

The EU in 2012: political and institutional tensions

Alexander H. Trechsel and Claudius Wagemann

Introduction

2012 marks the fourth year into the financial crisis that has hit most capitalist, modern and liberal democracies since the Lehman Brothers went bankrupt. In Europe, this crisis has given rise to profound effects on European integration. It has arguably stopped (with the exception of Croatia) the process of enlargement. It has furthermore put the common currency, the Euro, under enormous pressure and led to growing inequalities within the eurozone and between countries of the eurozone and EU Member States outside the eurozone. Finally, the crisis had such strong effects on national economies, most prominently those of the PIIGS countries (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain), but now also France, that the level of European integration achieved up to now is being questioned, since economic and political issues are so strongly related. In 2012, an increasingly important number of observers started to think about a potential process of European *disintegration*. While in the past such voices could be heard above all in the UK, they now became *salonfähig* in the heartland of European integration, Germany, France, Italy, the Benelux and other Member States.

In this short contribution we will focus on two major developments that are important, in our view, to understand the situation in which the European Union finds itself in the year 2012. Both developments focus on the topic of democracy. We first identify a number of democratic 'hot spots', *loci* of tension, tipping points and general trends that mark the year 2012. Second, we focus on the relation between the EU and its citizens, adopting a 'view from below'. We argue that citizens are not only becoming more strongly involved in policy making generally, but also that their attitude towards European integration in times of crisis must be properly understood.

1. Democratic 'hot spots' in 2012

For 2012, the year on which this contribution concentrates, several tipping points can be identified which help us to illustrate the current state of democracy in Europe. This description is not limited to the EU level, but it also takes into account current developments (usually failings) at the nation-state level. This list is of course not complete, and this is not our goal. We intend, rather, to provide an illustration of what we think of as currently occurring democratic dilemmas. Also, while we focus on the year 2012, some of the examples mentioned here are not strictly limited to the year 2012, but refer to a longer time horizon: some developments had already set in before 2012, and others will be with us in the (shorter or longer-term) future.

A first point is that incumbent governments are currently very much at risk when it comes to elections. The most recent years saw new governments in Great Britain, France and Spain, that is, in three central European democracies; in all these cases, the incumbent leader was a candidate, but was impressively defeated. Only the German Chancellor remained in office, since the electoral cycle did not foresee any national elections, while the incumbent German *national* government was defeated several times in *regional* elections. In Italy, the incumbent government was not replaced through elections, but through an emergency 'technocratic' government. However, this situation was short-lived: in the most recent Italian elections, this incumbent technocratic government under the leadership of Mario Monti was, one could say, almost brutally, punished by the voters for its politics. Even more, the outcome of the elections led to a chaotic situation, not least because of the high level of dissatisfaction in Italy with the incumbent (technocratic) government which, strictly speaking, they had not even voted in. But also in other, smaller countries, recent years have shown rapid changes of governments. Greece is certainly a case where two elections were needed in order to form a new government. In short, incumbency is no longer helpful for being re-elected. Rather, the contrary seems to be true. While government alternation (or at least the possibility thereof) is usually regarded as a sign of functioning democracies, observers of contemporary European democracy have to wonder if the changes are not a little too frequent.

However, incumbent government leaders or top-level politicians face a risk of losing their office not only at election time. Political and private scandals are leading to relatively quick replacements. This does not necessarily mean that, today, politicians are more involved in scandals than in the past; nor does it mean that the public is more sensitive and more reactive towards scandals; the reason might rather be that journalists and citizens now get to know of scandals more easily. Ever-increasing public visibility, the omnipresence of (old and new) media, and the fact that private life is becoming more and more public (also, because politicians seek such a public life): all these factors contribute to the spreading of information. Additionally, as is well known, news about scandals obviously sells well.

