

# Stuck on the Rubicon? The Resonance of Ideas of *Demoi*-cracy in Media

## Debates

ABSTRACT: Theories of *demoi*-cracy have recently gained salience in the continuous debate on a legitimate democratic Euro-polity. *Demoi*-crats argue that multiple *demoi* can provide the European Union (EU) with its much sought after democratic legitimacy. This paper aims to offer an empirical contribution to the literature on the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy. The paper analyses media debates in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and France in order to identify resonance of *demoi*-cracy ideas. Analytical-content analysis was undertaken of legitimization statements in opinion articles in two quality newspapers per country and shows that the debates often share a similar point of departure as *demoi*-cratic theories. However, the evaluation of both this situation and the existing EU-structures relies on either intergovernmental or supranational democratic idea(s). In conclusion, the research offers little evidence of ideas of *demoi*-cracy resonating in these public debates on the EU's legitimacy with a few promising exceptions.

KEY WORDS: *Demoi*-cracy; Democratic deficit; European Union; Legitimacy; Media analysis; Political claims analysis

They are bound instead by the basic injunction of democracy: thou shalt not cross the Rubicon which separates a Union ruled by and for multiple *demoi* from a union ruled by and for one single *demos*. On this ship, many yearn to land on one shore or the other rather than stay on the Rubicon.

(Nicolaidis 2013: 367)

The EU's legitimacy has been a source of continuous public and academic debate over the past decades. Since the early 1990s, the 'permissive consensus' has arguably come to an end (Hooghe and Marks 2009), witnessed in among other in a decline in voter turnout and acts of resistance against the EU-regime (e.g. Bellamy and Castiglione 2003; Bellamy and Attucci 2009: 198-99; Føllesdal 2006: 442): the so-called Post-Maastricht blues (Eichenberg and Dalton 2007).<sup>i</sup> The analysis is often that the EU has more autonomous powers than before, however it lacks the necessary democratic legitimacy: the democratic deficit. The academic debate has been exploring many different dimensions of the EU's legitimacy. Different concepts, means, and objects of legitimacy feature in the literature (see e.g. Bellamy and Castiglione 2003; Føllesdal 2006; Wimmel 2007), yet the debate on the EU's legitimacy persists.

Theories of *demoi*-cracy offer a fruitful perspective on the EU's democratic legitimacy. In contrast to the widespread concern about the lack of a European *demos* – i.e. the no-*demos* thesis (Scharpf 1999) –, they argue that the existence of multiple *demoi* and a single democratic *kratos* within the Euro-polity does not necessarily result in a democratic deficit (Nicolaidis 2013: 352-53). Instead, so some *demoi*-crats argue, the EU can be considered legitimate, because there is equality and interaction of the statespeoples' and the EU-citizens' representatives as well as a balance between supranational rights of EU-citizens and national policy autonomy (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013: 348). However, this normative-theoretical perspective on the EU's democratic legitimacy warrants further empirical exploration.

This paper explores whether the idea of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy resonates in the public debates on the EU's legitimacy in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. Thus, it aims to explore the empirical basis for the EU as a *legitimate demoi*-cracy. The findings indicate that the public debates in these three countries often subscribe to the analysis of the existence of a multiple *demoi* and a single *kratos*. However, this is understood as the source of the EU's democratic deficit. The solution is not found in a balance and/or combination of legitimation by the national *demoi* and EU-citizenry. This perspective is nearly completely absent from the debates. Instead, two democratic ideas of legitimacy – intergovernmental and supranational – compete with one another. In conclusion, the idea of the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy finds, at least for now, little resonance in these public debates, which, in the main, still depend upon democratic ideas despite a few promising exceptions.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, it will present an overview of the literature on the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy. Then, the research strategy will be discussed in the second section. In the third section, the findings will be presented in relation to the two-fold argument of *demoi*-cratic theories. That is, first, the desirability of multiple *demoi* and a single *kratos*, and then, secondly, the attainment of legitimacy through a balance and combination of national and transnational modes of legitimation. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Theorization of the EU as a Legitimate *Demoi*-cracy**

The literature on the EU as a *demoi*-cracy can often be associated with political-theoretical debates on the nature of the Euro-polity. Since the 1990s, there has been a move toward a more normative research agenda in EU-studies: the normative turn (Bellamy and Castiglione 2003). The 'theorem of the democratic deficit' has been the catalyst for many normative political-theoretical reflections on the Euro-polity (Friese and Wagner 2002: 342).

The literature on a legitimate democratic Euro-polity posits idea(s) in order to determine appropriate standards of democratic legitimacy. Some of the more prominent positions in this debate include the EU as a technocracy (Majone 1999; Scharpf 1999), a federal state (Morgan 2005), a civic republic (Bellamy and Castiglione 1999; Habermas 2001), and an intergovernmental regime (Moravcsik 2002). However, as Bellamy and Attuci observe, there is as of yet no consensus on the normative question at the heart of this debate (2009: 218). Despite or maybe thanks to this lack of consensus, the debate on the appropriate standards for the EU's legitimacy persists. The EU as a *demoi*-cracy forms a promising contribution to this academic debate (Müller 2011).

