (Schmidt, 2004, p. 983). On the whole, the most disputable issue centers on whether European Parliament should take a greater role or not. The present deficit of EU institutional structure refers to the *partial* integration of the European Parliament in legislative decision making since despite the numerous procedures EU uses, the European Parliament only participates in a few of them and is not the decisive legislator in the procedures in which it does participate (cited in König, 2007, p. 422). Some scholars argue that the limited ability of the European Parliament to legislate and to control the executive powers of the Commission and the Council of Ministers leaves EU lack electoral accountability (cited in Bellamy, 2006, p. 725).

Other scholars admit that the problem of the democratic deficit may rest not on the institutional setup of the EU but rather on the *functioning* of its institutions (Crombez, 2003, p. 115). Such arguments focus more on the procedural aspects of the EU institutions which bears a set of problems. Many scholars have noticed that "EU institutions, especially the Council of Ministers, suffer from too much secrecy" (Sbragia cited in Zweifel, 2002, p. 817). The transparency on the decision-making process or an excess of delegation in the legislative process has been a strong critic showing that a democratic deficit of the EU may exist precisely owing to these problems (Crombez, 2003, p. 101). It is the complexity and distance of European decision-making that at minimum weakens the potential for EU-wide democracy.

But to a deeper critic, beyond the weaknesses of the EU procedures rest the argument of the EU legitimacy, both procedural and substantive since there is insufficient trust in EU institutions. This legitimacy is being questioned both on the inputs and the outputs of the Union. Those arguing that EU lacks legitimacy in its output (effectiveness) see this "primarily because of its failure to provide social justice" (cited in Majone- ECSA Review 2000). While those who see EU losing legitimacy in the input rather than in the output speak primarily about the lack of more EU democratic institutions.³

Socio-cultural dimension of democracy

Beside the institutional dimension the concept unfolds another major dimension, that of socio-cultural factors. Employing such an approach the

³ "Traditionally [what EU lacks is] the need to justify the EU through more democratic institutions" (Moravcsik- ECSA Review 2000).

analysis have put the stress mostly on (the lack of) demos, public sphere and few on community-building (see for example Etzioni 2007)⁴. Such literature suggests that "the EU does not function well as a democracy because there is no European public opinion, no European electorate and no European *demos*" (cited in Crombez, 2003, p. 105 and Bellamy, 2006, p. 725). The attributes of the socio-cultural dimension range from the simplest to more complex elements of socio-cultural cohesion

It has been argued, that *demo-cracy* as a term in itself implies the presence of a demos otherwise the term would be meaningless. The no-demos assumption holds that the lack and more the potential impossibility of a demos in Europe - since "*demos* is not a given, but historically constructed" (Zweifel, 2002, p. 819), - is in fact enough to speak of a democratic deficit in EU. In the absence of demos, that is of people who do not belong to a political constituted community, it has been argued that there can be neither a 'democratic sovereignty' (cited in Cohen & Sabel, 2003, p. 703) nor a 'democratic legitimacy' (Offe and Preuss, 2006). Such arguments have been widely criticized as being traditional and populist, pointing so to the new, more liberal components that we need to look at when evaluating if there is a democratic deficit or not (Mény, 2002, p. 11).

On more sophisticated arguments the issue of demos is related to the relations between citizens and EU institutions since "a bigger problem is the lack of a connection between the growing democratic politics inside the European Parliament and EU Council and the views of the public" (Føllesdal and Hix, 2006, p. 553). It has been argued that public have very little influence and involvement on the decision-making process creating so an "insufficient trust in EU institutions" (Zweifel, 2002, p. 818). This mistrust is observed in "the steadily decline of the European parliamentary elections turnouts" (Cohen and Sabel, 2003, p. 697) as well as on the unhappiness expressed by Eurobarometers polls (Offe and Preuss, 2006).

A second reading on the socio-cultural dimension of the 'democratic deficit' refute to talk of demos, it rather prefers to argue by a more ambitious idea of democracy, that of polity-building as the EU political entity. This new vision is based, rather than in homogeneity, in the idea of solidarity grounded in the mutual recognition of otherness (Offe and Preuss, 2006, p. 31). "This presupposes that the EU polity has achieved a considerable degree of maturity as a political system that has come to exercise 'classical' functions of political systems, (such as the production of public policy) with regulatory politics as the central pillar of the EU's political activity" (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 35). But the questions arising here is if we can speak of a polity without a coherent *public space* and a lack of *community building*.

Although there is a widely accepted view that indeed there is a developing European public sphere, this is seen skeptically since it is made of European

⁴ Etzioni (2007) argue that "European Union is suffering not just from a democratic deficit, but a community deficit".