Paradoxically, while being an incumbent becomes more and more risky for a political future, the political importance of those individuals who do hold government offices is increasing. We can observe that political power is increasingly shifting from legislative actors to executive actors. As well as a 'presidentialisation' of Europe's (parliamentarian) political systems, we can also observe an 'executivisation' of policy-making. In times of crisis, political decisions have to be taken so quickly that there is hardly any time for in-depth discussions in parliaments. Decisions are increasingly, then, taken at the level of the executive, with the legislative power just rubber-stamping them *ex post*. This does not only attribute more power to the executive, but also undermines the control function of parliament, and, even more worryingly, fundamental principles of political representation in parliaments are discarded.

There is no doubt that this trend towards 'executivisation' has been intensified through the European economic and currency crisis. There are two more recent effects of the crisis on current European democracies: first, political decisions increasingly have to be taken under enormous time pressure, not only due to the necessity of finding solutions for urgent problems, but also because the durability of solutions has become very short. Developments on the international financial markets, but also within single European countries, force governments into rapid decisions, the efficacy of which is based on assumptions which (might) change very quickly.

Secondly, the current European crisis is complex and requires well thought through solutions. Not even scientific experts are able to advise governments in a clear way. Thus, it is an illusion to assume that ordinary citizens without any particular skills would be able to follow the substance of the discussion. Already, the sheer number of ever new 'rescue packages' and quickly introduced European institutions is creating some confusion among European citizens. The broad level of disagreement among experts and the partial incapacity of even top journalists to explain to the citizens what the crisis and potential solutions are about, just further underline this complex character of decision-making. This also became manifest when the German President Joachim Gauck criticised the German Chancellor Angela Merkel for not explaining her policy decisions well enough to the people. In such a way, politicians risk losing contact with the true sovereign, i.e., the citizens, whom they should represent. We will come back to this most important 'view from below' in the subsequent part of this contribution.

A possible consequence of 'executivisation', the new speed of politics, and the complexity of the issues at stake is that 'technocrats', instead of democratically elected politicians, are endowed with political decision-making power. This is most visible in the Italian 2011/2012 government, which has been a technocrats-only government. While certainly the term of a 'technocratic government' (*governo tecnico*) is chosen in order to express – somewhat euphemistically – that the government does not receive its legitimacy from the people as a sovereign but through its technical expertise, the term also refers to the fact that elected representatives who would be the 'mirror image' of the general population would not be able, in terms of substance, to tackle the tasks presently before them.

While most of these changes mainly affect political institutions, we are witnessing a number of additional developments affecting European democracies that are not linked to formal state institutions.

For a few years now, several European countries have been showing a strengthening of right-wing extremism or right-wing populism, mostly manifested in increasing electoral success of their respective political parties. France and Austria are confronted with continuously high (if not increasing) vote shares for the *Front National* and the FPÖ, respectively; the Swiss SVP is becoming more and more radicalised and

gains high numbers of votes in elections; but also Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in the Netherlands, the 'True Finns', Jobbik in Hungary, or *Chrysi Avgi* in Greece are just various facets of one and the same development. Above all the latter two – Jobbik and *Chrysi Avgi* – show that right-wing extremism does not necessarily hide itself any longer by expressing more toned-down anti-system views which make racist and extremist stances less visible: now, topics and opinions which can easily be called 'neo-Nazi' have become part of the political discourse. Apart from the fact that this development is a negative sign for democracy as such – some if not most of these actors clearly voice their anti-democratic stance – the high vote (and thus seat) shares of these parties is increasingly complicating the formation of coalition governments.

However, it is not only right-wing radicalism which is challenging current political party systems.

Yet another, but similar development is the rise of a populist (more rarely truly extremist) political left: the Greek SYRIZA and its leader Alexis Tsipras are the most prominent examples of this. These actors have advocated policy positions which seem – to say the least – unrealistic: e.g., while SYRIZA proposes on the one hand that Greece should not obey the EU austerity measures imposed on them, it also claims that, on the other hand, the European international community should still continue its attempts to save Greece from a complete financial disaster. As the two Greek elections in 2012 have shown, such reasoning attracts many votes, but also complicates government formation and policy making. As the Tsipras case shows, strong political (populist) leaders are not only emerging on the political right, but also on the political left.

