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The Green Democratic Reboot

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Contents

From a Green reboot of democracy to a democratic reboot of the Greens

Benoît Lechat

This combination of active citizenship and ecology is written onto the hard disk of nearly all Green parties across the world.

In recent years, the volume of articles and books dedicated to the democratic crisis has been constantly expanding. The same is true of the literature addressing the ecological crisis. Yet a simultaneous reflection both on the ecological and on the democratic crisis has not accompanied this proliferation. This is the intention of this print edition of the Green European Journal.

What we want to discuss is the dual significance of the "sustainability of democracy": 1. the capacity of democratic systems to be "sustainable", and to be transmitted to the future generations; 2. the ability of democratic representative systems to take up the ecological challenge and to respect the rights of the future generations.

The European elections showed us just a few worrisome trends: low voter turnout, especially in the newer member states; successes of populist, eurosceptic, even anti-democratic, parties; authoritarian tendencies; a narrowing of the pluralism in debates; the transformation of activism in political parties at a time when their hold on political life is only getting stronger…

These trends can be observed both at a national and European level where they are likely to have been accentuated by the economic and financial crisis. This edition seeks to identify and examine their root causes. It also sketches some reforms that could address them by, for example, strengthening participation in the democratic life in Europe.

ⓒⓢⓞ Mike Hiatt

But for the Greens and for all those who feel concerned by ecological problems, it is not only the future of democracy that is at stake, it is also the lot of future generations. This is the reason why since their beginnings in the seventies, the Greens have been advocating that it was not only possible but also necessary to achieve the ecological transformation of our lives through the reinforcement of democratic participation.

This combination of active citizenship and ecology is written onto the hard disk of nearly all Green parties across the world. It was also the base on which the Greens decided to start the "long march through the institutions" that led them not only into the parliaments but also into many governments in different European states.

More than thirty years later, the time has probably come to reflect on this original combination between democracy and ecology. Clearly, this does not mean that we need to go "back to the roots", to an orthodox conception of grassroots democracy from the early stages of the Greens. Nor does it mean that we want to sacrifice this pillar of the Green identity. On the contrary! What we do mean, however, is to reinvigorate the demand for democratic participation and to see how this demand can rise to the many democratic challenges that Europe currently faces.

But on the other hand, if we want this debate to be relevant, we need to take the deep changes to the historical context into account. In forty years, the social bases of both civic participation and environmental awareness have completely changed. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial to listen to the sociologists and political scientists who can help us to understand the changes that affect the social bases of this "Green citizenship".

Between 1980 and 2014, not only has the scale of the ecological problems dramatically expanded, but the social and anthropological conditions of political commitment have also been deeply transformed by the cultural evolution of our post-industrial societies. Any proposals of reforms of

We believe that the Green political foundations have a very important role to play in the democratic reboot, i.e., the re-inventing, re-establishing and re-launching of democracy on its new social and political bases.

the current democratic institutions towards more sustainability or more participation that would not integrate these structural changes would be doomed to fail.

More specifically, this edition examines the role that Green foundations can play in these debates, whatever their size and financial means. Therefore we have asked six different Green national foundations to explain how they concretely try to address the democratic and environmental issues in their respective countries. We have also asked them to describe briefly how they contribute to the reinforcement of the civic participation in their respective countries.

We believe that the Green political foundations have a very important role to play in the democratic reboot, i.e., the re-inventing, re-establishing and re-launching of democracy on its new social and political bases. Their autonomy towards the parties gives them better opportunities to enter into a dialogue with all the social and democratic movements that are not satisfied with the current state of our political systems. At the same time, they can modestly contribute to the "democratic reboot of the Greens" and, thereby, to the preparation of a new phase in the history of green political parties.

The scenario is not written yet. But it can be inspired by some democratic and social experiments that have been implemented recently. This is why the third section of this edition is dedicated to democratic initiatives and experiments which, albeit through a learning process of trial and error, are concrete attempts to fulfil the Green promise of more democracy and more sustainability. ◼

Benoît Lechat is editor-in-chief of the Green European Journal.

Dany Cohn-Bendit

Beyond political parties

The specificity of "democratic radicality" is by no means a bulwark for the Greens against developments or rationales that run counter to this "democratic requirement." Nonetheless, it is a progressive component of the Greens' heritage, one that must be constantly revived and that commits individuals to their responsibilities.

This article is the translation of the foreword to "Ecolo, la démocratie comme projet" by Benoît Lechat (Editions Etopia, 2014).

"Democratic radicality" as an integral part of the Greens' project

Castoriadis was one of the first to have discerned the emancipating potential, both for individuals and for societies, that is unique to political ecology. He placed ecology within the realm of autonomy, conceived as a form of self-government closely linked to a heightened consciousness of limits. Autonomy calls upon a critical consciousness that results in a fundamental questioning of the consumption and production habits that are inflicted upon us. In this way, autonomy emerges as a fertile dissidence of thought and behaviours through which individuals can reclaim their lives, while finding themselves in a common "destiny."

Ecological thought has unquestionably widened our view of the world and transformed our experience. It has managed to allow for the complexity and pluralism specific to contemporary societies. In the temporality of politics, it has also restored the future as a fundamental element of the present.

Political ecology, by establishing a specific blueprint for society, one that individuals can subscribe to freely and critically, takes part in the forming of "plausible utopias" to be determined within the democratic political space.

The democratic ambition and argumentative contents of political ecology plead, without a doubt, in its favour. Yet, if we consider the impact that the Greens have had purely in terms of election results – since they are actually not in a position to have a determining impact on the policies enacted by the parties in power – it must be noted that they have only been able to convince in part.

The Green discourse, when it doesn't simply try to mimic the conformist attitude of the majority parties, is undoubtedly complex. I would even go so far as to say that it is rendered more complex considering that the current climate is not conducive to political innovation, to empowerment, or to progressive views. Suffice to look at trends in Europe to gauge the amount of ideological backtracking and the success of conservative parties.

The rise of conservatism in Europe draws little or no attention, but is nonetheless a reality. It is all the stealthier because the rise of the extremist parties occupies centre stage. Conservative parties, often complacent towards openly reactionary rhetoric – when not integrating it directly into their own discourse of course – are able to draw voters through their minimalist approach to Europe. What's more, it is interesting to note that they often brandish their renationalised take on the European Union as a way of setting themselves apart and sidelining any and all type of sovereigntists. This game of subtle opposition is rattling to say the least. And it explains how a "monstrous complementarity" is gradually being established between acceptable conformist conservatism and a nauseating extremism that is increasingly shrinking the room available for any type of discourse that is even slightly more enlightened.

@①⊕⊜ European Parliament

Too often, we forget that the European project, by definition, is capable of taking numerous forms. It is far from living up to its full, and in my mind promising, potential.

Putting democracy back at the core of the European political project

Given all of this, it should come as no surprise that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Greens to argue in favour of a European Union structured around the values of the democratic rule of law – with its legitimacy stemming from its ability to democratise globalisation – without being relegated by some to the camp of the extremists of irresponsible utopias or being reduced, by others, to just another conformist like the majority parties. This was illustrated in July 2013 at the time of the discussions on the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament for the first time had the power to stand up for a European budget able to support the interests of Europeans. Everyone agreed that the budget defended by the member states did not respond to the social and economic crisis rocking the continent. But, when it came time to vote, the three majority parties (conservatives, socialists and liberals) wound up accepting a conservative European budget, pushed notably by U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron. Obviously, up against that overwhelming united front the opposition Greens, with less than 8% in the European Parliament, were crushed.

Too often, we forget that the European project, by definition, is capable of taking numerous forms. It is far from living up to its full, and in my mind promising, potential. I would even go so far as to say that it currently exists in its worst possible form. In so far as the European Union is a "political project" it is neither a given nor unequivocal. Its current morphology is the product of the interaction amongst the political forces in power which are updating a European project, and more comprehensively a blueprint for society, that is their own. The old refrain, "there is no alternative" certainly has its supporters in political circles, but

it is worth pointing out that it is by no means an immutable truth. No matter how much conviction it is affirmed with, it is a clear argument from authority: no more, no less.

When well understood, democracy is a "risk shared" by political forces and citizens. A one-dimensional solution likely to solve all problems and answer all questions is a pipe dream. Currently, what worries me the most is the decline in pluralism, which has come so far as to border on ideology. Today's grammar of politics is astoundingly poor. Political thought has become monochromatic and caters to simplistic binary logic, even among our ranks.