Member State 'publics' rather than some idealized single 'public' (Risse cited in Schmidt, 2004, p. 992). EU beside the formal engagements in EU election does not go further to build a polity. EU has not encouraged, beyond the formalities of elections, the creation of an engaged European public sphere debating the future of a European polity (Cohen and Sabel, 2003, p. 697). In an Europe that is becoming with time ever wider it is more easily to see a heterogeneous public composition across an European space rather than a compact polity. The problem that arises here is that such incompatible (divergent) polity has little ability to engage at EU issues and on the other side EU have little opportunity to speak directly to its polity.

More advanced arguments are put forward arguing on a lack of affinity with EU. It has been noticed that EU citizens lack a "feeling of belonging to a (single) community" (Moravcsik, 2004, p. 361). Føllesdal (nodate) argues that present domestic democratic arrangements (that is, European-wide Political Rights and EU citizenship) are insufficient. He also finds that Europeans share 'thick' values and sense of community, and often carrying several loyalties arguing that such broad more universally shared values does not necessarily build a community. The point of a community deficit - that is, the lack of shared values and bonds - will be stressed by Etzioni (2007) as an important factor that will contribute to a more democratic and stable EU. It is necessary to invest in the civic dimension of community-building, "giving so importance in the 'we-feeling' and the 'community' argument, in order to give individuals a reason to care about EU politics" (Moravcsik, 2004, p. 361). The existence of minimum level of 'we-feeling' seems important since citizens with some sort of distinctive shared values and sentimental bond will give much substance and validity to the EU.

The deficit meaning of democracy

If this first dichotomy explains the content of the concept of democracy it cannot capture the notion of deficiency. As it can be observed from the literature and is also mentioned by others (Crombez, 2003, p. 103) all scholars in a way or another imply the presumed existence of a democratic deficit as part of their arguments but "nobody really dared to discuss the magnitude of this gap" (Mény, 2002, p. 9). The debate has been and still remained normative with "quite divergent interpretations concerning the nature and the quality of the deficit" (Gianfranco, 2001). Although the discourse tries to put emphases more on the deterministic nature of the problem, a yes or a no answer, it still indirectly points on a number of elements characterizing the deficit concept. Zweifel in his article tries to build on these elements and set up a 'measure of democracy' but which he himself recognizes that this "scale do not measure the real issue" (2002, p. 834). At best "its purpose has been a comparison between other polities and the EU" (Zweifel, 2002) not if the EU suffers from a democratic deficit *per se*. That is why there is no given all-encompassing scale to measure this deficit rather than there are normative assessments. But even these standards for a norm deficit's assessment are diverse and yet unsettled. Although Majone (1998) wrote on the issue of standards, Føllesdal and Hix will re-assess them with the aim to bring "a contemporary standard version of the

democratic deficit (2006, p. 533). So what we are left here are only disputable models to which we can at best refer to.

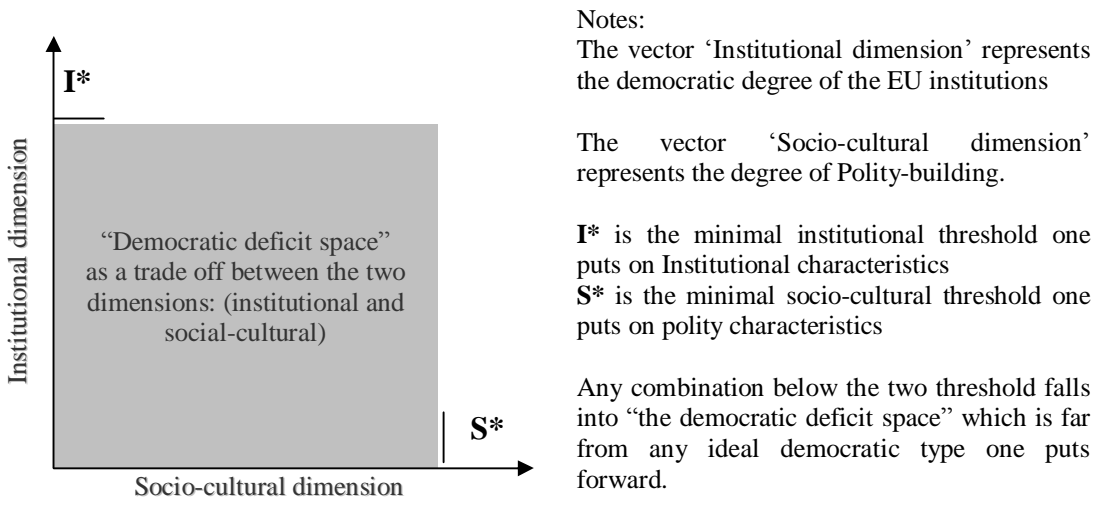
“Democratic deficit space”: a trade off between the institutional and social-cultural dimensions

So how can we at least understand what the literature in EU democratic deficit is all about? Is there a way to map all these argument into a single model? At this point what may be helpful is to graphically represent the normative (qualitative) evaluation of the two previous dimensions where ‘deficit’ is nothing but a “matter of degree”⁵ of the two dimensions.