Populism, however, does not necessarily imply extremism. European integration has often been taken as an opportunity to win more votes, above all when Europe was in a (real or perceived) crisis, even by mainstream political parties. There cannot be any doubt that the British Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement has not only revived the public debate about the future of the European Union (not only in Britain), nor that this has been a fundamental step towards a more populist exploitation of European topics. However, unlike in the past, Cameron's move is not a single-issue stance (such as voting on a Treaty), but questions the project as a whole. As such, it has revealed many hidden negative feelings among the British population.

The radicalisation of (party) politics mentioned above is also in part connected to a more general radicalisation of the European public sphere. While Europe has been suffering for some time from an immanent conflict between Western and Eastern Europe (with Eastern Europe here being defined as the group of new EU Member States that entered with the enlargement rounds since 2004), a new – perhaps even stronger – dimension has been added recently, namely the North-South conflict. While the North portrays the South as the lazy area which only claims money from the rich North without wanting to reform the structures at home, the South complains about a lack of solidarity from the North of Europe and about the unfair measures with which the Southern countries (and the lives of the people living there) are confronted. These attitudes have even reawakened old resentments thought to be dead: when an Italian newspaper, controlled by Italy's former Prime Minister Berlusconi, announces the advent of a fourth German *Reich*, linking requests for structural reforms to the Nazi dictatorship, then clearly the quality of discussions has deteriorated alarmingly. Dante Alighieri's famous call for the German Kaiser to come South of the Alps to put in place some law and order strangely comes to mind. This also became manifest in the most recent Italian election campaign when Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right alliance and the populist five star movement – two otherwise extremely different political actors – distanced themselves substantially from EU integration in general and the imposed austerity measures in particular; the latter have often been presented as policies designed largely to suit German interests. Similar developments had already been visible in the last two Greek election campaigns and are to be expected in similar occasions in Spain, Portugal or Cyprus. This can also be understood as a transnationalisation of national election campaigns, which will probably also be seen, but in reverse, in the North of Europe: one big issue in the upcoming elections in Germany and Austria will certainly be how to deal with the Southern European crisis states, a topic which had already become implicitly important during the last elections in Finland and the Netherlands, as mentioned above.

Unfortunately, this emergence of new stereotypes and stigmatisation in Europe does not mean that these new scapegoats have replaced the former ones with which Europe has had to live over the last years. Quite to the contrary: phenomena such as anti-immigration movements and activities have not disappeared, but indeed seem to have become more

intense. Certainly, the emphasis has shifted: during recent years, immigration issues have been increasingly framed from a religious perspective, usually leading to strong disapproval of Muslims. Islam itself has become a new policy issue: questions such as the construction of mosques (and minarets) and teaching the Muslim religion in schools, as well as the observance of religious rituals and habits (ranging from *burkas* to children's circumcision), have raised the public awareness of the Muslim presence in European societies – with the effect that anti-Islam stances have also intensified.

However, not all new tendencies and actors on the political scene belong to the extreme ends of the political spectrum. The year 2012 (and the previous years) have shown the advent of new political parties and movements, competing for seats in Parliament. The most prominent example of 2012 are the 'Pirate Parties', which started their success story in Sweden in 2009 when they surprised the European public by gaining more than 7% of the electoral share in the EU elections; they then continued their good performance at the *Land* level in Germany, although their heyday seems to be past, and the Pirates may even soon disappear completely from the political spectrum. Their temporary success cannot only be traced back to their policies, i.e., that they advocate a new form of liberalism, extended to internet topics, but also to questions of political style. 'Liquid democracy' and a very intensive inclusion of party members in intra-party processes characterise this new form of political party.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Italy, where the *Cinque Stelle* movement (M5S) of the comedian Beppe Grillo has become a key player on the political scene. In the most recent elections, the M5S surprised everybody and became the strongest single party in Italy. Although the institutional conditions (such as the electoral law) made it unlikely from the outset that the *Cinque Stelle* would reach such impressive levels of success, with one out of four voters opting for Grillo, such extreme shifts have become reality.