*Demoi*-cratic theories on the EU's legitimacy tend to offer a two-part argument. Many authors have contributed to the theorization of the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy (a.o. Bellamy and Castiglione 2013; Besson 2006; Bohman 2004, 2005; Cheneval 2011; Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013; Müller 2011; Nicolaïdis 2003, 2013; Weiler 1999). Despite their differences (Nicolaïdis 2013: 352-58), their arguments tend to share a two-part structure. First, they argue that European integration constitutes a transformation of the European political landscape. The Euro-polity constitutes a single political authority – *kratos* – without a single political community – *demos* – instead with multiple national communities – the *demoi*. This largely empirical analysis is evaluated positively. Secondly, they argue in favour of new principles of legitimacy for the regime in this newly emerging polity rather than a transposition of the standard democratic ones (Nicolaïdis 2013: 352). These principles need to secure equality as well as interaction between both the statespeoples' and the EU-citizens' representatives and in terms of balancing citizens' supranational rights and national policy-making autonomy (Cheneval et al. Forthcoming). Thus, the *demoi*-cratic argument unfolds from a more descriptive-empirical analysis to a normative account of *demoi*-cratic legitimacy. The argument is fleshed out further to fully appreciate it.<sup>ii</sup>

The *demoi*-cratic argument on the EU starts from the recognition of the Euro-polity's 'dual character' as simultaneously a collection of states *and* a citizenry within a common

supranational regime (Nicolaidis 2013: 354). However, it also denies the impossibility of legitimate democratic politics under these conditions. *Demoi*-crats agree that European integration constitutes a transformation of the European political landscape. The Euro-polity emerges as a polity with a regime with authoritative powers, but it lacks a single European *demos* instead national *demoi* are likely to persist in the near future. Empirical evidence informs and bolsters these claims (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013: 337-39).

Theories of *demoi*-cracy embrace the EU's dual character (Cheneval et al. Forthcoming: 335; Nicolaidis 2013: 352-53). Two important considerations lead to the embrace. First, the existence of transnational effects of national policies warrants a transnational regime, because democratic peoples should work together in order to address their negative externalities (Weiler 1999: 341). Secondly, the normative desirability of the concept of the people is challenged for excluding outsiders. *Demoi*-cracy might therefore be a more desirable form of democratic governance than democracy (Cheneval et al. Forthcoming; Weiler 1999). A theory on the appropriate standards on the EU's democratic legitimacy should therefore embrace the existence of multiple *demoi* and a single *kratos* (Bellamy and Castiglione 2013: 207; Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013: 335; Nicolaidis 2013: 357).

The second part of the argument focuses on criteria and potential ways to democratically legitimate the EU as a *demoi*-cracy. Most *demoi*-crats agree the EU-regime is not a state (Nicolaidis 2013: 354).<sup>iii</sup> Still, *demoi*-crats offer somewhat different perspectives on the EU-governance regime. Some (Bohman 2004; Nicolaidis 2003, 2013) conceptualize legitimacy for multiple potentially overlapping constituencies within a 'multi-perspectival' governance regime. For example, the Eurozone and the CAP are governance regimes with their own competences ruling over partially overlapping, yet different constituents. Alternatively, others approach the European governance regime from the perspective of a single *kratos* – the EU –, that is simultaneously *not* a state, but still performs statist functions that require legitimation (Bellamy and Castiglione 2013; Cheneval and Schimmelfennig

2013; Weiler 1999: 348). Still, they agree that *demoi*-cracy should represent a third way between sovereign states and federal state (Nicolaidis 2013: 353-56).

The *demoi*-cratic literature suggests ways to incorporate *demoi* in policy-making processes in order to legitimate the EU-*kratos*. A *demoi*-cratically legitimate EU should accommodate ‘an opening up’ of the national *demoi* (Nicolaidis 2013: 356). Opening up refers both to active interaction between national *demoi* and the creation of alternative transnational *demoi*, such as stakeholder groups (Nicolaidis 2013: 355-56). *Demoi* should have ways to influence transnational policy without fear of domination by others and in recognition of each other (Nicolaidis 2013: 358-60). The EU’s legitimacy could, for example, be improved through the supranational institutionalization of Member States’ parliaments – the representatives of the national *demoi* – in a ‘Senate’ (Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). This would offer a forum for statespeoples’ representatives to influence policy.

*Demoi*-crats seek to involve both representatives of national *demoi* and citizens within the EU-regime. A broad *demoi*-cratic criterion able to assess the EU’s legitimacy is “the equality and interaction of citizens’ and statespeoples’ representatives in the making of common policies [and balancing of] transnational rights of citizens with national policy-making autonomy” (Cheneval et al. Forthcoming: 1). The active participation of these representatives – such as states, national parliaments, and stakeholder groups – ultimately legitimates the EU as a *demoi*-cracy. Some *demoi*-crats conclude that the EU actually performs well judged upon this *demoi*-cratic criterion of legitimacy (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013: 14). Yet the EU’s legitimacy crisis seems to persist. Kalypso Nicolaidis suggests that the explanation lies in the persistence of the paradigm of democracy predicated on a single *demos* (2013). However, does the idea of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy developed from empirical observations find no resonance at all in the public debates on the EU’s legitimacy?

