

## How Can the EU Become a Democracy?

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### Summary

The European Union (EU) is either slow or unable to perform many vital nation-building actions. This is because it does not have sufficient mandate from the people of Europe.

To resolve the problem the European Council should voluntarily give up power to the European Parliament. The President should be a ceremonial figurehead and protector of democracy. The President and the Commissioners, including a new role of the "Chief Commissioner", should be identified for the role by the European Parliament and should follow policies approved by the European Parliament.

These changes can be made without any fundamental change of treaty.

### Why is Democracy Important?

The EU is working on a long term project to try to forge a single nation out of the many separate member states. Without a direct mandate from the people of Europe the EU is forced to try to persuade the national governments of the member states to allow it to make progress. This is difficult and slow because in many cases progress requires the national governments to give up power to the EU. This also introduces unfairness because some member states have more bargaining power than others.

In a truly democratic nation the population is made aware of the options that are facing its government. The population is involved in the decision making process. There is far more chance of the government being allowed to take decisive action and far more chance of the population supporting or at least tolerating their government's policies.

More generally, around the world there is a strong correlation between democracy and healthcare, education, prosperity, happiness, respect for human rights and environmental protection. In the past suspension of democracy has led to many bad effects ranging from the introduction of martial law to world war.

### Example directions in which the EU could make faster progress if it had a mandate from the people of Europe?

- Introduction of EU wide services like education, healthcare, social security, pensions

- Further strengthening of the power of the European Parliament and confinement of the role of national governments to national issues.
- Application of more financial discipline to the EU, reduction of EU waste and costs and reimbursement of contributions back to member states.
- Stronger efforts to invest in underdeveloped parts of the EU.
- Stronger environmental protection actions.
- Stronger efforts to drive member states to follow EU rules including financial controls.
- Stronger efforts to fight corruption within the EU and within member states.
- Bailing out of some regions that have been mismanaged in recent years.
- Amalgamation of defence and security services.

### How does the EU work now?

The European Commission (EC) is the bureaucracy of the EU. It is directly controlled by the President and Commissioners. They are appointed and controlled by the European Council which is controlled by the national governments of the member states. There is also an elected European Parliament which consists of 705 MEPs but this does not have much power.

#### *Role of the European Parliament according to the EU?*

“The Parliament is a co-legislator, it has the power to adopt and amend legislation and decides on the annual EU budget on an equal footing with the Council. It supervises the work of the Commission and other EU bodies and cooperates with national parliaments of EU countries to receive their input.” [1]

#### *Role of the European Parliament according to us?*

The EU's description in the section above overstates the authority of the European Parliament. The European Parliament has much less effective power than the European Council. The evidence for that is:-

- The President and the Commissioners are all chosen and appointed by the European Council.
- When campaigning, prospective MEPs do not make campaign promises. This is because if elected they have no power to deliver.
- In the UK the indication that a Brexit deal was going to happen came when Boris Johnson was re-elected with a large majority. Authority was given by the UK voters to the UK Parliament and then passed to the Prime Minister. In the EU the indication that the Brexit deal was going to happen came when it was agreed by the President and the European Council. The European

Parliament's approval was assumed and the people of Europe were never consulted.

- "In areas such as taxation, competition law and Common Foreign and Security Policy, the European Parliament is "consulted". In those cases, Parliament may approve or reject a legislative proposal, or propose amendments to it, but the Council is not legally obliged to follow Parliament's opinion." [1]
- "The European Commission [is] the only institution empowered to initiate legislation" [2] In other words, the European Parliament cannot initiate legislation.

## What Changes should be made to make the EU into a Democracy?

These changes are both a mechanism by which the European Council can hand over power to the European Parliament without needing a change of treaty, and also a mechanism by which the European Parliament can improve its processes so as to be trusted to wield that power.

- The European Council should agree that in future it will always appoint people as President and Commissioners who have been identified for the job by the European Parliament. It should also agree that it will only allow Presidents and Commissioners to remain in the role if they have the confidence of the European Parliament.
- The European Parliament should create a role called something like "Chief Commissioner". The Chief Commissioner will have a role similar to a Prime Minister in other democracies. The Chief Commissioner role can be a redirection of one of the existing Commissioner roles.
- The European Parliament should change the role of President so that President is above politics. The main responsibilities of the President are to be ceremonial head of the EU including the head of any future EU armed forces, and to ensure that democracy is working within the EU.
- Henceforth the European Parliament should identify all people for the roles of President and Commissioner (including the Chief Commissioner).

## Benefits of the Proposed Changes?

- Policy, activity and spending will be controlled by the European Parliament, which is appointed by and controlled by the people of Europe.

- When campaigning, MEPs will be able to make campaign promises because if elected their party will control Parliament. EU policy will be debated, understood and approved by the people of Europe.
- There will be far less need to bargain and compromise with national governments for permission to make progress, and the EU will be able to make much faster progress in whatever direction the voters of Europe choose.
- The roles of leader of the government and protector of democracy will be separated, in line with the best democracies around the world.

### Resistance to these Changes?

- It may be claimed that these changes require constitutional change and multiple national referenda. However this is not true. The changes are all made by decisions of the European Council and the European Parliament within their respective current authority.
- These changes may be resisted by extreme federalists who fear that the “European Project” may be derailed if it is put under the control of the people of Europe. However the proposed changes would actually make the European Project complete. Any such resistance would actually be preventing the very thing the federalists have been striving for.
- People may not trust the European Council to always appoint Presidents and Commissioners who have been identified by the European Parliament. However once a European election has been held and the people of Europe have selected their European leaders no national government would dare to oppose the appointment.
- Richer member states may fear that a stronger European Parliament may demand greater flow of money from rich to poor regions. However within the member states themselves this only happens to a limited extent. Democratically elected governments understand that they need to protect and nurture their wealth generating regions.
- These changes require the European Council and the national governments of the member states to give up power to the European Parliament. That will only happen if the changes are demanded by the people of Europe, and that demand is expressed at national and EU elections. It may be that demand will be stimulated if the UK manages more nimble action and fast growth after Brexit.



## References

[1] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/faq/17/what-are-the-european-parliament-s-powers-and-legislative-procedures>

[2] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/powers-and-procedures/legislative-powers>

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