The magnitude of the deficit (that is the range of characteristics of each of the two dimensions) graphically is represented in the longitude of a vector, where each (horizontal and vertical) vectors embody cumulatively adding each of the elements discussed (institutional and socio-cultural) while the space in between can capture the democratic deficit debate which is nothing but any degree of combinations of the two elements (See figure 1). The assumption here is that “any polity can suffer of a democratic deficit” (Radu, 2006, p. 3) and this democratic deficit can be graphically represented by the area in the ‘democratic deficit space’. Any other point falling out of this bounded space does not suffer from a democratic deficit. An ideal democracy type still makes part of the model of ‘democratic deficit space’ but out of the bounded space created by combining any two critical (minimal) points a dimension may have. In such case the combination of dimensions’ elements depends on ones own evaluations, that is, where one puts the critical points on both of the dimension. An ideal democracy model should be rather a system overcoming both of the minimum institutional and socio-cultural thresholds (in the figure 1, showed as I* and S*). A satisfactory equilibrium between these two points is not yet fixed. Different authors discuss and argue precisely on this point of equilibrium. Some believe that the problem rest on the institutional dimension and some on the polity dimension. While there are also others who see both of these dimension interchangeably. What is even more within a dimension is that there is a wide range of elements being argued to lack in the EU case creating so the space deficit composed of combining elements. This deficit spoken by the scholars regards any or both of the dimensions and it is amplified across the two dimensions regarding different attributes that compose each dimension depending on one’s normative standpoint of what constitute a democracy. The “democratic deficit space” is not a deterministic concept but at least it can map the scholarly argument in a qualitative way (virtually) catching all the arguments. The answer rest on whether there will be a consensus on how much the institutional balance and to what degree polity-building is needed for EU.

⁵ Here we have to acknowledge, as Sartori has pointed out, that “the use of ‘it is a matter of degree’ phraseology and of the ‘continuum’ image leave us with qualitative-impressionistic statements which do not advance us by a hair’s breadth toward quantification” (1970: 1036).

Figure 1: “Democratic deficit space” as a trade off between the institutional and social-cultural dimension



“Democratic deficit space” in the EU context: the three levels of analyses

Adding to the conceptualization problem the term democratic deficit embeds, we have to consider also the methodological difficulty we face when applying such (democratic deficit) concept into a particular context (the European Union). The problem becomes more acute in the EU context because one had to deal with a fuzzy object under investigation. The ever-long disagreements on what the EU itself is still exist because there is no academic “consensus over the EU’s elusive ontology” (Chrysochoou, 2002, p.1). What we are being left here is only a term which unfortunately, does not help us to understand the genuinely political character of the EU. In such a case any researcher that deals with EU issues has firstly to resolve the puzzle of whether and if EU is or at least resembles more a state-like entity or an international organization; or rather considering it an entity in its own. Different from the previous discussions, what is at stake here is not the presence or absence of a given dimension of the concept but it is more a matter of establishing the unit of analysis. The EU being an *unidentified political object* - as claimed once by Jacques Delors, - have left open choices to the researcher to choose from which angel to approach. This raised the level-of-analysis problem⁶ that is why before evaluating any argument we first have to identify at what level the scholars are making their case.