Clearly, new entries into a party system result in high levels of contestability and reactivity – something that is positive at a first glance. However, without necessarily being extremist, the new additions also give us indications as to the current situation of party democracy in Europe. These new actors do not just add yet another ideology to the

party spectrum, but question the system (or important parts thereof) as a whole. Thus, their emergence and their strength reflect a negative evaluation of existing options. Therefore, they are not only instances of the reactivity and the openness of the political system, but also imply the failure of the established forces to aggregate people's interests and to meet their expectations. The results of the Italian elections of 2013 are the most drastic recent exemplification of this thesis.

In a similar vein, if we turn our attention to the organisational realities *within* political parties, we arrive at a number of both interesting and worrying observations. While there is, on the one hand, a growing tendency to allow for more participation of the rank-and-file (through primaries, 'liquid democracy', open-access conferences with party leaders, etc.), we also witness a stronger professionalisation of political parties. Many conceptual and operative activities of political parties are outsourced, ranging from the planning of election campaigns up to the distribution of electoral propaganda. The phenomenon of the party member who, in his/her leisure time, knocks on doors or puts up electoral posters is slowly disappearing. This is paradoxical, if we consider that this continuing professionalisation of party life is paralleled with ever more intensive attempts to allow for participation of party members in internal decision-making processes. We can assume two (not completely mutually exclusive) developments behind this: for one, it can simply be that the attempt to integrate party members into a political party's life is logical and appropriate, in the sense that political parties imagine that their followers expect to be integrated into internal processes. Or, alternatively, it could simply be that the expectations of the party members, and their readiness to contribute to the party life, has changed: participating in the operative business of a political party has become less attractive, while participation in decision-making is more and more desired.

These processes of professionalisation and outsourcing cannot only be observed for political parties, but also in the case of interest groups. These observations are the more relevant if we additionally consider that political parties and interest groups are increasingly challenged by other political actors, usually referred to as social movements. And with regard to this phenomenon, the year 2012 (and the years before) has provided us with some new examples: first and foremost, the *indignados* and the 'occupy' movement. We have to distinguish here

between two variants: firstly, there are demonstrations, strikes, and protests in those countries which were directly affected by the Euro crisis and externally imposed austerity measures, most prominently Greece, but also Spain and to a certain extent Italy. Secondly, there are also similar movements in countries which were not directly affected by the crisis, such as Germany, where protesters expressed a more general and less specific feeling of unease with contemporary capitalism.

However, the importance of social movements does not stop here. The year 2012 and the recent past have also seen some other forms of protest against public policy measures. Considering the German example of the protests against the new railway station in Stuttgart, we have to conclude that the general public can be easily mobilised, that new groups participate in protests (the Stuttgart case also included many bourgeois protesters), and that these protests tend to criticise the system as a whole, claiming that people's opinions are no longer respected. The same goes for the international protests against ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) and SOPA/PIPA (Stop Online Piracy Act and Protect IP Act) by activists from the anti-Internet-regulation spectrum, and most notably the Anonymous Movement. These protests were very broad in scope, explosive and, in the end, highly effective and successful.

It is also here where the main problem lies for European democracy. Certainly, it is very positive that political systems provide protest opportunities, and that citizens become engaged in political and social life. Nevertheless, these protests emerge from a certain unhappiness with the current situation, and a growing share of these protests express a more general critique of the system. If protests become frequent or strong, this is a sign of a more general crisis of the system.

One of the most pressing questions for European democracy, therefore, centres around the attitudes of citizens, arguably the main actors in a system of democratic governance, towards possible solutions to the crisis. In the next section of this contribution we therefore focus on the 'view from below', i.e. whether the crisis has led, as some observers argue, to the emergence of a new 'European cleavage' and what this implies for the state of European Democracy.