Breaking the mould

Some are satisfied to denounce a legitimacy crisis in Europe without realising that, in reality, it runs much deeper than that. The crisis affecting the European institutions is to a certain extent an amplification of the one that has been affecting national politics for a long time. Defiance towards democratic representative institutions and the political class should particularly pique our attention. It forces us to re-evaluate the scope of politics, and, among other things, the role of political parties, whose modus operandi and traditionalism no longer meet the expectations of individuals. Political parties, when they are not simply serving as machines for consolidating power for one person or another, are often out of touch with reality. And experience has shown us how difficult it is for the party apparatus to reform on its own. Understandably, many people refuse to constrain themselves to rigid structures. Changing commitments and the picking of political battles often result in some not feeling the need to join a specific organisation or to commit to a political party. Therefore, the Greens would do well to undertake an open process of transformation towards structures that are permeable to life.

ⓘⒸⒺ European Parliament

As I prepare to leave the institutional political sphere, I feel as though we have a duty to go back to some issues that at first glance might seem elementary, but that, in reality, are essential: What is the purpose of politics? What is the blueprint for society that drives the various political parties and groups? How far are they willing to go to explain them and compare and contrast them in public debate? To what extent do political parties recognise the role of individuals in the development of their political platform? Just how far does our democratic ambition go?

Let us be so impertinent as to put democracy back at the core of the political project even if, and especially because, it is inconvenient to the customary practices of the parties. It is a risk, but one that seems necessary to me if we are to strengthen the progressive spirit and political maturity of our societies, and restore the vitality of pluralism. ◨

Daniel Cohn-Bendit was one of the main leaders of the May '68 protest movement. He was a member of the European Parliament from 1994 until 2014, representing both the German and French Green delegations in rotation. Until May 2014 he was co-president of the Greens/EFA Group in the Parliament.

John Barry

Ska Keller

The Green promise of democracy

What do the Greens think about the current fatigue with representative democracy? Can the green idea of including more people in the political process, and in more ways, address this general disenchantment? A discussion between Ska Keller and John Barry.

GEJ: What are your feelings as Green politicians on the state of democracy in Europe based on your own experiences in your respective arenas, in Belfast and the European Parliament?

Ska Keller (SK): When it comes to European democracy there are two levels to it: how it actually is and how it's perceived to be. Democracy in Europe is perceived as really poor whereas, although it is obviously to be improved, I don't think it's as terrible as it's often perceived. At least, it's not necessarily worse than on many other levels, whether national or local, but it's perceived as being much worse. In order to improve the democracy in Europe, I think it's very important to strengthen the European Parliament, giving it the right to initiate, having transnational lists, making the European Citizens' Initiative better, as currently the hurdles are way too high for the meagre outcome that you are going to get. It is not simply about improving the democratic links to institutions, like national governments, but rather to the people directly. It is very important that all Europeans feel they have a direct say rather than only through their governments or parliaments on the national level.

John Barry (JB): I would describe it as a general alienation within mature democracies across Europe with formal politics, like the party competitive system, national and local parliaments. There is a kind of tiredness of this type of representative government and maybe that is part of the debate we need to have as Greens – how do we not just reform institutions of democracy, but effectively re-found our democratic politics at European, national and indeed local levels? I also think there is a growing context of insecurity amongst many people across Europe, certainly in my own town Belfast, where it is aggravated by the particular post-conflict situation of Northern Ireland, which itself creates insecurity and anxiety. The impact of austerity, the global economic crisis, and a sense of globalisation being out of control all feed into this alienation.

ⓘⓈⓔ master phillip

A pillar of the Green movement

GEJ: As Greens, we have a very strong commitment towards democracy; would you agree that Greens regard democracy as not only a tool, but also as a goal in itself? Do you feel the Greens' approach to democracy is different in comparison to other parties?

SK: Obviously, democracy is extremely important to us Greens and it is a value in itself, but it is also a tool for making policies that are actually beneficial to people. It's only if you make policies in a democratic way, allowing for people to participate, that the policies can be the right ones. So it is a value in itself but ultimately, the aim behind it is to give everyone the opportunity to participate and to make people's voices heard.

JB: I think we have to remember that democracy is one of the four pillars of the Green movement. What really marks the Greens as being different is that we want to see democratisation, the principle that democracy should extend to as many places of our social lives as possible. A key issue for Greens is "why should democracy end at the factory gate or office door?" Greens view citizens not simply as taxpayers, nor simply as voters, rather we encourage people to take control of more of their lives in a democratic manner. Ultimately, we want to create a democratic culture and society and not just a formal democratic institutional system which allows citizens to vote.

What we have experienced is that we cannot have democracy without maintaining the individual freedoms of people, because you need that freedom in order to be able to participate, to have your own free will to express yourself and be able to disagree with others.

Ska Keller

GEJ: It could be argued that in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Green movement in the 1970s was developing, the idea of democracy as a broader social ideal rather than just a form of institutional organisation was more entrenched, while the years following this saw a period of democratic rollback. What do you think has changed? Do you think it is possible to develop a culture of democratic participation in today's individualistic society?

JB: Absolutely, it is so important especially at this time to recognise that the global economic crisis and the crisis within the European Parliament is also a democratic crisis. And so is the ecological crisis around climate change, with its failure to take into account the impact of our way of life. The Green promise of democracy is the idea that we include more people in the discussion around, for example, the real impacts of our energy decisions. Not all problems can be solved by more democracy and democracy as a decision-making procedure doesn't necessarily guarantee any particular outcome, but on balance it is more likely to produce fairer, more equal and more sustainable outcomes.

Among the Greens, there sometimes tends to be an antipathy towards the idea of leadership in that somehow it is authoritarian, which is always a danger, but we should not be afraid of distributed leadership – leadership, not leaders. Currently we are in a media-obsessed era of passivity, where citizens simply sit back and see politics as a spectacle, and I think this has to be dealt with.

SK: If you look at the Eastern European experience, this was completely different. In fact we saw a surge of democratic movements in the 1990s. From that experience, I would reject the notion that individualism goes against democracy. What we have experienced is that we cannot have democracy without maintaining the individual freedoms of people, because you need that freedom in order to be able to participate, to have your own free will to express yourself and

be able to disagree with others. Therefore, it is very important that people value themselves and others and I reject the notion that individualism is against community. You must be able to have the individual at the centre of policy-making.

JB: I think a Green republicanism can answer the question of how we balance the absolute focus on liberty and freedom of the individual but in a common life with others. Democracy is a non-violent way of disagreeing and that contestation is more important than consensus at times and we shouldn't shy away from it.

Daring to disagree

GEJ: In some Green parties there can be a fear of dissent, debate, and disagreement, because there is a fear of creating division and conflicts. Do you see that also in your parties?

JB: Partly why the republican ideal appeals to me is that I come from a political context which has been very violent and fraught, where dissent was actually dangerous. So you would imagine I should go the opposite way and not want to embrace dissent or contestation, but I actually feel more empowered when presenting a Green, robust version of democracy as people being free to disagree fundamentally, but ultimately respect each other as fellow citizens. That is the key issue, that individualism, dissent and contestation can only really be reconciled on the basis of some degree of solidarity and fellow citizenship. We live a common life and there is a common good and that's what politics is about, it's not an exact science. That is why democracy is the only way forward in terms of debate and deliberation.

SK: Every party has its own traditions and political history and no system is perfect, also in the German Greens we have had huge discussions about how to make things more democratic and there are always disagreements. Overall, I would say it works fairly well but we are learning and adapting all the time and there is quite a lively

debate and, come election time, this sometimes makes things very difficult. But, it is very important that you have lively policy debates within the party. Obviously, Greens agree more or less on what sort of better world they want but the way that we get there is often debated. These disagreements must be brought to the surface and the more space you give to really open debates, the less chance there is of hidden disagreements emerging later. But democracy is never perfect, you always have to keep improving it; traditions that were once really effective might no longer be as valid today. People change, technology changes, and you need to be able to adapt because democracy is only alive when it is moving.

ⓘ⊛◎ Grünen Sachsen

GEJ: The way democracy is implemented by Greens in our own structures says a lot about our ideas on it. Do you feel there is a strong divide in parties today between the professionals, the activists, and the volunteers and are you trying to strengthen the involvement of activists in the democratic process within your parties?

SK: The activists are always the most important part of any party and I always find it amazing that the other parties have their party congresses in the middle of the week when it's clear that no volunteer could come and only the professionals can attend. Whereas, our party congresses are held at the weekend for the purpose of making it possible for everybody to attend. The local party

groups depend on voluntary work, especially in the East where we do not have any strong professional structures, it's all volunteers and the whole organisation depends on them.

JB: Our party is still relatively young and small; therefore it is much more egalitarian. We certainly have had discussions around issues that democratic debate is a form of social learning – we need to constantly challenge ourselves. If there was one criticism I would have of the Green movement, having been a member for nearly 25 years, it is that we are far too nice and we don't challenge each other as much as we should which often leads to a lazy consensus where we all end up agreeing. We suffer in silence which not only builds up resentment, but it means we are not learning and for me, part of the democratic decision making process is about social learning.