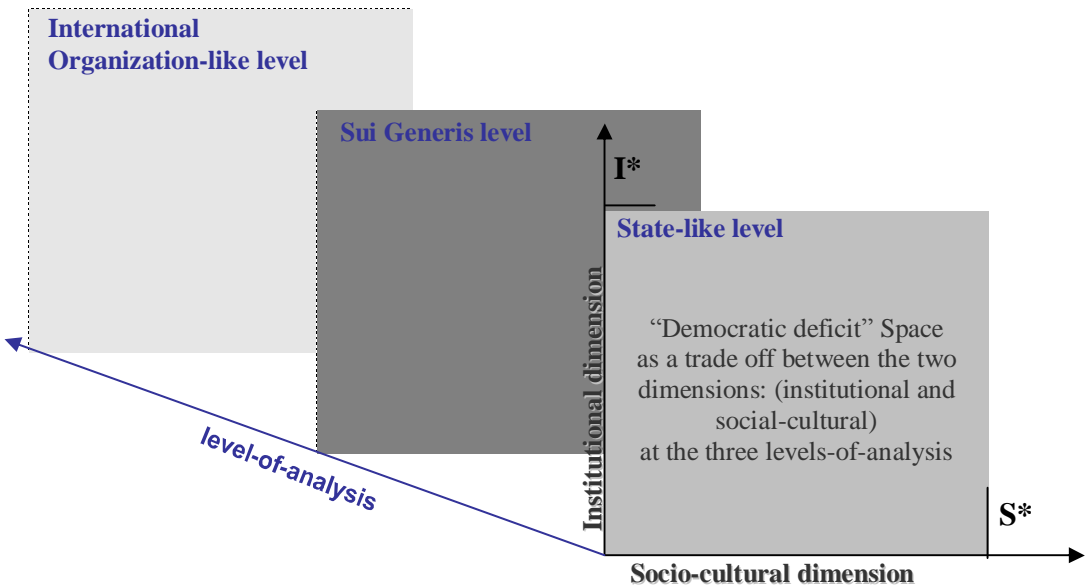
⁶ “The level-of-analysis problem is concerned with the choice and limitations of particular units of analysis” (Moul, 1973, p. 494).

The argument and counter-argument speaking rather in favour or against a democratic deficit has been developed at three major levels-of-analysis; namely state-like, *sui generis* and international organization-like approach. For Moravcsik the EU is merely an international organization and he analyses EU as such. While Majone does accept the state-like analysis only by *analogy* (1998) but he do this because to cite him "we are still groping for normative criteria appropriate to the *sui generis* character of the European Community" (1998, p. 6). Føllesdal and Hix on their response to Majone and Moravcsik, have raised the concerns about their level-of-analysis arguing that "Majone's views of the EU democratic deficit are logical extensions of his general 'regulatory politics' theory of the EU, while Moravcsik's views of the democratic deficit are extensions of his liberal-intergovernmental theory" (2006, p. 541). On the other side, Zielonka's main critics on Føllesdal and Hix arguments rest precisely on the same issue, that of the level of analysis, arguing that "they try to apply state-like democratic recipes to a polity that is not a state" (2007, p. 203). He himself prefers to take a *sui generis* approach where the "union is seen as a prototype of post-modern, multi-level, polycentric governance that is decentralized, flexible, deliberative, informal, inclusive and non-territorial" (Zielonka, 2007, p. 187). But the *sui generis* level-of-analysis does not rest unproblematic. As Zweifel argues, "seeing the EU as *sui generis* has still shortcomings since such an approach treats EU in a vacuum and fail to compare it to other polities" (2002, p. 812), turning us once more to the state-like level-of-analysis. This brings us back to where we started, at both Majone and Moravcsik first arguments. Such controversies are close cycle where everyone brings its counter-arguments which, in many cases, more than frontal try to confront the scholars choice level-of-analysis, that is if what they are refereeing is a state-like, *sui generis*, or international organization.

It is to be noticed here the double-side argument. Although they argue about the EU democratic deficit they still need a second 'ideal or relative' democratic model to compare at. These later depend still on the authors' choice. It is precisely the choice and the approach (state, *sui generis*, international organization) that has raised so many disputes. One may find them disagree on which level should EU be compare rather than on the essence of if there is a democratic deficit or not. Just to mention one, for example Marovcik and Zweifel both agree that there is not a democratic deficit on the EU but they disagree on the level-of-analysis. Most of the discourses and divergences among the scholars are not about EU democratic deficit itself, they are rather related to the model one is refereeing to. My point here is that one has to be careful in accepting or rejecting any argument since they are contextual-embedded on the level-of-analysis one has chosen. The point here is that one should be, if possible, explicit about his choice on the type of polity he is refereeing to EU and the model comparing with. How EU would be depicted and with what it will be compared will have an effect on whether we can speak or not about a democratic deficit. Gerring's proposition seems to perfectly fit here, reminding us that 'what one finds is contingent upon what one looks for, and what one looks for is to some extent contingent upon what one expects to find' (2004, p. 351).