2. Citizens' views on a solution to the economic crisis

The issue of mass attitudes towards Europe is central for our understanding of current political trends at all levels of government. For sure, in today's politics, European or not, one cannot do without a closer look at public opinion. With an increased role played by participatory governance and a proliferation of more direct forms of decision making, including at the EU level, ignoring mass attitudes would mean neglecting a major political actor, the citizens.

Before addressing the current developments of mass attitudes towards Europe, let us briefly reflect on what has been named by observers the emergence of a new cleavage regarding European integration, a so-called 'Euro cleavage'. We remain strongly sceptical of the idea of expressing the current tensions transcending electorates on the question of Europe in terms of a 'cleavage'. The relevant literature from the field of social science, and most notably the contribution of the late Peter Mair and of Stefano Bartolini, underlines that three conditions need to be fulfilled for a cleavage to appear. Firstly, there needs to be a socio-structural division of society in groups along lines of conflict; secondly, the members of these groups must understand that they are part of the latter and identify with their respective group; and, thirdly, this conflict must be politically reflected by mobilisation and competition, most prominently in electoral terms. European integration, from such a perspective, does not really constitute a foundation for a proper 'cleavage' in the sense in which it is used by the most prominent political scientists.

It fails the test because, arguably, the division of 27 European electorates into rather homogenous pro-and anti-European groups is at best far-fetched. Let us nevertheless assume that we do have two groups with more or less clearly defined boundaries. Let us even assume that the emergence of a European identity vs. some kind of proto-nationalism overlapped with these two groups. We would still lack the organisational condition, such as, for instance, the partisan manifestation of this phenomenon. Therefore, most prominent observers concluded for a long time that Europe had, at best, a very limited impact on national party systems. In the midst of the current financial and economic crisis, however, this view must probably be qualified, as more recent developments could indeed lead to the emergence of a re-politicisation or simply a politicisation of Europe within the Member

States. However, we argue here that this politicisation will most probably not be expressed through the emergence of a new cleavage but, rather, through a sort of Europeanisation of traditional cleavages, such as the class cleavage. As Europe starts to impact the wallet of not just French farmers but of taxpaying workers, the unemployed, the pensioners and those in education, the European dimension may very well 'sneak into' the traditional socio-economic conflict lines that are at the basis of the class cleavage. We would argue that the European Union is still seen by the majority of survey respondents as the major *locus* for solving the problem of the financial and economic crisis, therefore interfering with and possibly offering a solution for a crisis that affects tangible concerns of citizens, such as unemployment, taxes, pensions, salaries etc. But just because the link between European Integration and these areas traditionally reserved for domestic sovereignty is becoming clearer, does not necessarily mean that we are witnessing the emergence of a 'euro-cleavage'. Rather, Europe is becoming a *platform*, a *locus*, an *arena* or a *level* for resolving very traditional problems of economic governance, rather than a force to be supported or rejected as a priority. The possible exception to this are the protests in Greece and elsewhere, some of which are explicitly directed at the European Union, though even in these instances it is not entirely clear, in our view, at what in particular – the European institutions, the integration process, the Troika, the common currency, the dominance of some Member States or their leading politicians, or all of the above. In the most recent elections in Italy, Europe did not emerge as one of the major themes in the campaign, with the exception, possibly, of Beppe Grillo's call for a referendum on whether Italy should remain in the eurozone. The effects of the Italian elections on European democracy are therefore rather indirect: the outcome of the elections matters greatly, although the campaign leading to this outcome did not focus on the effects on Europe.

In short, we therefore argue that despite Geert Wilders, the True Finns, the M5S and more generally the emergence of anti-European, nationalist and/or populist parties and actors, mainly, but not only, to the right of the political spectrum, there is no such thing as a developed 'European cleavage'. Nor do we see one emerge. We have serious reservations as to whether, as is claimed, attitudes towards Europe and European integration play the role of an independent variable, directly causing systemic changes in electoral outcomes and even party system structures.