The challenge of the long term

GEJ: A broader social challenge is the inability or unwillingness of political representatives and institutions in our current democratic system to adopt a long-term perspective, to address the ecological crisis, for example. There was a proposal for a "Senate for Future Generations" made up of representatives from civil society. Do you think this could be a means to ensure that we meet our sustainability targets?

JB: This is one of the major challenges but it is not just an issue of democratic institutions. We now live in a culture of short-termism, which is the opposite of sustainability. At the macro level the way the economy operates demonstrates this clearly – we hear the media and politicians constantly referring to quarters, then at the micro level, there is a culture of consumerism which infantilises citizens resulting in people wanting instant gratification. Meanwhile, the political system at the very most looks at the next election, so it is very difficult to see how sustainability can

really be embedded in this system. The Iroquois had what they called "The Law of the Seventh Generation" which urged current generations to live sustainably and work for the benefit of the next generations. With any decision on a road network or energy infrastructure, we need to ask the question "what will be the impact of this three, four or five generations down the line?" I think there are institutional mechanisms by which we can do this, for example a second chamber consisting of people whose job it is represent children, the non human world or to represent long-term thinking. Or we could also have every piece of legislature equality-proofed, like we have here in Northern Ireland – why not have mandatory requirements that large-scale infrastructural changes in society have to be sustainability-proofed? There are lots of democratic innovations we can look at to usher in this long-term thinking.

SK: Short-termism is not something new nor is it only linked to capitalism. It's actually quite natural and understandable from people's point of view because it is difficult to predict what will happen in one or 10 years time. So the question is, how do we also take into account long-term consequences? Perhaps, it needs the leadership you mentioned to argue for the long-term perspective, but at the same time our whole party was made with the long-term perspective in mind, to look into the future. Take the example of the destruction of nature – it's done for a short term benefit but results in a long-term loss. But our party is proof that people can and do get together and say "We have to think about the long-term". I wouldn't say it's as simple as saying it's linked to consumerism. There is also a problem with electoral terms, for instance if you are elected for four or five years you will obviously think in those terms, but at the same time it would not be a good idea to extend election periods to ten years.

JB: What's very unique about our current situation is that we know our continuing carbon addiction, our way of life based on a "make, take and throw away" approach, is leading to medium and long-term
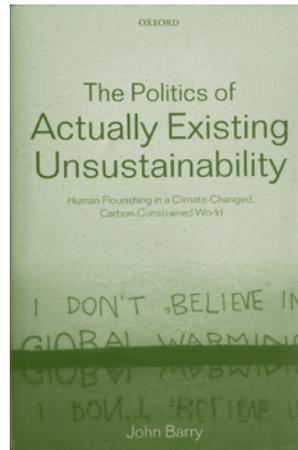
consequences. The reality is, unlike previous human generations who could be forgiven for their short-term thinking as they didn't have the knowledge, we know we are going to run into serious ecological problems 10-20 years down the line if we carry on down this "ecocidal" path based on fossil fuel and an economy based on orthodox economic growth. How we as Greens deal with the issue is a tricky one as we can be seen as negative and quickly dismissed as a "doomsdayer". We have to recognise we are in a unique position, that this generation of human beings could be accurately documenting our own demise. We don't need any more scientific reports to tell us what we're doing – we know what we're doing. What we lack is the political will and the imagination to do something about it.

A Green definition of freedom

SK: We have to be careful about not coming across as if we feel we know better than everyone else what is best for people, because every individual is capable of making their own choices. That is a challenge as not everybody will be convinced, even by the scientific evidence, that we need to lower CO_2 emissions. Having said that, the state does have the obligation to regulate behaviour – we have taxes which are levied on things based on what they contribute to society or the harm they cause. There is an obligation as you need state income and it makes sense to tax things

which could be harmful to society. You can't forbid people from taking actions like flying, but you can simply say if you choose an action which is harmful to society then you have to adopt a "polluter pays" policy. Of course, you can't put a price tag on the living quality of future generations but at least you have people contributing somehow. I also think it's very important to challenge our notion of freedom. Freedom is not just about owning a house and a nice car; it's also about freedom to live in a healthy environment, to have your own space for creativity, not having to work huge amounts of overtime – to be able to have the freedom to do other things in your life. We should challenge this notion of freedom as simply the freedom to own and have a broader understanding of what freedom really means.

GEJ: Do you have any concrete institutional proposals for improving politicisation and participation in your society, or do you know of some concrete examples?

JB: In Porto Alegre in Brazil, for example, they have initiated something called "participatory budgeting", which allows ordinary citizens or municipalities to have public budgets which are decided democratically by referenda or by street level forms of democracy. This has been experimented with in other places as well. It is about showing people that this is their money, their income and they should have some input into how that money is spent. I also like the idea of worker-owned cooperatives, not just because it empowers the citizens making them more socially aware, but also because they tend to be more environmentally aware and do not necessarily go all out for economic growth because they value the work/life balance. And they can give workers more autonomy, which is another element of freedom – autonomy in places of production and work is something I think we as Greens need to promote.

SK: Yes, there are many examples of local initiatives, not all are successful of course but it's

important to experiment with different forms. Local budgeting is one area, but another is communal city planning where if a building is being demolished for example, the citizens get together and can decide what should happen. In Berlin recently, for example, we had a referendum on the airfield and the people decided to keep it free and open for everybody and not build more houses on it. We also have local currencies and digital forms of participation which are really interesting developments and we should always be open to new ideas. ◼

© Tempelhof

On May 25th 2014, the citizens of Berlin rejected plans for housing development on the site of the former airport of Tempelhof, subsequently turned into a park. This referendum was the result of a citizen's initiative.

This a citizens' initiative was conducted on June 19, 2014.

Prof. John Barry is a Green Party local councillor in Northern Ireland and Professor of Green Political Economy at Queen's University Belfast specialising in the economic, political and cultural dimensions of the transition from unsustainability. His latest book is The Politics of Actually Existing Unsustainability *(Oxford University Press, 2012).*

Ska Keller has been a member of the European Parliament since 2009 in the Greens-EFA Group. In the European elections of May 2014 she was selected as one of the European Green Party's two leading candidates to run for presidency of the Commission.

Ulrike Guérot

Robert Menasse

Europe's unfinished democracy

Old Europe is disaggregating. The new Europe, which has long been a reality in the mind of many European citizens, is waiting for its constitution, one that will effectively take us into the future.

The debate should be about whether (and how) a post-national, democratic Europe could be a defendable aim for political voluntarism: politically, economically and culturally

European integration is yesterday's word; European democracy tomorrow's. The problem is not "more or less" European integration, as most of the current EP-campaign rhetoric between the defenders of Europe and the "populists" makes believe. The problem is that Europe, the Eurozone, is monetarily fully and economically deeply integrated, but has no democracy. For the euro is an orphan currency, a transnational currency without transnational democracy. That is what hurts Europe today.

To be sure: the European Union is legitimate in a legal sense; all the treaties and contracts which constitute the institutional fabrics of European governance have been passed by votes and referenda at some moment or another. But European citizens don't perceive them as intuitively democratic, because the so-called sui generis structure of the EU's triangular setup - where most political energy is spent in institutional fights between the EP, the Council and the Commission – barely allows political opposition, let alone the reversibility of policy choices. You can vote all you want; you'll get the same Europe!

There is no discursive space for those who want Europe, but different policies. Those who wish to see a political turn-around, need to be against the system. This is, in essence, what fuels the current success of the populists – left and right – because politics is about options, not rubber stamping. T.I.N.A. (there is no alternative) sucks – but whereas the mainstream features Tina, the populists pose the right questions... and provide the wrong answers.

At conferences about Europe, again and again you hear that Europe is caught in a catch-22: the EU system is untenable but cannot be reformed. Where a political solution is unachievable, the technocratic structures prevail, and the discontent not only of the citizens but also of the officials in Brussels grows. The latter now openly say that the EU does not work any more – or won't for much longer – and that Europe has been creeping for some time towards disintegration.

A Europe for all

"We thought democracy is about participation but actually it is about equality", Pierre Rosanvallon writes. Form follows function: where the EU offers formal democracy, EU citizens request democratic content – a social Europe. Where functional democracy is hollowed out by formal principles, the populist vengeance is just around the corner. For democracy is seen not merely in the formal functioning of its institutions, but also as about the organization of cultural and socio-economic bodies, which form deeply enrooted fabrics of societal living.

The debate should be about whether (and how) a post-national, democratic Europe could be a defendable aim for political voluntarism: politically, economically and culturally. The question is whether reconstituting Europe, the Eurozone, differently, could be the solution to the global threats to democracy that one can observe these days.

To be sure: the actual threats to representative democracy today take many forms and are not just a problem for Europe. There are at least three of these, the first being the paradigm shift from democracy to efficiency. The subordination of politics to the demands of efficient capital exploitation and the maximisation of profit, even when this destroys human livelihoods, by definition systematically sucks out any meaning from democracy, even more so when such politics are organised so as to still provide democratic legitimacy for this exploitation.