At the current stage, since EU remains still a disputable political entity (in the scholarly debates) it seems plausible that either of the approach may be employed. Figure 2 graphically represent the 'democratic deficit space' model separately at the three levels-of-analysis EU can be conceptualized. This distinction between different levels-of-analysis suggests explicit referent (state or sui generis or international organization) which may be used for the purpose of comparison by analogy. Presenting the issue this way will help us better know how to appraise the arguments on the democratic deficit on the bases of the level-of-analysis one has selected.

Figure 2: "Democratic Deficit Space" in the EU context



A graphical representation of the debate on EU "democratic deficit" comprising 'the democratic deficit space' (institutional and polity dimensions of democracy) separately at the three levels of analysis (State-like, Sui Generis and International Organization)

Suggestions on what the "Democratic Deficit" argument can stand for in the case of EU

Unless we want to speak of a 'democratic deficit' we need to compare it to something. The question is *compare to what?* First of all we miss an ideal-type of democracy, and what is more although scholarly literature provide us with some minimal criteria, they are questionable. Secondly, given the undefined character of EU what we can do at best is compare by analogy. The divergences found in the literature rises precisely on these two points: what standard and which analogy best fit our case?

"Since the mid-1990s when Weiler and his colleagues set out what they called a 'standard version' of the democratic deficit" (cited in Føllesdal and Hix, 2006, p. 534) many other scholars had return to them aiming at re-viewing. Even after Majone's (1998) standards re-setting, the debate on the democratic deficit continued with the latest Føllesdal and Hix (2006) upgrading 'standard version' of the democratic deficit. As Majone has pointed out "to speak of re-setting the standards is to suggest that the debate about Europe's democratic deficit is still in the standard-setting stage" (Majone, 1998, p. 6) that is we still are in the normative type of analysis and arguing. This has left behind the empirical analysis (with few exceptions, see Zweifel 2002). Such a lack of empirical measurements is legitimized since as Sartori suggests "we cannot measure unless we first know what it is that we are measuring" (Sartori, 1970, p.1038). But is it useful to endless continue with this re-assessment debate or should we, as Mény (2002, p. 11) suggests, turn to "a new concept of post-national democracy"? Before any term abandonment may be helpful that once more we refer to the origin from were the term came. That is, Marquand analysis of the functioning of the EU (then EC) institutions in order to underline the weakness of their democratic components; since then "the EU - a political entity *in motion* - has increasingly taken measures to rectify the democratic *deficiencies*" (Eriksen, 2006, p. 20). Pointing to the weakness or gap and to the expectations or requirements for improvement may be more useful. Rather than stressing on the 'democratic' term we better stress the 'deficit' term, meaning "something required or expected"⁷. As such, 'democratic deficit' in the case of the European Union should be conceptualized in the broad context as a term assessing the European Union's performance not the EU democracy. This seems to be a characteristic shared also by the literature since almost all "use the presumed existence of a democratic deficit as part of their arguments" (Crombez, 2003, p. 103). Even those that does not find a 'democratic deficit' in the European Union find problems and speak of a need for an improvement of the actual status quo⁸ either through reforming the institutions or by bringing more community integration. Picturing the debate more as the half-full or half-empty glass argument doesn't change the real essence, that of the need for improvement.

Conclusion

In this paper I had required to bring some clarity to the debate on the EU democratic deficit by trying to map up the already existing literature on EU democratic deficit issue. What I have tried to do is utilizing the enormous literature thus to unfold the concept of democracy. Both, the institutional approach that stresses the institutional imbalance of the EU institutions and the socio-cultural approach that points at the absent of a European demos have

⁷ This is one of the meanings of the term 'deficit' in the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁸ The authors that argue that there is no 'democratic deficit' admit that there are still problems and there is a need for improvement. For example Zweifel (2002, p. 812) admits that "there is much room for improvement...; while for Crombez (2003, p. 117) "the democratic deficit is, in the first place, a problem of lack of information and excess of delegation"; such statements enforce more and more Mény's idea that "...nobody can deny that there is a real problem" (2002, p. 11) in the EU.

been considered. I accept these two different interpretations as two elements of the term democracy which if mingle together portray us the 'democratic deficit space'. The logic behind this 'democratic deficit space' is that we need to relay on a number of elements (institutional and socio-cultural) when speaking of a (democratic) deficit. This model is still a normative representation and depends on scholars' assessment. Furthermore, when it has been applied into the EU case it has become even more contextual depending on the level-of-analysis one has chosen since scholars approach EU differently; some consider it an entity in its own while others more a state-like entity or even an international organization.

As outlined here, the issue remains still open and very broad without a definite answer on whether we can speak of an EU democratic deficit. But what we can propose at this stage, which is also a shared characteristic of the existing literature, is the need for improving the institutions and polity building in EU.

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