## A Comparative Analysis of Media Debates

This paper aims to offer an initial exploration of the resonance of ideas of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy through an examination of media debates on its legitimacy. Two kinds of perspectives can be distinguished in the assessment of the EU's legitimacy: external and internal (Bellamy and Castiglione 2003; Hurrelmann 2008: 191). An external perspective on legitimacy evaluates the EU's legitimacy against normative standards from a 'third person' point of view, whilst the internal perspective inquires into the beliefs on the EU's legitimacy held by the EU-citizenry. *Demoi*-cratic theories on the EU's legitimacy offer an external perspective. However, the internal perspective of *demoi*-cratic legitimacy warrants further exploration (Cheneval et al. Forthcoming: 2). This research offers an empirical contribution to this still largely theoretical literature on the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy.

Public debates are a well-established practice to analyse the EU's legitimacy from an internal perspective. Mass media outlets have become an important object of analysis for empirical research into the EU's *internal* legitimacy (e.g. Bursens and Baetens 2005; Hawkins 2012; Hurrelmann 2008; Liebert and Trentz 2008; Medrano 2009). The following research analyses statements on the EU's legitimacy in articles from quality newspapers. Newspapers tend to offer more space to explicate positions in more detail than other mass media outlets. *Quality* newspapers were selected specifically in virtue of their tendency to produce more opinion pieces than other newspapers. These pieces are particularly well suited for in-depth qualitative analysis (Hawkins 2012; Hurrelmann 2008). While, these articles do represent an elite part of the debate, the aim to establish resonance of a set of ideas rather than to reconstruct the entire public debate.<sup>iv</sup> Furthermore, if these ideas do not resonate in these debates then they are unlikely to resonate in other parts of the public debate. These reasons inform this empirical focus.

The lack of a European public sphere necessitates selecting national debates.<sup>v</sup> The research inquires into the public debates of the Netherlands (NL), the United Kingdom (UK),

and France (Fr). A random selection is not favourable within the context of the EU (Haverland 2005: 2). These countries were selected for the differences in the perception of the EU. The United Kingdom is a well-documented Euro-sceptic country, whilst the Netherlands and France are usually categorised as pro-European. Moreover, the referenda on the constitutional treaty increased the salience of the EU's legitimacy in these pro-European countries. These differences lead to an expectation of diversity in the perspectives on the EU's legitimacy allowing for a comparison between debates and a greater potential for the resonance of *demoi*-cratic ideas. One might expect more original ideas, such as *demoi*-cracy, to resonate more pro-European debates (NL & Fr) than in Euro-sceptic ones (UK), because the former expected to attempt to legitimate the EU, whilst the latter expected content with the lack of legitimacy.

A comparative analytical-content analysis of legitimisation statements was undertaken. This analytical-content analysis follows a similar approach to earlier research (Hurrelmann 2008: 195-97; Hurrelmann et al. 2012: 3-4). The objects of analysis are *legitimation statements*. A legitimisation statement is an explicit evaluative statement on the EU's overall legitimacy contributing to an ongoing political discourse (Hurrelmann et al. 2012: 3-4).<sup>vi</sup> These statements are the basic unit of analysis rather than the articles themselves. The content of a single statement on the EU's legitimacy has become more significant than a mere mention in an article (Hurrelmann et al. 2012: 3). Moreover, the in-depth qualitative analysis of ideas of *demoi*-cracy requires the explication of the understanding of legitimacy. Hence, the analysis examines the content of legitimisation statements. Further, triangulation secures proper interpretation through both a discourse analysis on the article level and secondary material.

### *The Analytical Framework*

An analytical framework was developed to systematically code the statements. The framework offers a systematic way to code legitimisation statements on the evaluation of the

EU's legitimacy. It incorporates, in addition to whether evaluations are positive or negative, dimensions of legitimacy and modes of legitimacy. These categories represent prominent conceptualizations in the literature on EU's democratic deficit. They were originally developed to test democratic legitimacy, however they are capable of establishing *demoi-*cratic legitimacy.

First, statements were coded according to whether or not they deem the EU to be legitimate. More specifically, the question was whether a statement evaluates the EU's current legitimacy positively or negatively. A statement indicating a need for improvement is coded as negative, as it is take to indicate a potential to improve legitimacy. The statement need not argue that there is a complete absence of legitimacy. However, a lack of some kind of legitimacy is conceptually prior to the potential for improvement. A statement was coded as either positive or negative. The other two categories indicate the reasons for the EU's legitimacy or lack thereof.