ⓘ mac_ivan

Democracy is not guaranteed by the abstract right of political participation but by equal opportunities, which make participation possible. Sociologists have long known that sections of the middle class are fearful of social relegation, that their votes in elections are intended to show their anger and deliver a warning, and that this can end up in them voting against their objective interests. Also long known is that the poor don't go to the polls anymore because the bottom fifth in society have ceased to believe that their vote has any influence on politics.

The last point concerns something demographically determined, namely the political disempowerment of European youth, whose role in the formation of a European future is slipping from our fingers. Their futures are being betrayed. The proportion of young voters (18-25) supporting Europe's populist parties is high, for Orban and Le Pen, Lucke and Wilders offer an "alternative". This fiction, in the desolate institutional maze of European crisis management, seeks to find its way into a disillusioned public sphere. To believe that the votes for Marine Le Pen will again quickly drop from 25 to only 6 or 8 percent simply because at some point the French GDP will grow by 1 percent is naïve. And as Thomas Piketty tells us, growth is no longer with us anyway.

European "demo - I - cracy"
"More Europe" is a hackneyed phrase, and "better communication" a useless concept if the political elites are not ready to say what "more Europe" means, but are instead fearful of convincingly pleading the case for an innovative, consequential and post-national political concept – for a democratic Europe.

This Europe would need to be about inventing European "demolcracy" – with a capital "I" (a demoicracy is a polity of multiple distinct people or demoi). It would be about organising a European civil society and giving it a voice in the European system. It would be about de-homogenising national discourse and the creation of a space for transnational discussion and policy-making. When it concerns the euro crisis, energy policy or crime, focusing on German, French, Finnish or Portuguese opinion is hardly relevant – and (wrongly) presupposes national homogeneity.

The insistence on this fiction of national interests within post-national development produces an unproductive contradiction, which cannot lead to any reasonable synthesis. The voice of civil society and the interests of citizens usually lose out. Multinational companies use this in that they exploit the advantages of the single market and at the same time seek to duck paying tax by playing national governments against each other to the detriment of European citizens, who are held captive in the narrow prison-cells of national identity and a social-political straitjacket. They are thus unable to defend themselves from the costs of this game, against which they rebel rightly but with no prospect of success, being disenfranchised. At the same time rich French people change their citizenship and become Belgians in order to evade the wealth tax in their own country. It would be hard to find a more vivid example of how the concept of nation can be perverted.

It is essential to recognise that national democracy cannot function in this way any longer, but that European democracy cannot function yet. Everything hinges on the one important question for the year 2014, which must be put to all European citizens, not to the nation states: are we ready and willing, on the basis of equal EU citizenship, to develop a truly democratic, that is, a consistently post-national Europe? Are we ready, for example, to seriously discuss – for the Eurozone first – a European unemployment insurance system? Or universally-applicable European industrial relations that match the way the European supply chain works? Are we ready to talk about a common tax system, and harmonise our socio-economic parameters?

Euroland has been a single market for a long time now, but this reality is not reflected in the socio-political sphere of national parliaments and national public spending.

Unproductive contradiction

At present Europe is forced into economic, country-to-country comparisons. On the question of a transfer union a distinction is made, often with chauvinistic overtones, between donor and recipient, or northern and southern countries. And yet not all of Germany is rich, and not all of Greece or Italy is poor. If we could only learn to understand Euroland as an aggregated economy, which it has always been anyway, it would then be possible to consider transfer systems which would establish a fiscal equalisation scheme from one (always privileged) centre to an economic (always disadvantaged) periphery, or (transnationally) from urban to rural regions, afflicted as these are with infrastructural problems throughout Europe.

All statistics, always, have shown that Europe is but one giant market, and that borders are superbly ignored by economic ties. But this has yet to evolve into a political macro-economy with collaborative control and taxation. There is indeed a legal single currency in 18 countries, but it coexists with national account systems and national budgets that are subject to the sovereignty of the national parliaments. This is a sterile contradiction which can produce only one thing: crisis!

Euroland has been a single market for a long time now, but this reality is not reflected in the socio-political sphere of national parliaments and national public spending. A Europe-wide unemployment insurance would be a solution matching the way things are developing: underlying this is the idea of an indirect, brokered financial transfer not based on borders; this would, besides, have the effect of creating a sense of identity.

In the present structure of European governance – held back by the nation-state approach – the national economies of the Eurozone must compete against each other with an eye on, for example, productivity, exports or growth. The flaw in the structure of European governance up till now has been that individual countries are supposed to comply with detailed macro-economic goals, with

European Parliament

relative freedom as to how to reach these goals. But in the absence of a properly regulated, even playing-field on tax or socio-political regulations (for example) in the Eurozone, this system cannot work.

Democratic governance is key

Where European democracy is emasculated, the populists triumph. The surge in Eurosceptic MEPs after the Euro elections – along with an increase in the number of parties represented in the European parliament – could lead to nearly Weimar conditions and inefficiency in the EP. This will give grist to the mill of those who say that the EP is not a proper parliament.

Drawing from the latest Franco-German suggestions of Glienicker and the Eiffel group, together with the convincing memorandum for a political union by the French economist, Thomas Piketty, here is a concept for a viable European future. It starts with the Eurozone, but other EU member states could join in stages.
A common fiscal policy is introduced in the Eurozone, with a Eurozone budget (ca. 3-7 percent of the Eurozone GDP) that goes well beyond the present one, which is extracted from the infrastructural and cohesion fund of the EU in transfer payments. Fiscal redistribution is launched alongside the European unemployment insurance, which acts as an automatic stabiliser. The shell construction of a European executive authority would be placed opposite a strong European legislative body.

We must dare to make a new European beginning, as the current system is running out of steam.

The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) could become the embryo of a European Finance Ministry and a Eurozone parliament would get the legislative right to take initiatives and oversee the budget. The "permanent President of the Eurogroup" evoked in this Franco-German paper, could be seen as a future European Treasurer, or European Finance Minister, who would manage the Eurozone budget. Thus European democracy would finally exist horizontally (a European legislative body vs. a European executive body) and no longer vertically: nation state vs. Europe. The Eurozone could act as a powerful magnet for other EU countries and these could in time join this new Euro-democracy. The democratic system of the Eurozone would move in the direction of a division of powers à la Montesquieu. Whoever thinks this is building castles in the air should look at the September 2012 Westerwelle Report on the future of Europe.

The Commission would have to be developed into a future Euro-government, as described already in 1994 in the Schäuble-Lamers document. At the same time, its (neutral) functions regarding economic competition in the EU would have to be separated from its political functions. The Commission would be divided up into single Ministries (and simultaneously reduced in size), which can arise from the present Directorates-General: a Ministry for Foreign Affairs (the current EEAS), a Trade Ministry, a Ministry for Development, a Ministry for Agriculture, a Ministry for Energy, a Ministry for Cyber Communications, etc.

Only in this way can political decisions be clearly assigned. The individual Ministries could represent the ruling coalition of the European Parliament, and political lines of demarcation would become visible. Today, Commissioners are perceived as mere national representatives, who in addition

to their own perimeter get involved in matters that are in direct contradiction to the "national interests" of their country. This is the reason why most of the proposals coming from the Commission feel undemocratic.

History happens largely by default and not as a result of "grand bargains". But it is high time to think about which way we want the European idea to develop in the twenty-first century. We must dare to make a new European beginning, as the current system is running out of steam. We must set our hopes on a new European Constitutional Convention – or, better, a constituent assembly – in which European citizens, over and above the heads of their national delegates, can directly participate via an elaborate system of representation. The formation of a European res publica must come from civil society.

In this century, we will hopefully be spared the "big crash", which again and again in history has marked a break between epochs. But there is no doubt that the creeping disintegration of old Europe has already been under way for some time. The new Europe, which has long been a reality in the consciousness of many European citizens, is waiting for its constitution, one that will effectively take it into the future. ◼

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Democratic dispossession

John Pitseys

The economic crisis and the democracy crisis share some of the same causes: redefining the ideal of democracy, the impotence of current regulatory methods in the face of collective decision-making, and a crisis within political programmes. Yet, analysis of the causes suggests that in many ways the feeling of a crisis in democracy, in the European Union as a whole and in individual Member States, preceded the economic and financial crisis.

In essence, democracy is a questionable regime since it gives every citizen the right to think and say that what others think and say is stupid.

In France, Italy and Spain, as well as in some Scandinavian and Eastern European countries, opinion polls show a downward trend in approval ratings for political representatives and public institutions as a whole. This decline is coupled more widely with a political and societal reactionism of public opinions as demonstrated by various protests during the adoption of the "marriage for all" bill in France, and the referendum which resulted in a no vote for same sex marriage in Croatia.