Let us now more closely look at mass attitudes towards Europe. Here, a broad range of literature shows how public opinion *vis-à-vis* the EU has evolved over time, how it is context-dependent and how it is shaped by a multitude of social and economic factors. These analyses attempt to explain mass attitudes towards Europe using cognitive skills, value-based, utilitarian, socio-economic or other types of theories. Without delving further into this literature in a systematic way, let us briefly consider how attitudes towards the European Union have changed over the past few years, during the most serious financial and economic crisis Europe has witnessed in decades, and how they have culminated, so far, in the year 2012.

At the European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO), we started to produce a series of so-called 'Spotlights', short analyses that focus on changes in public opinion due to recent changes in the political agenda. Let us here briefly draw on these Spotlights, authored by Danilo di Mauro, Marta Fraile and Claudius Wagemann, as well as recent Eurobarometer data.

Mass attitudes towards Europe have been fairly stable over time – at least until the outbreak of the financial and economic crises some four to five years ago. Let us make a few observations regarding the potential link between the crisis and support for Europe.

Our first observation is that we have recently witnessed a marked change in the hierarchy of concerns among Europeans. Unemployment and the general economic situation are now by far the two most important concerns of citizens, both domestically as well as in relation to the situation of the European Union. While on average, at the national level, unemployment remains the most important concern, 11 percentage points ahead of the general economic situation (Eurobarometer 78, Autumn 2012), for the European Union the situation is the opposite: here, 53% of Europeans think that the economic situation is the most important issue the EU has to face, coming 17 percentage points ahead of the second-placed issue of unemployment.

Secondly, we witness an enormous variance between countries when it comes to judging the current situation. Recent data (Eurobarometer 78, Spring 2012) show that 75% of Swedes think the current situation is good but only 1% of Greeks think the same thing. This 'spread', so to

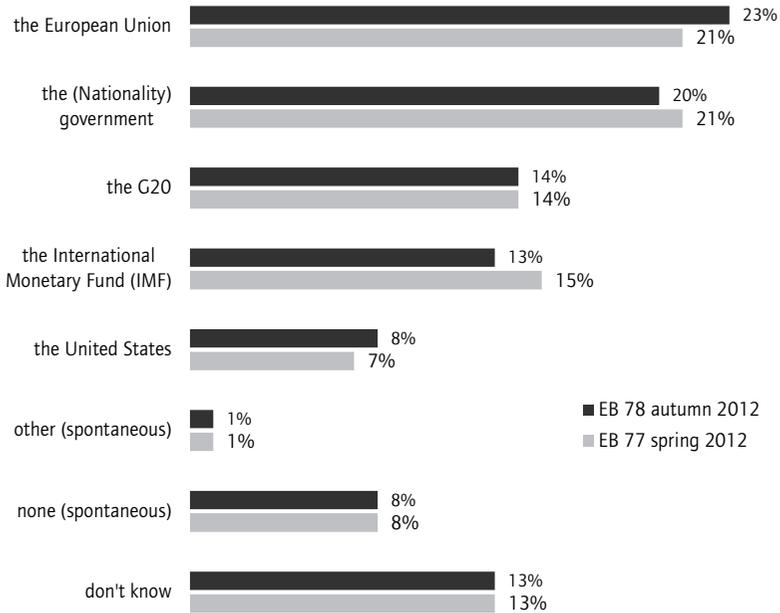
say, has reached alarmingly high levels. Note, however, that just one year before, in the autumn of 2011, Swedes ranked 10 percentage points higher, with 85% of them thinking the situation of the national economy was good. Since then, their evaluation has deteriorated to the level of German public opinion, where still three out of four respondents judge the situation of the national economy as good.