Secondly, the framework distinguishes between three dimensions of legitimacy: input, throughput, and output. These dimensions have been explored in relation to the nation-state (Bernard 2001) and the EU (Bekkers et al. 2007; Schmidt 2012; Wimmel 2007: 14-16). Input legitimacy refers to the civil and socio-political requirements for democratic participation (Wimmel 2007: 15). The category not only includes elections, institutions for representation, and public spheres, but also the bond of collectivity between citizens (White 2011: 4-6). This latter factor combines shared values with a 'national' identity. Throughput legitimacy shifts the attention to decision-making procedures after the input-phase (Wimmel 2007: 15). Legality and effectiveness can function as justifications of these procedures. Finally, output legitimacy focuses on the performance of a regime in serving its citizens (Scharpf 1999). The outcomes of the political process fall under this dimension. Statements were coded as input, throughput, or output.

Thirdly, the framework analyses the mode of legitimacy deemed necessary for the EU. The EU can be described as its predecessor – the EC – as “less than a federation, but more than a regime” (Wallace 1983). In terms of legitimacy, a federation has become associated with direct legitimacy. Direct legitimacy refers to direct acceptance by the citizens of a regime (Beetham and Lord 1998: 27). The EU is thus understood as an international regime depends for its legitimacy on its Member States: indirect legitimacy. Governments rather than the citizens confer legitimacy upon the regime (Beetham and Lord 1998: 27). Statements were coded as: direct, indirect, neither, or both. The ‘neither’-category tends to address the justification for European integration as a proxy for the EU’s legitimacy. Finally, the ‘both’ category refers to statements incorporating both modes of legitimacy.

[Table 1: Coding Examples]

#### *Empirical Sources*

The following empirical sources were analysed. Two qualitative newspapers were selected per country: *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* for the Netherlands; *The Independent* and *The Guardian* for the United Kingdom; and *Le Figaro* and *Libération* for France. They represent different ideological positions. These were analysed during the run up to and aftermath of 1) the introduction of the Euro and 2) the referenda on the constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands. The first period runs from 1st January 2000 until 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002; and the second period from 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004 until 30<sup>th</sup> May 2006.<sup>vii</sup> These periods of a high degree of salience tend to generate more public debate; hence there is the expectation of a greater number of opinion pieces (Hurrelmann et al. 2012:6).

Articles were pre-selected using electronic keyword searches in the database: Academic Nexus Lexus. The aim is to retrieve articles explicitly addressing the EU’s legitimacy. After a pilot study, the following keywords were selected and translated: legitimacy crisis; democratic deficit; future of the EU; future of Europe; Democratic Europe; sovereignty + EU. The articles were reviewed in order to avoid irrelevant ones and duplicates

on the criterion whether statements explicitly addressing the EU's legitimacy were found. The number of articles and statements can be found in Table 2.

[Table 2: Number of Articles and Statements]

Finally, the following measures were taken to secure reliability of the research. The conceptual framework set out above disciplines the analysis. The qualitative nature of the research question does not allow for single word analysis. In line with Hurrelmann's approach (2008: 208; fn. 5), to ensure reliability analysis was not delegated to non-experts, instead the author selected the articles and coded the statements according to the framework. This avoids the potential danger of inconsistency due to a degree of interpretation necessarily involved in research into 'free-range' statements in contrast to set-answers in questionnaires (Hurrelmann 2008: 193). Decision rules and extensive note taking during the coding process further ensured consistency and ultimately reliability.

### **Findings: One Prominent Problem, and Two Solutions**

The *demoi*-cratic literature creates two contrasting expectations. First, the resonance of *demoi*-cratic ideas creates the expectation of a positive evaluation of the EU's legitimacy (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013: 348). Following this expectation, on the one hand, the lack of demos to provide direct legitimacy should not be understood as problematic, whilst, on the other hand, the combination of modes of legitimacy should result in *demoi*-cratic legitimation of the EU. *Demoi*-cratic statements, even if they do not refer to the term, could be democratic defenses of the status quo or institutional re-balancing as long as they do not aim toward intergovernmentalism or aiming to federalize the EU. Alternatively, the European institutionalisation of national parliaments could also be considered *demoi*-cratic (Bellamy and Castiglione 2013). The empirical reality according to this account reflects the theory of *demoi*-cracy, therefore, more broadly, one might expect *demoi*-cratic ideas to resonate in the debate.

Second, however, *demoi*-cratic theorists have been pessimistic about the expectation of resonance of the idea of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy (Nicolaidis 2013: 367). The EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy would be a ‘mere’ academic construct. Instead, the idea of democracy predicated on a single people is expected to be prominent in the public discourse. The EU’s input would be prominent and problematic, and solutions would be sought in either indirect or direct modes of legitimacy. More concretely, statements favoring either supranational federalization or intergovernmentalism are considered democratic rather than *demoi*-cratic. This rather pessimistic account results in the expectation that although institutional reality might reflect *demoi*-cratic theory, these ideas will not be reflected in debates on the EU’s legitimacy. Thus, the literature leads to contrasting expectations with regard to the resonance of ideas of *demoi*-cracy in these debates.