Of course, trends vary according to geographical location, but for some 20 years they have resulted in an increase in votes for populist parties across Europe: in Eastern Europe (Hungary), Northern Europe (Finland, Denmark, Sweden), in Central Europe, and in Western Europe (France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria) with the rise of the National Front in France, Vlaams Blok in Flanders, and the Liberty Party in Austria. These trends arise from, among others, a greater desire for power and the resurgence of the "scapegoat" rhetoric. At least, that is what garnered 7% of the votes for Golden Dawn, an openly neo-Nazi party, in Greece's national elections in 2011.

On both an electoral and chronological scale, the emergence of the democracy crisis does not seem to be directly related to the economic crisis. With the exception of Greece, the countries hardest hit by the economic crisis are not necessarily those that weathered the storm of the most visible democracy-defying demonstrations. Inversely, since 2008, the rise of "outside of the system" parties, on both the left and right, has been more intense in those countries generally portrayed as being at the top of the class economically in Europe: for example, Finland, Austria, Denmark, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands.

The rise of populism is undoubtedly fed by a sort of "chauvinism of well-being" which combines a desire for economic preservation with a fear of slipping from the front of the pack in the wild goose chase of the world economy. That said,

such anxiety existed long before the economic crisis and stems more from a fear – sometimes controlled, sometimes shameful – in the face of globalisation and the rules of the economic game, and the relativity of a level playing field.

Democracy in crisis: a weathered concept
In this context, the rise and restructuring of populism reminds us that there is nothing more anchored in political thought than the idea of a "democracy crisis". In essence, democracy is a questionable regime since it gives every citizen the right to think and say that what others think and say is stupid. As illustrated by Canfora, political thought has always proved sceptical when reflecting on the virtues of democracy.

From Aristotle to Schumpeter, the idea that exercising the sovereignty of the people could actually create general interest has long been considered hazardous at best, the people being conceived either as a passive mass or an aggregate of irreconcilable interests. At worst, it is considered as a simulacrum for putting and keeping the strongest and richest in power through majority consent. It has always seemed tenuous that the most incompetent members within a community could legitimately construct well-being, and that collective construction could be anything more than a shadow theatre for the strongest.

Nonetheless, current defiance presents some specific structural dimensions that lead to the rejection of the term democracy crisis. The causes have not been triggered by the economic crisis. They comprise a deep-rooted ideological fatigue, in both the destabilisation of the idea of political community, and the loss of the meaning of institutional transpositions of the democratic ideal.

An era of peace and compromise
First, let us address ideological fatigue. Putting aside the question of social inequality in the strictest sense of the term, there has never been a more peaceful time in terms of political conflict in the EU. Communism is no longer considered

The idea that a legitimate regime should promote shared citizenship is debunked by the observation that some stakeholders have access to significantly more resources, more routes to power, and even more opportunities for failure, to such an extent that they live in a parallel political stratum.

the bogeyman. A liberal-democrat compromise has been largely imposed. Although the social partners do not participate in negotiations and/or the implementation of social policies everywhere, they do benefit from a legal status.

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The degree of political violence experienced in Europe towards the end of the 1980s, whether perpetrated by the police or extra-parliamentary political groups, has quickly been forgotten. We are currently experiencing a period of resignation regarding the political debate. Christian democracy has lost a sizeable chunk of its confessional base and, with the end of the bi-polar world, part of its allure. One example is the German CDI – those parties that still carry the flame of Christian democracy have essentially shifted from an inter-classist stance towards the centre-right of the political sphere. Liberalism no longer seems to hold the key to unlocking the economic and social promises of simultaneously achieving strong growth, economic development, a flourishing middle class, and – in fine – enhanced well-being.

Finally, for nearly 20 years, social democracy has positioned itself as a doctrine of the social adjustment of capitalism. Either it redefines its identity around progressive or democratic values, as if simply subscribing to political liberalism were enough to define a redistribution model, or it presents itself as a realistic version of socialism without, however, clearly defining its objectives, or more generally, its less-than-ideal conception

of justice. Therefore, the redistribution of wealth ideal gives way to the logic of helping the weakest, which is now justified as social inclusion or social cohesion. In this way, the fact that social equality is no longer an objective per se feeds a generalised doubt as to whether or not political institutions are able to promote the well-being of all. It also weakens the very meaning of political equality: the idea that a legitimate regime should promote shared citizenship is debunked by the observation that some stakeholders have access to significantly more resources, more routes to power, and even more opportunities for failure, to such an extent that they live in a parallel political stratum.

What lies beyond the nation state?
This feeling of ideological impotence is accompanied by a growing difficulty in identifying the social basis upon which democracy is built. In other words, it is becoming increasingly complex for citizens to determine to whom common rules apply and where such rules come from. It is well known that public administration is undergoing a double process of denationalisation and destatisation. Yet, this process does not just require a re-evaluation of the nation state as a reference in political decision-making. It also saps the legal framework we have inherited from modernity, which is characterised, among other things, by checks and balances, the pyramid of laws, the principle of rule of law, and state monopoly on collective administration. The emergence of what François Ost and Michel van de Kerchove refer to as "law in networks" does not necessarily imply force prevailing over law. It responds to specific constraints associated with the desire for more flexibility and openness in the concept and application of legal standards.

However, it tends to increase the uncertainties citizens have as to the where, how and who: Who is making the decisions – governments, public or private international institutions, networks of stakeholders? What are the various steps in the decision-making process? How can one exert

Reducing democracy to an increasingly diluted relationship between the citizen's vote and establishing a government programme and its negotiated transposition to Europe, results in reinforcing the idea that democratic elections have ridiculously little influence on public management.

influence on them? Contemporary transformation of the legal scope gives the impression that the action of representatives is either becoming incomprehensible – when decisions are made by elected or co-opted representatives in bodies that are increasingly being removed from public view – or derisory, when the simplest decision must get through three levels of power, some of which are completely removed from the political control of citizens. Finally, the very discerning of these rules can be unclear – many of them are part of "grey legality" that includes official recommendations, management by indicators, and reports that result in social sanctions imposed by peers. Therefore, the question raised is not just if the national level is the most appropriate for handling public affairs, but is also how to democratically organise social institutions that, although extra-governmental, make a significant impact on community life.

The shift in democracy towards a strong regime or technocratic government is not the result of a sudden power grab by fascist movements or a mysterious group of experts, but rather of a gradual, passive, re-evaluation of the idea that political legitimacy comes from the collective exercising of Individual political equality.

Flawed transparency
This re-evaluation runs through the gradual neutralisation of the principle of representation, as witnessed by a quick overview of the EU institutions. Often criticised for being overly bureaucratic, in fact the European institutions now function much more democratically than they did even 10 years ago, both in terms of broadening the European Parliament's powers and media attention to European policy. Nonetheless, their operations feed a profound feeling of collective dispossession, independent even of the substance of the policies implemented to resolve the banking and financial crisis.

The European Commission is seen as a decision-making body that is both partial and inscrutable. The European Parliament, with its limited powers, has been unable to establish itself as the EU

institutions' democratic forum: public opinion is focused on what has become the infamous "lack of a public space for Europe".

Then there is the fact that the European Council comprises heads of state and government, legitimised by the fact that they were elected, but nonetheless not made democratic: the debate over passing the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance of the European Union left the impression that the EU does not live up to the transparency required for a truly democratic process. This is supported by the fact that the Council's operations are short-circuited by directorates from some larger Member States; that the European Commission capitalises on the opportunity to exert influence over national policy which has nothing to do with the powers bestowed upon it by the treaties; and that the European Parliament is sidelined in the decision-making process.

Obviously, reducing democracy to an increasingly diluted relationship between the citizen's vote and establishing a government programme and its negotiated transposition to Europe, results in reinforcing the idea that democratic elections have ridiculously little influence on public management.

Democratic legitimacy and the public space
Moreover, the democratic crisis is linked to hijacking the pluralist ideal to the benefit of a new type of elitism. The European discourse on public management is based on the idea that it is not possible to avoid the blind rule of the masses – or, on the contrary, to compensate for the non-existence of a public European space – unless forms of government are developed that are capable of representing society in all its diversity while extracting a rational voice.

Democratic legitimacy consists either in "a healthy and open expression of conflicts of interests and dif-ferences in opinion", or by setting up the delibera-tive bodies necessary to ensure that an impartial and objective debate can be held. In this context, real attempts at power by members of the social

ⓘ ⓢ glennshootspeople

space are removed in favour of developing "deliberative systems" charged with choosing and distilling them in the public space. From Majone in the past to Scharpf or Rosanvallon more recently, ample literature exists extolling the virtues of government by agreement among all the stakeholders, setting up independent and pluralist agencies, establishing intermediary control bodies to keep a check on power, and setting up discursive and educational mechanisms to ensure reflexivity, impartiality, as well as the civic culture of public debate.