Our third point is that at the same time, our analyses could show a certain ‘Europeanisation of public attitudes towards the economy’. Until recently, and independently from their optimism or pessimism, citizens’ expectations of the national and European economy tended to differ with expectations of the European economy being structurally more positive. Nowadays, expectations of the economy at both levels, national and European, coincide. This apparent consistency is mainly caused by pessimism. The worse off one feels oneself to be, the more consistently negative one feels about the economic future at national *and* at European level. Note, however, that here as well, there is a very large context-dependent variation in this Europeanisation of attitudes towards the economy, directly linked to the performance of the respective national economies. The most negatively affected contexts display the highest rates of consistency.

Fourthly, it is remarkable that almost a quarter of all Europeans think that it is the European Union that is the best able to take effective action against the financial and economic crisis. 23% of all respondents to the Eurobarometer 78 (Autumn 2012) answered ‘The European Union’ when asked the question ‘In your opinion, which of the following is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis?’ This puts the European Union ahead of one’s national government, the G20 or the IMF (figure 1).

Figure 1 Who can best take action against the crisis?

QC3a. In your opinion, which of the following is best able to take effective actions against the effects of the financial and economic crisis?



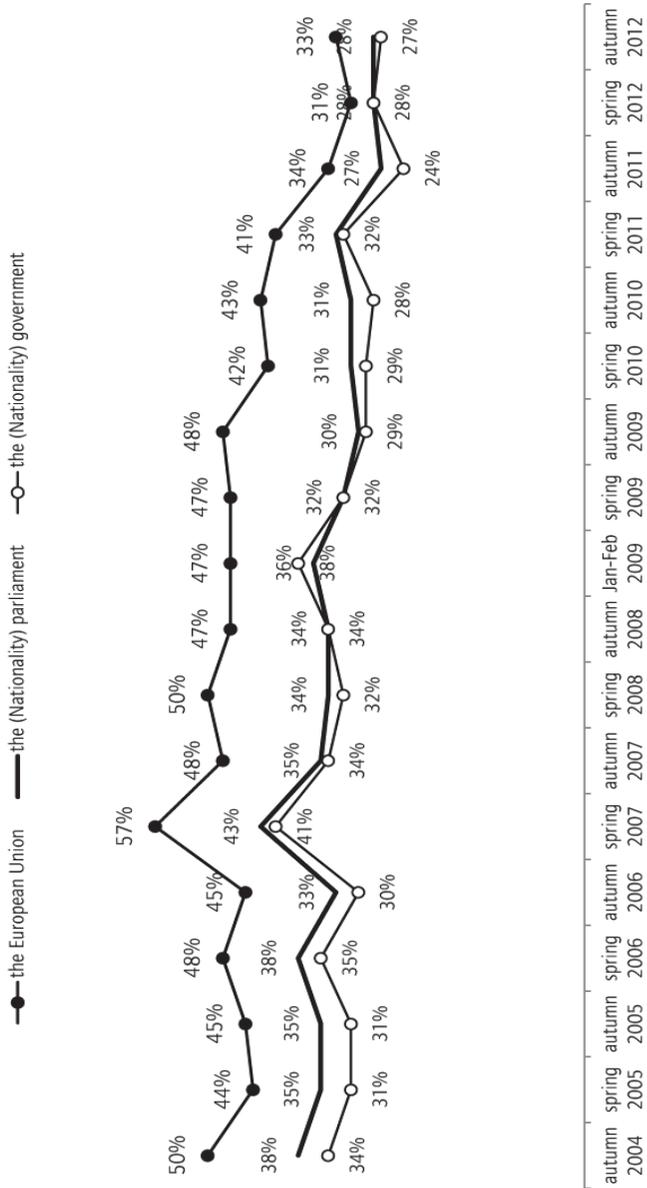
Source: Standard Eurobarometer 78, Autumn 2012, Public Opinion in the European Union – First Results.

Note, however, that the formulation of the question and the answer categories leave it completely open what exactly is meant by ‘The European Union’. At the same time, the EU is also the biggest loser when it comes to measurements of trust (figure 2).