The findings indicate common tendencies across all debates on the resonance of *demoi*-cratic ideas, despite national particularities. Firstly, the research suggests that the EU has a legitimacy deficit from an internal perspective. Around 80% of all statements evaluated the EU’s legitimacy negatively. The Dutch debate is the most negative with 81,4% of all the statements offering a negative evaluation, followed by the French with 80,8%, and finally, the British with 79,8%. There is little change between the periods in this regard.<sup>vii</sup> Other research collaborates this finding (Hurrelmann et al. 2012). It indicates a legitimacy deficit in line with most of the academic literature. This critical tendency might also be linked to the inherent nature of editorials. But this is unproblematic for the research, because the aim is not to reconstruct public debates. The question, however, is the resonance ideas of *demoi*-cracy in these debates, therefore patterns of legitimation are of interest rather than an overall tendency in the evaluation.

#### *The Problematisation of Multiple Demoi*

The reason for this legitimacy deficit tends to be sought in the existence of multiple national *demoi*. The no-demos thesis is a prominent analysis in the public debates. Input

legitimacy is the most prominent dimension in debates, which results in a legitimacy deficit. The prominent analysis in the debates is congruent with the no-demos thesis. Democratic legitimacy is often related to the need for a common ‘national’ identity. Federalists, Euro-sceptics, and intergovernmentalists problematise the lack of a European *demos* albeit resulting in different conclusions and recommendations.

The analysis of the dimension indicates the prominence of input legitimacy and a negative evaluation thereof. More than half the total statements address the input legitimacy in all three debates (NL: 64,6 %; UK: 58,8%; Fr: 52,4%). The output legitimacy comes second in all three (NL: 19,7%; UK: 26,2%; Fr: 31,5 %). Finally, the throughput component accounts for less than 20% in all three debates. The input legitimacy is persistently evaluated more negatively than the national average (NL: 89,4%; UK: 86,9%; Fr: 85,5%). By contrast, the output is evaluated much more positively (percentage of negative statements: NL: 48,5%; UK: 62,7%; Fr: 67,5%). The EU’s legitimacy is most often evaluated from a perspective that combines the input component with a direct model resulting in a negative evaluation. More than two fifths of the Dutch statements are of this type (44%), compared with about a third in the other debates (UK: 32,9%; Fr: 34,4%). These findings indicate a clear prominence of input legitimacy in the evaluation of the EU’s legitimacy. Further, it tends to result in a legitimacy deficit.

The no-demos thesis features prominently in the debates, as the pattern described above already indicates. Yet, the academic literature (e.g. Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Habermas 2001) and political discourse (European Council 2001) have tended to understand the EU’s legitimacy deficit as a democratic deficit. The argument is that the lack of legitimacy derives from a lack of popular participation, democratic representation, and a European public sphere. This understanding prevails in the Dutch and French debate, but it is less prominent in the British one – except for certain media biases. Still, commentators in favour of supranational democratisation do invoke the lack of a European people, but they believe democratisation will be instrumental in the creation of one.

The democracy and national identity are implicitly and explicitly related in many evaluations of input legitimacy. The EU's legitimacy deficit is often understood to derive from institutions being 'far away' from or 'foreign' to citizens (e.g. Macintyre 2000). This analysis is that the EU is perceived as a technocratic bureaucracy influential upon, yet far removed from the EU-citizenry. The input deficit derives from a lack of identification (e.g. Chevènement 2005). Attempts are made to convince the public of a European value community (e.g. Brinkhorst and Bolkenstein 2005; Balkenende 2005). Other statements depend upon its existence, such as cultural arguments against the membership of Turkey (e.g. Bollaert, Germon and Lacroix 2005; See also Medrano 2009: 88; van Middelaar 2009). Despite Habermas' normative appeals against it (e.g. 1996), a French quote exemplifies the understanding of a close-knit relationship between democracy and national identity:

But regardless of the magicians. The room is empty, but they [European federalists] continue their magic tricks in front of a virtual European people. Because there is no European people, but only peoples in Europe, rooted in national histories, language, culture, policies, attached to what we call a nation where democracy is exercised and where identity is based, which is manifested in sovereignty (Gallo 2005).

The lack of a European demos and persistent identification with *national demoi* is understood as an important challenge for the EU's legitimacy across the debates.

*Demoi*-cratic theorists share this analysis, but they do not problematise it. Yet, the expectation of a lack of *demoi*-cratic ideas seems validated for the elite discourse on the EU's legitimacy. The next section will focus the proposed solutions to the EU's legitimacy deficit. The *demoi*-cratic argument would translate in solutions combining modes of legitimacy. However, the prominent solutions will further validate the 'second nature' of democratic ideas (Nicolaidis 2013: 362).

*The Perceived Solutions: A Competition between Two Democratic Ideas*

The legitimacy deficit does not result in appeals to *demoi*-cratic solutions. The solution to the EU's legitimacy deficit is currently sought in solutions drawn from either intergovernmental or federalist ideas. These ideas lead to the perception of the EU-*kratos* as either an international organisation or a federal state (to-be). The findings suggest, instead of a balance or combination between modes of legitimacy, there tends to be an either-or competition between them in the public debates. Interestingly, intergovernmentalists do propose *demoi*-cratic solutions, however these are not self-aware *demoi*-cratic solutions. Yet, a mention could be understood as promising.