The rage of the democratically dispossessed

Very few places are as transparent and inclusive from within than the four prongs of buildings that make up the European neighbourhood in Brussels. The Schuman quarter resembles nothing less than a small democratic Trianon. It is the same at both national and European levels: the elitist characteristics of the representative regime are strengthened by a lack of clarity as to the division of responsibilities among the various representative bodies.

When consensus building at federal, national and European level requires reconciling interests so diverse that even the simplest decision requires negotiation behind closed doors; and when multilevel diplomatic conferences swell the hierarchy of executive bodies, the conveyor of popular representation no longer functions as a means of legitimising power but rather as a practical way of appointing those responsible for negotiating public decisions. Deliberative

processes or techniques for direct democracy are quickly sidelined because of their impracticality or their populist dimension – as if "more pedagogy" or "results-based culture" augmented citizens' feeling of democratic dispossession.

Thus, the financial crisis translates to a regulations crisis, whereby government had become a moral and practical obstacle to freeing up economic energy. But it was also a crisis of the democratic ideal, reduced simply to each individual's economic freedom and placed on a pedestal by administrative or government experts charged with proposing measures "detached from the short term" to fight the crisis. The slogan "We are the 99%" is less an outcry against the economic mishaps of capitalism but more a cry of rage against the grabbing by some or all of the economic and political resources and perversion of the very sense of political equality. ▢

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Dominique Bourg

For an ecological democracy

According to Dominique Bourg, modern representative democracy is not conducive to handling environmental challenges. Ecology requires new political institutions capable of tackling long-term concerns.

This interview was originally published in the French magazine Sciences Humaines. *Interview by Julien Bonnet.*

Ecology can only truly move forward within a democratic framework. In my opinion, authoritarianism is the alternative threat on our democracies if these problems worsen and aren't taken care of quickly.

Political ecology emerged in the 70s, but, up until now, seems to have little traction in large democracies where short-term interests and individual gratification seem to prevail. Are ecology and democracy fundamentally incompatible?

It is true that there's some degree of incompatibility between ecology and our democracies as they operate today. I see two reasons for it. Firstly, the very mechanism of elective representation: our elected officials are regularly held accountable to voters, giving voters the ultimate power to act as judges and try their actions. The elected thus turn to the citizenry's immediate awareness: each of us is considered the best judge of his or her own situation, in terms of social burden, sense of well-being, and economic satisfaction. But environmental issues aren't picked up by the senses or citizens' "immediate awareness". We perceive day-to-day changes in the weather, but are oblivious to average temperature variations over the long-term, or the increased scarcity of global resources. It is therefore difficult for the electoral process to take environmental issues into account: they are too abstract and distant.

Secondly, there is a problem in terms of the end goal. Representative government, as it arose at the end of the 18th century in the writings of modern writers such as Benjamin Constant, is supposed to keep government interventions in check while protecting individual rights. For modern philosophers, the government's function is rather to contribute to the maximisation of individual interests and facilitate trade between nations. This very individualistic and economic conception was relevant in a world where the growth of production and consumption had no discernible limits. Today, however, in a world of finite resources, where human activity threatens the ecological equilibrium, this conception is obsolete.

Does this mean that ecology might require a minimalistically authoritarian framework, a "benevolent dictatorship"? For example, Hans Jonas suggests creating an election-independent Council of Wise Men to ensure that our political choices do not jeopardise future generations...

Indeed, Mr. H. Jonas has advocated for a "benevolent and well informed tyranny", a reformulation of Plato's "Nocturnal Council", operating in secrecy, free of any form of control and electoral constraints. His idea was to build an Assembly of Wise Men with the salvation of the world in their hands. In my opinion, this idea isn't going to work, simply: isolated, behind closed doors, the "Council of Wise Men" would dramatically cut itself off from the people and generate violence, internally (among the sages), and externally, in society at large where the Council would quickly become very unpopular. Thus, ecology can only truly move forward within a democratic framework. In my opinion, authoritarianism is the alternative threat to our democracies if these problems worsen and aren't taken care of quickly.

The idea of a "Council of Wise Men" ensuring the well-being of future generations could also find its place in a democratic framework, could it not? For example, following the model of the French Constitutional Council or the US Supreme Court. Would you then be favourable to the idea?

On this model, Pierre Rosanvallon has suggested a "Future's Academy" composed of scientists, philosophers, and community representatives. The downside of this type of institution is that it has no electoral legitimacy, which, in my opinion, limits their power.

The past and the present aside, the future is modern representation's biggest loser.
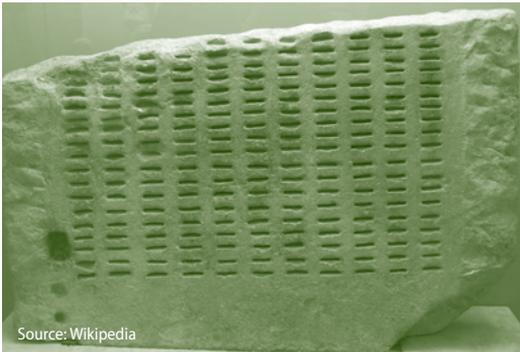
Source: Wikipedia

In Athens around the fifth century BC, the officials of the democracy were in part elected by the Assembly and in large part chosen by lottery. This is the kleroterion, the machine used to select the magistrates.

That said, electoral legitimacy inevitably leads to partisan politics, the logic of which is incompatible with environmental advocacy. Next to this kind of institution, I would recommend setting up an upper house including a creative designation method. In a representative system, the upper house was traditionally designed to protect the interests of the past and those bound for long-term horizons: it is based on heredity or on longer-lasting mandates than those belonging to the lower house. The upper house generally leans toward status quo and tradition.

Meanwhile, the present is duly represented by the lower house of modern government. The lower house employs short-term mandates that make elected officials reluctant to make risky political changes, that would mainly benefit future constituents. The past and the present aside, the future is modern representation's biggest loser.

As a result, I would propose putting the upper house in charge of guarding the future instead of the past. The upper house would benefit from some form of representation and would have veto power over any law issued from the lower house.

Generally speaking, according to you, the ecological problem requires institutional overhaul...

In addition to operating off of short-term electoral cycles, modern institutions were built to protect local and national territories, while environmental issues typically cross borders and have no boundaries. Modern institutions must therefore be expanded to face up to new challenges. For example, as P. Rosanvallon, I posit that we need to renew and rethink the state's role in safekeeping patrimonies. In the last decades, this primary function – to ensure the existence of a national community in the face of potential enemies – has experienced a singular extension: the nation's present and future well-being is now threatened by human control over the biosphere including its underlying mechanisms. As a result, a new challenge begets the state's responsibility: anticipating and preventing future and irreversible degradations, even if it implies severe constraints to the present.

Besides a long-term upper house, what other mechanisms would an ecological democracy have to rely on?

We would need a mixed system including new institutions in charge of sustainable development. The mechanisms of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy are good means by which to improve the representative system. The first approach allows for efficient citizen participation in punctual decisions upstream. However, unlike elected officials in the "representative" system, citizens can inform public decisions independently because they are not accountable to anyone. The absence of a mandate fosters detachment from vested interests. Deliberative democracy, which actively involves NGO representatives and public policy experts, promotes environmental advocacy in the face of pressing economic and social challenges. NGOs acquire more legitimacy in the extent that they operate internationally and

Deliberative democracy, which actively involves NGO representatives and public policy experts, promotes environmental advocacy in the face of pressing economic and social challenges.

within territories defined by environmental issues. They offer direct contact with widely dispersed populations as well as significant expertise in the field of ecology.

Participatory democracy is traditionally resorted to at the local level: citizen juries, neighbourhood budget votes... How should participatory democracy be used to address global issues, such as environmental protection?

An international Citizens' Conference has already taken place. On September 26th 2009 there was a Global Consultation on climate change in which 4,000 citizens from 38 countries participated. The cry for action was consistent across countries: developed, developing, and emerging. By consensus, they were in favour of greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all nations (to varying degrees depending on the country's level of development) and of sanctions for noncompliance. It is therefore possible to bring panels of people from different countries together on the same topic. As the legitimacy of civil society is strong in the public eye, the recommendations produced out of these participatory procedures can be useful checks to decisions coming from traditional institutions.

Still, deliberation on environmental issues requires a minimum amount of knowledge on the part of constituents. As environmental issues tend to be very technical, we are seeing experts and scientists hijack the public debate. How can this be avoided?

My position is clear: citizens are not to act as experts in the collection and creation of data. On the topic of creationism or climate scepticism, it isn't normal that individuals, who are not involved in the development of scientific knowledge by a worldwide community of thousands of researchers, allow themselves to use the media to summarily dismiss that community's findings. Data collection should be left to specialists and the peer-review evaluation system. Once scientific data is on the table – the IPCC role is precisely to provide data for public debate – it is crucial that constituents are then consulted to make policy decisions based on the facts brought by scientists.