Since September 2007, in just four years, trust in the EU has been eroded from 57% to 33% (Eurobarometer 78, Autumn 2012). It is true that trust in national parliaments and governments has also been eroded since then. Taken together, the cumulated trust in the EU, national Parliaments and national Governments has declined from 141 points to only 88 points, or, in other words, a cumulated loss of trust of almost 40%. However, the biggest losers are the European institutions.

Figure 2 The evolution of trust in institutions (2004-2012)

QA11 I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend not to trust it or tend to trust it.



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 78, Autumn 2012, Public Opinion in the European Union – First Results.

So while Europeans continue thinking that the solution for the crisis should be primarily found at the European level, only a third of all Europeans still trust the EU. And this loss of trust in the EU is quite similarly distributed across major institutions, such as the European Parliament, the Central Bank, the Commission and the Council.

In these times where incumbent governments and parliamentary majorities tend to be punished at the ballots, with any alternative to the previous government being seen as potentially better, one may hypothesise that this mechanism of blaming those in charge is hitting the European Union particularly hard, mainly because at the European level there is no such thing as an alternation in power. And where there is no alternation in power, where there is no credible opposition, there is a sort of permanent incumbency. It might therefore not be surprising that while recognising the need for action at the European level, the institutions at this level are not seen as trustworthy enough to deal with the problems at stake. Coming back to our earlier point: it might well be that Europe is becoming a platform or an arena rather than an actor seen as credibly able to resolve the current problems.

Conclusions

It goes without saying that European democracies are not living through easy times. There are worrying developments both at the nation-state level and at the supranational EU level. Clearly, many challenges have resulted from the current economic and financial crisis; however, it is impossible to find out what would have happened had the crisis not occurred. We can only speculate that some phenomena would have appeared even if the crisis had not hit the continent. For example, Italian politics have been volatile for a long time; the respective views, opinions, and stereotypes of Northern and Southern Europeans have also been around for quite some time; and the trends towards such phenomena as populism, new forms of intra-party democracies, protest attitudes, executivisation of politics, the importance of scandals, etc., are also nothing new. We can, at this point, only assume that the crisis in Europe has worked as a catalyst for processes which were already under way. However, it cannot be excluded that, if the crisis continues and if institutional problems of various European Member States cannot be quickly solved, a 'Europeanisation of the conflicts' could occur. First indications that such a development could be possible are

already observable. However, as we argue in this contribution, a 'euro-cleavage', at least in electoral terms, is not yet a reality.

As our discussion of survey research on the EU has shown, Europe, the EU and the crisis are mainly seen from an *economic* perspective. However, there cannot be any doubt that, at a certain point, the crisis might also be discussed from a *political* point of view. Above, we have already identified a number of phenomena that point in this direction. The question now becomes in how far political leaders (those elected and those who are on the rise) agree with the general European consensus as to the positive aspects of European integration.

Looking at the nation-state level, there seems to be a prevalent need to 'bring citizens back in'. Traditional arrangements of contemporary democracies, such as the (usual and most common) representational form of institutional systems, are evidently under stress. This does not necessarily mean that they are dysfunctional *per se*; it can also mean that they are not being fully used by the main political actors. In other words, they have high potential which, however, does not unfold in political practice. From the point of view of political science, this does not necessarily mean that research agendas have to be changed. It means, rather, that new factors are affecting well-known processes and that observers in general - and political scientists in particular - have to adjust to these new challenges.

What also becomes evident from our discussion is that the supranational EU level and the nation-state level cannot be analytically held separate any longer. These two levels influence each other, from both a political and a political science perspective. This should also sharpen our analytical capacities and research agendas. In fact, it is in itself testimony to a high degree of Europeanisation – if political phenomena can no longer be regarded separately, then something has changed in our outside world. When European politicians, citizens, journalists and social scientists speak about politics or democracy, they cannot ignore the existence of (at least) *two* levels of politics. It is now the task of practitioners, observers and scientists to translate the concept of democracy in a way which does not only take into account the multi-level principles of European democracy, but also the new developments, no matter whether linked to or dating from prior to the current crisis. Only in this way will our political and scientific account of European democracy become more accurate.