Direct legitimacy tends to be the prominent mode in all three debates and it results often in a negative evaluation. The EU's legitimacy is most often evaluated in relation to its direct legitimacy (NL: 63,3%; UK: 51,9%; Fr: 57,1%). The neither category (NL: 22,1%; UK: 23,3%; Fr: 25,6%) and indirect legitimacy (NL: 12,7%; UK: 22,9%; Fr: 16,2%) are much less common. Statements focussing on direct legitimacy lead most often to a negative evaluation in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in comparison to the nearest negative other model (NL: 87,3% versus 75,2% [neither]; and UK: 87,6% versus 73,5% [neither]). France forms an exception in this regard. Indirect legitimacy is also evaluated more negatively than the national average 87,1% (direct) and 83,5% (indirect). The analysis indicates that direct legitimacy is more prominent in the public debates.

The idea of the EU as a novel regime is almost completely absent from the debates. *Demoi*-crats aim to establish principles of legitimacy for a novel democratic *kratos*. However, this idea is nearly completely absent from the public debates. A negligible percentage of statements combine both modes of legitimacy. An exception to the pattern is the then Dutch *staatssecretaris* of European Affairs, Dick Benschop, who attempts to legitimate the EU through the idea of Network Europe (Obbema 2001). However, this idea tends to be more associated with technocratic output rather than democratic input. Therefore, it does not necessarily resonate well with *demoi*-cratic ideas. Instead, the findings indicate a dichotomous conceptualisation of the EU as either intergovernmental regime or federal state

(to-be).<sup>ix</sup> A Dutch article exemplifies this dichotomy: it presents the EU's future as an either-or choice between federal state or cooperation between states (Klamer and Magala 2001).

The statements on the EU's lack of direct legitimacy are actually made both by federalist and intergovernmentalist commentators. In the debates, federalists tend to argue that the EU lacks sufficient direct legitimacy, because its institutions have not yet developed into a full federal state or another form of federation. They understand the current EU-regime as an 'in-between'-phase in an on-going process of supranational federal integration. The Euro-sceptics' arguments depend on the same logic, but they want to resist this process. In this case, the desire – not the underlying democratic ideas – determines their position. On the other hand, intergovernmentalists tend to perceive EU-institutions as 'too democratised' and 'institutionalised'. The EU's direct legitimacy deficit is perceived as deriving not from institutional underdevelopment, but institutional *over*development. This evaluation is in turn linked to the lack of European people. Direct legitimacy tends to be evaluated negatively, because the EU-regime is neither a full federal state nor merely an intergovernmental one.

Statements on the EU's indirect legitimacy are less prominent, but tend to rely on similar ideas. Federalists believe that indirect legitimacy is insufficient or irrelevant; while Euro-sceptics argue that overly influential supranational institutions threaten it. Euro-sceptic intergovernmentalists (mainly in French) tend to share the latter concern with the Euro-sceptics. The Euro-sceptic and pro-European intergovernmentalists disagreement in their evaluation of the EU's legitimacy can to an extent be reduced to a clash in desires *pace* federalist and Euro-sceptics with regards to direct legitimacy. The intergovernmental idea is the same, but the desire to legitimate differs. The findings indicate that the positive evaluation of indirect legitimacy derives from a desire to legitimate. These intergovernmentalists do not seem to want to create a more federal regime any more than supranational federalists want to devolve to an intergovernmental one.

The *demoi*-cratic legitimacy does find some resonance with intergovernmentalists. The reliance on just indirect legitimacy is to some extent problematic for pro-European intergovernmentalists. Arguably, this is, in part, due to the fact that it attempts to solve a ‘democratic deficit’ that does not actually derive from its perception of the EU as at its core an intergovernmental regime. The British Gaullists ascribing to Tony Blair’s position<sup>x</sup> offer a particularly interesting solution from the perspective of *demoi*-cracy. Their proposal is the creation of a European Senate made up of national parliamentarians representing national constituencies in order to curtail EU-competences (Lichfield 2001). This *demoi*-cratic solution, however, is a compromise to intergovernmentalism rather than a self-aware move towards a European *demoi*-cracy. Actually, they tend to argue that the powerful position of the European Council secures democratic legitimacy (Macintyre 2000).

Similarly, the so-called yellow card procedure features a few times in the Dutch debate during the second period.<sup>xi</sup> For example, Andre Rouvout, Dutch politician of the Euro-sceptic Christian-Union, defends its introduction despite the rejection of the Constitutional treaty in order to tame the EU (NRC, 2005). Important similarities to the UK are the sceptical perception of the Dutch audience in this period and an intergovernmental logic tending to inform these proposals. The only possible *demoi*-cratic exception *might* be former EU-commissioner Frits Bolkenstein. He defends the treaty and supranational institutions, yet explicitly rejects the idea of a federal EU as unrealistic. However, his defence focuses on the status quo in relation to economic management, which is more output related (Brinkhorst and Bolkenstein 2005). Still, the idea of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy resonates in these proposals.