Understood, but how can you ask constituents to make decisions on issues for which they lack the scientific training to make sound judgment calls?

Democracy requires adequate instruction. On the one hand, the press has an important role to play in democratising scientific knowledge in the public arena. On the other, when participatory mechanisms are solicited to address punctual debates, providing technical training on the themes that require deliberation is entirely feasible.

Finally, going back to the international level: you seem to trust States despite the fact that in Copenhagen they were unable to reach a collective decision on global issues...

The financial and economic crisis has clearly demonstrated that the State is the only authority that can preserve and promote the general interest. The State keeps an eye on the hierarchy of ends and prevents any one part of society from exploiting another for its own benefit. As a guarantor of the common interest, and as an institution close enough to its constituents, the State remains essential. However, as most environmental problems aren't confined by borders - river pollution spreads from one nation to the other and the atmosphere is global - supranational institutions need to be developed and strengthened.

The example of the European Union is interesting and, in my opinion, the Commission has been effective on numerous environmental matters. As we enter the 21st century, the EU regulates the various air pollutants and hazardous chemicals that contaminate our environment. It avails directives that protect migratory species, manages the quality of inland and coastal waters... This type of supranational organisation demonstrates that it is possible to limit national sovereignty in certain areas.

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Populism, sustainability, democracy

Ingolfur Blühdorn

Before investing excessive hope in radical participatory solutions we need to re-examine established beliefs about democracy and sustainability and their mutual relationship.

Needless to say, we want the structural transformation of modern – highly unsustainable – societies towards sustainability to be organised in a democratic fashion: expertocratic or even authoritarian approaches are entirely unacceptable! But then, what can we say about the sustainability of democracy – how sustainable is democracy and are democratic structures really capable of managing the sustainability crisis?

The question as to whether democracy itself is sustainable has been discussed ever since the "crisis theories" of the 1970s. At the turn of the 1990s, Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history suggested it is the best and final form of political organisation. However, more recently the proliferation of political cynicism, diminishing trust in democratic institutions and lively debates about the coming of post-democracy or even post-politics have suggested otherwise.

Much less debated is the second dimension: early suggestions, made in the wake of the Club of Rome's "Limits to Growth" report, that the scarcity of resources would render the adoption of eco-authoritarian policies a necessity for human survival, have been robustly refuted. Yet the issue as to whether democratic systems are really capable of effectively addressing the sustainability crisis remains unresolved. With the powerful re-emergence of the finiteness-of-resources issue and the post-growth economy; with the irritating metamorphosis of democracy; with the post-political belief in science, technology and the market; and with new radical uncertainty about what exactly sustainability may mean, this question has become more urgent than ever.

Sustainability from below?

Emancipatory social movements of the 1970s and 1980s forced environmental issues on to political agendas, the assumption that ecology and democracy are inextricably linked has become deeply entrenched. Political ecologists, in particular, have argued that liberation of the environment and the empowerment of citizens are two sides of the same coin, and have engaged in a struggle for radical democratisation even in established democracies. Disempowerment of political and economic elites and the devolution of power to the citizen were proposed as the best way to secure both ecological integrity and civic self-determination. But from the mid-1980s, the ecological modernisation paradigm gradually depoliticised ecological issues. As political tactics and ideological obstructions were perceived as blocking the effectiveness of environmental policy, technology-focused, market-based and managerial approaches became incrementally dominant. Yet, for all their undeniable achievements, these ecological modernisation strategies have so far been unable to bring about anything like the profound structural transformations required if internationalised consumer society is ever to become sustainable. Solutions are required that are much more radical.

ⓘ Dominic's pics

Thus, true to the tradition of the emancipatory social movements, many observers are calling for a bottom-up renewal of environmental policy. In line with the more general reaction against the rule of so-called systemic imperatives, the proliferation of expertocratic governance and the assertion that "there is no alternative", they insist that the remodelling of industrial society can only work if driven by an engaged, active and empowered citizenry. As the transformation of sustainability necessitates profound changes in value preferences, lifestyles and societal practices,

Alternative niche-cultures certainly do exist. But how confident should we be that empowering democratic citizenry will really move contemporary society closer to sustainability?

the argument is that the project needs to be designed and controlled by the citizens – a project people perceive as their own and can identify with. Interestingly, such demands for the reinstatement of genuine democracy and the re-empowerment of the legitimate democratic sovereign, the people, are currently being articulated across the full ideological spectrum.

Of course, the radical criticism of depoliticisation and expert rule is perfectly well justified. No structural change to the established order of unsustainability can ever be expected from those who confine themselves to stimulating ever-new cycles of techno-managerial innovation, economic growth and mass consumption. Political ecologists and Green Parties were once very clear that ecological change needs cultural change – and hence profound political change. Yet, the old beliefs that more democracy will promote more sustainability – and that at the grass roots of consumer societies new values, lifestyles and social infrastructures that might provide the basis for democratic transition towards sustainability are already emerging – seem rather untenable today. Alternative niche-cultures certainly do exist. But how confident should we be that empowering democratic citizenry will really move contemporary society closer to sustainability? What can participatory democratic approaches achieve? How are the conditions of contemporary modernity reconfiguring democracy?

Democracy and sustainability
Doubts about the feasibility of democratic solutions to the sustainability crisis have commonly been fended off with warnings that those who raise them are probably sympathetic to authoritarian approaches. However, this logic ignores two important points. First, in addition to the participatory-democratic and the expertocratic-authoritarian solutions to the sustainability crisis, there is a third option: that of non-solution, i.e. a politics of unsustainability that seeks to sustain the status quo and manage

its unpleasant implications for as long as possible. Second, democracy – a concept that can be and has been interpreted in a variety of very different ways – can be just as much part of the problem as part of the solution. And there is evidence to suggest that under the particular conditions of modern consumer society, democracy may indeed be assuming a shape that is geared more towards stabilising than radically changing the unsustainable status quo.

Of course, doubts about democracy's capacity to deal with environmental problems are not new. It has often been pointed out that democracy is anthropocentric and has limited potential to represent that which has no political voice. Electoral democracy is strongly fixated on the present and structurally inclined to discount the interests of future generations. Democratic procedures are both time- and resource-consuming and thus inappropriate whenever fast and decisive action is necessary. Democracy aligns politics with the electoral majority, even though the majority's preferences – such as, for example, the addiction to car or air travel – are rarely sensible in terms of sustainability. Democratic systems are hard pushed to generate majorities for policies that burden citizens with costs or restrictions mainly for the benefit of people in distant parts of the world and for something as abstract as biodiversity or global climate. And, perhaps most importantly, democracy is always emancipatory, which has mainly been seen to imply the enhancement of (individual) rights and (material) living conditions. It is not really suited to restricting the rights or material conditions affecting the majority – unless the benefits are immediately tangible.

All these concerns have been articulated by eco-political sceptics of democracy for a long time – and robustly refuted by their emancipatory-libertarian counterparts. Yet, the ongoing process of modernisation keeps chipping away at the very foundations of the ecologist defence of democracy:

– The pluralisation of social values and individual lifestyles, reinforced by migration and multiculturalism, diversifies social needs and perceptions of (eco-)political priorities.
– National governments, even if democratically elected, are no longer in control, politically; under new governance patterns, the state is just one of several actors.
– A range of functional subsystems – most notably the economy, science and the media – have evolved well beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and thus beyond the control of any democratic electorate.
– Environmental issues are increasingly global, complex and abstract; they are becoming less directly tangible for citizens being measured, framed and communicated mainly by scientific experts.
– The ecological footprint of modern lifestyles (and consumption patterns) extends ever further beyond a particular national territory thus invalidating the democratic principle of congruence between the authors of political decisions and those affected by them.
– The acceleration of change, the flexibilisation of social norms, and the shift towards consumption-based lifestyles not only reinforce democracy's fixation with the present, but make unsustainability itself a core characteristic of prevalent ideals of identity and patterns of self-realisation.