These findings do not bode well for the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy, as *demoi*-cratic principles find very little resonance in these debates. The EU’s legitimacy is not evaluated in relation to a combination between direct and indirect modes of legitimacy. On the contrary, neither intergovernmentalists nor federalists seek to balance in line with the second part of the *demoi*-cratic argument. These democrats argue for the necessity of a *demos*

on either the national (intergovernmental) or supra-national (federalist) level (Nicolaidis 2013: 354) resulting in a competition.

Still, some *demoi*-cratic ideas are found in the public debates, such as a European Senate of national parliaments or the yellow card procedure. However, these ideas do not seem to derive from a self-aware *demoi*-cratic ideal. Thus, there is some resonance of the idea of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy, which can be understood as promising for an ‘academic construct’. Still, the external evaluation might be positive according to *demoi*-cratic ideals, but self-aware *demoi*-cratic idea(l)s do not resonate in the internal perspective on the EU’s legitimacy.

### **Conclusion: Feeling stuck on the Rubicon**

The paper endeavoured to explore the resonance of ideas of *demoi*-cracy within three media debates on the EU’s legitimacy. This empirical research contributes to the largely political-theoretical literature on the EU as a *demoi*-cracy. It inquires from an internal rather than an external perspective into the EU as a legitimate *demoi*-cracy. The research’s offers two important shared results in relation to the resonance of *demoi*-cratic ideas in these public debates, despite their stark difference.

First, the findings indicate that the *demoi*-cratic analysis of the nature of the Euro-polity as a *kratos* with multiple *demoi*, yet without a *demos* is prominent in these debates. However, this analysis tends to be problematised rather than embraced in the debates. Secondly, it is important to note that the solutions for the ‘democratic’ deficit are not found in the achievement of a balance or combination, but rather in the creation of a democratic federal state or retrenchment into a more intergovernmental structure. These two democratic logics tend to compete rather than complement one another. Therefore, the EU might well be *demoi*-cratically legitimate from an external perspective. However, ideas of *demoi*-cracy are largely absent from the internal perspective on the EU’s legitimacy in these elite debates.

*Demoi*-cratic ideas find some limited resonance. These ideas are reflected in institutional innovations, namely the idea of a Senate of parliaments and the yellow card procedure. Interestingly, in contrast to the expected country effect, it is found most often in the most Euro-sceptic country. An explanation might well be that federal solutions will be more acceptable within pro-European debates. Pro-European British contributors might be forced to be more inventive, hence *demoi*-cratic ideas tend to emerge in this Eurosceptic debate. The Dutch public became understood as more sceptical, which might provide a similar explanation for the emphasis on the yellow card procedure in the second period. However, the proposals tend to be understood as intergovernmental rather than *demoi*-cratic.

The debates seem to confirm the expectation found in *demoi*-cratic literature on the persistence of democratic ideas. The research suggests that the debate lacks self-aware defenders of the EU as a *demoi*-cracy. Therefore, the state of affairs of the EU might be described from an external perspective as a (legitimate) *demoi*-cracy, but very little resonance is found from an internal perspective. To borrow Kalypso Nicolaïdis metaphor (2013: 367), the findings indicate a feeling of being “stuck on the Rubicon” rather than a celebration of such a status quo. The vocabulary of the democracy predicated on the existence of a ‘people’ seems indeed to have become ‘second nature’ (Nicolaïdis 2013: 367). The lack of self-aware *demoi*-crats might indicate that the *demoi*-cratic in-between state of the Euro-polity – to borrow a phrase – is an unlikely equilibrium (Marks et al. 1996: 372; Nicolaïdis 2013: 362), unlikely does not necessarily equate to ‘impossible’.

Finally, two potential limitations are worth noting; both of which could inform future empirical research into the EU’s *demoi*-cratic legitimacy. First, this research explores three public debates around the Euro-crisis and the constitution. These public debates might have evolved over time and other countries might possibly yield different results. For example, the yellow card procedure has been introduced, yet this need not mean actual acceptance from an internal perspective. Therefore, first of all, future research is recommended to analyse debates around more recent events, such as the Euro-crisis. Even though, some argue that this might

actually gave further impetus to democratic logics (Nicolaidis 2013: 1). Another recommendation following from this limitation is to inquire into the public debates in other Member States.

Second, the research inquired into public debates through opinion articles in quality newspaper. The contributors and readership of quality newspapers can be characterized as elites (Hurrelmann 2008: 194; Hurrelmann et al. 2012: 6). Therefore, even though these outlets *might* impact and reflect widely held opinions (e.g. Bruter 2003; Michailidou and Trentz 2013), one should be careful with any generalizations. Despite this obvious limitation, the advantage of focussing on more sophisticated elite opinion is the increased likelihood to find the relatively sophisticated ideas of *demos*-cracy. The lack of resonance found might therefore be deemed more significant as a result. Future research, however, might endeavour to inquire into other mass media outlets or undertake other types of public opinion research into the EU's *demos*-cratic legitimacy from an internal perspective.

[Appendix: Overall Overview Findings]

### **Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> For a critique of this interpretation, see (Hurrelmann 2007).

<sup>ii</sup> The following account draws primarily on Cheneval and Schimmelfennig (2013) and Nicolaidis (2013), in addition to increasing coherence within this special issue, it provides a fruitful framework for this empirical inquiry.

<sup>iii</sup> The no-state thesis is often associated with multi-level governance (e.g. Bache and Flinders 2004; Marks et al. 1996), but also, for example, the EU as a neo-medieval empire (Marks 2012; Zielonka 2006) or regional state (Schmidt 2004).

<sup>iv</sup> Similar theoretical considerations inform the focus on elite debates in (Hurrelmann 2008: 194; Hurrelmann et al. 2012: 6).

- <sup>v</sup> A small scale European public sphere might be emerging (Díez Medrano 2009: 89-92). However, national public spheres persist as the primary site of public debate (Cheneval and Schimmelfennig 2013).
- <sup>vi</sup> The analysis focuses on explicitly evaluative subset of statements within political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Other examples of this type of claims approach include: (Hurrelmann 2008, Hurrelmann et al. 2012; Stratham et al. 2010).
- <sup>vii</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> is the day between the French and Dutch referendum on the Constitutional treaty.
- <sup>viii</sup> The number of publications in France did increase from 17 to 58, which suggests an increase in importance of the EU's legitimacy (Liebert and Trentz 2008: 8).
- <sup>ix</sup> Juan Díez Medrano distinguishes between intergovernmental and intergovernmental/supranational models (2009: 103). The debates tend not to reflect the second nuance as a model for legitimation.
- <sup>x</sup> '[Blair] is a modern Gaullist' (Young 2001) and "'De Gaulle," [Blair] replied. "Top man"' (Macintyre 2000).
- <sup>xi</sup> Officially, this early warning mechanism offers the 'limited' power to delay legislation to national parliaments.

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**Table 1: Examples of Coding**

<b>Newspaper text</b>	With [referenda] one offers citizens in Europe at last a possibility to influence at least a part of European politics. It has to be a robust instrument. Relatively easy to organise with observable outcomes, able to influence the rigid system (Versteegh 2004).
<b>Coding</b>	Input: referenda Direct: referenda on a European level Negative: needs to be introduced
<b>Newspaper text</b>	It is to lead the fight against today the "democratic deficit" of the European institutions and their governance, so that the peoples of Europe recover control of their common destiny (Bavay, et al. 2004).
<b>Coding</b>	Input: peoples control institutions and governance Indirect: <i>peoples</i> need to control their common destiny Negative: they have no control
<b>Newspaper text</b>	He [Blair] takes wholly for granted, as his predecessors since then never did, the EU's essential role not only as a vehicle for enforcing the single market, but for tackling defence, crime, asylum and above all economic reform. (Macintyre 2000).
<b>Coding</b>	Output: tackling [problems] Indirect: <i>Britain's</i> national interests Positive: He takes wholly for granted ... the essential role

**Table 2: Number of Articles and Statements**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Articles Period 1</b>	<b>Statements Period 1</b>	<b>Articles Period 2</b>	<b>Statements Period 2</b>	<b>Articles Total</b>	<b>Statements Total</b>
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	24	144	25	157	49	301
<i>Volkskrant</i>	18	89	21	122	39	211
<i>The Independent</i>	18	84	18	91	36	175
<i>The Guardian</i>	22	122	19	123	41	245
<i>Le Figaro</i>	13	86	31	220	44	306
<i>Libération</i>	4	18	27	165	31	183

*Appendix: Overall Overview Findings*  
**The Netherlands**

Pattern/Evaluation		Positive	Negative
<b>Input</b>	Neither	12	44
	Direct	15	226
	Indirect	6	22
	Both	2	3
<b>Throughput</b>	Neither	4	23
	Direct	1	39
	Indirect	3	8
	Both	0	2
<b>Output</b>	Neither	12	18
	Direct	25	18
	Indirect	13	13
	Both	2	0

**The United Kingdom**

Pattern/Evaluation		Positive	Negative
<b>Input</b>	Neither	6	26
	Direct	13	138
	Indirect	14	43
	Both	3	4
<b>Throughput</b>	Neither	1	16
	Direct	3	24
	Indirect	4	15
	Both	0	0
<b>Output</b>	Neither	19	30
	Direct	11	29
	Indirect	10	10
	Both	1	0

**France**

Pattern/Evaluation		Positive	Negative
<b>Input</b>	Neither	11	27
	Direct	20	168
	Indirect	5	23
	Both	1	1
<b>Throughput</b>	Neither	5	23
	Direct	1	28
	Indirect	1	18
	Both	0	3
<b>Output</b>	Neither	28	31
	Direct	15	47
	Indirect	7	25
	Both	0	1

*Word count: 6253 + 950 = 7203*