Identity and emancipation
Unsurprisingly, therefore, suspicions about the eco-political failure of liberal democracy have recently re-emerged. No doubt, critique of the democratic deficit goes on too, as do the demands to reinstate authentic democracy. Yet, concerns about insurmountable deficits in democracy itself are becoming stronger, as is the belief that the particular conditions of advanced modern societies' top-down approaches to eco-politics may, after all, be more effective. For example, Anthony Giddens regards the commitment of social movements and the Green parties to participatory democracy as outdated. He advocates an "active interventionist state"

as the all-important eco-political actor and calls for the depoliticisation of climate policy. Given the factual fixation of all national governments (as well as the EU) on economic liberalisation and growth, any such reincarnations of Plato's philosopher-king seem rather implausible. But reversely, democratisation can only be seen as a suitable means for ecological ends if citizens are perceived as the subject of an ecological reason sharply contrasting with the ruling logic of unsustainability as represented by the established authorities. And any democratic optimism loses its foundations if emancipation, rather than being understood as liberation from the alienating and destructive logic of productivism, is seen as the realisation of ever-more individualised freedom and choice, ever-more flexibility and, in particular, increasingly consumerist lifestyles.
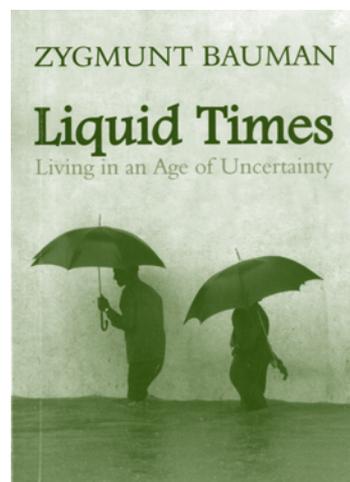
With his notion of "liquid modernity", Zygmunt Bauman captured the fact that in advanced Western societies, the bourgeois-modernist ideal of a unitary individual identity that matures throughout a person's lifetime has been supplemented by the intrinsically contradictory ideal of a multiple, fragmented and flexible identity. These are not only imperatives of the modern labour market, but also appear to open up new options for a richer experience of life and

The new self-understanding demanded by the modern economy, preferred by today's individuals and enforced by the so-called "activating state", is fundamentally unsustainable.

more personal fulfilment. Accordingly, modern citizens have made their identity norms more complex, flexible, innovative and tolerant towards intrinsic contradictions.

This shift is important for the prospect of a democratically organised restructuring of modern society towards sustainability. As mentioned above, the new self-understanding demanded by the modern economy, preferred by today's individuals and enforced by the so-called "activating state", is fundamentally unsustainable in several respects. First, by definition it is flexible, fluid and volatile – in other words, not stable and sustained. Second, this new self-conception focuses very strongly on the present. Third, this contemporary ideal of identity relies strongly on consumption as its most important means of self-construction, self-expression and self-experience.

Contemporary citizens may well be ecologically informed and concerned but, crucially, the prevalent patterns of self-realisation and self-experience rely on the consumer market which, in turn, necessitates an ever-accelerating pace of resource-consumption. This shift towards the inherently unsustainable self has by no means fully replaced more traditional notions of identity. It is not equally prevalent in all social milieus and, factually, proliferating social inequality excludes major parts of society from this consumption-based self-realisation. But what is prevalent in the most entrepreneurial and pace-setting social milieus shapes the aspirations of others and, accordingly, what citizens will demand to see represented by democratic processes and institutions. The implications of this are dire for the vision of an emancipatory and democratically legitimised transition towards sustainability. In sociological terms, they may be summarised as follows:

Second-order or reflexive emancipation supersedes traditional or first-order emancipation. The latter may be understood as referring to the 1970s and 1980s, when increasingly self-confident citizens, seeing themselves as the subject of authentic reason, struggled for liberation from the guardianship of traditional elites and were determined to assume responsibility for the common good, which they aimed to negotiate and implement in participatory-democratic ways. Conversely, second-order or reflexive emancipation refers to a trend in evidence since the 1990s, entailing partial deliverance from the very responsibilities citizens had previously fought for enthusiastically. In particular, it seeks liberation from moral and intellectual overload and calls for reassessment of restrictive social or ecological imperatives. This second phase of the emancipatory project is closely aligned with the rise of liquid identity which, in addition to promoting unsustainability, also undermines the very foundations of democracy.

From the citizen's perspective, these shifts lead to frustration with existing democratic institutions and cynicism about democratic processes which invariably fail to organise, articulate and represent the complexity and dynamics of modern needs and identities. At the abstract level and in terms of citizens' expectations of public bodies, democratic values remain fully in place, and indeed are being articulated ever-more vociferously. Yet in practice, democracy entails ever less of a guarantee, be it for the already marginalised or excluded (who are increasingly turning away from political engagement), or for those trying to use their available resources to secure personal advantage in an increasing struggle for opportunities.

Governing unsustainability
In light of these shifts, the sustainability of democracy itself may well become a problem, and democracy's capacity to initiate a move towards sustainability may be permanently impaired. But political scientists have always praised democracy's great flexibility and adaptability, drawing hope from its proven problem-solving capacity and ability to address its own faults reflexively. Indeed, although the social and

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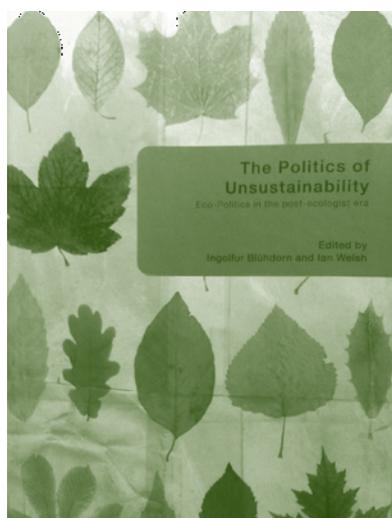
Even in countries like the UK, where the exhaustion of socio-cultural capital can be seen most dramatically, and where diagnosis of the "broken society" is widely debated, the basic structures of democracy remain intact. Yet, given the cultural shift outlined above, the reinstatement of authentic democracy frequently demanded by populist movements with various agendas is not that feasible. For in the wake of second-order emancipation, the structural limitations that have always existed are powerfully reinforced by new cultural limitations that essentially stifle all hopes for the profound value change necessary for any democratic transition to sustainability. Of course, none of this implies that expertocratic-authoritarian policy approaches are in any way more promising. Hence, it could be argued that despite its evident insufficiencies, democracy is still the best chance we have to address the challenges of the sustainability crisis. This is the eco-political reformulation of the old Churchill Hypothesis. However, this fails to recognise the extent to which the quality of

democracy is quietly changing – and that for contemporary governments as well as most contemporary citizens sustainability means – above all – to sustain, at least for a little longer, a comfortable status quo and the logic that supports it.

In its classical understanding, democracy was perceived as emancipatory and egalitarian. At the limits of growth, it transmutes into a tool for the defence of established order. Whilst there is little evidence that democracy is suited to the implementation of sustainability, constraint and burden-sharing, there is plenty of evidence that democratic values are invoked by both the power-elites and the embattled middle classes to legitimise privileged lifestyles that can only be sustained at the cost of increasing social injustice and exclusion. This is most drastically visible in the United States, where neoliberal elites and the bottom-up Tea Party movement have joined forces to deny climate change, alarmed that it might "provide a rationale for the government to "intrude" everywhere, curtail consumer choice and property rights, and increase the state's size and surveillance". But this also reverberates in Europe. In the UK, for example, the Conservative government's "big society" project has appropriated the language of civil society and empowerment to orchestrate a massive austerity programme set to dramatically reinforce the already high level of social inequality and exclusion.

When the modernist normative foundations upon which it once rested have largely crumbled away, democracy may become the most powerful instrument for governing unsustainability. The narratives of those who simplistically rave about democratic empowerment, tacitly assuming that sustainability is still a structural change project, may, unintentionally, be contributing to this agenda. What is required is a much more detailed enquiry into this new reactionary democracy. This is both a theoretical and an empirical challenge to which the social sciences are only now beginning to face up.

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Lucile Schmid

Long-term vision for day to day politics

Are political parties still capable of integrating the long term into their strategic reflections? This crucial question for ecologists has particular relevance in France, where political foundations have the potential to contribute to the reforming and reinvention of the country's democracy.

The very organisation of political party life is difficult to reconcile with real intellectual work.

Generating new ideas in political parties

Promoting, proposing and debating ideas: in these times of economic challenges and the declared end of ideology, political parties are struggling to convincingly fill this role. For one, they are veritable professional election machines. Under these circumstances, developing ideas, spreading a platform, and facilitating public debate are both necessary and secondary. Experts write opinions, working groups meet, decision makers are questioned and policy proposals are debated – some even with full-fledged communication plans to back them. But none of this imposed structure really has any effect on the reality of political party life. What really matters is elsewhere: the games of political movements and people, buzz words, and the art of rebuttal and communication surrounding this back and forth – either in the institutions when a political party is the ruling party or within the networks of influence.

During campaigns fresh ideas are generated once again, usually when the parties close ranks around the main candidates and a political personality is built. During these times of conquering new, or holding on to old, electoral ground, the exercise of proposing and debating ideas remains important. Under the Fifth Republic in France, the five-year term presidency has meant an increase in the linking of political content to a personality. This is the case to such an extent, in fact, that the role of generating ideas comes down to *the* front (wo)man in the electoral battle: presidential candidates, mainly, but also the heads of the party lists for regional or European elections. S/he has the ideas and the others follow along. The party kowtows to the candidates' wishes. This was clear in the Nicolas Sarkozy-Ségolène Royal face-off for the French presidency in 2007. In 2012, François Hollande immediately showed that he did not feel constrained by the platform agreed on by the Socialists and the Greens after several months of concerted efforts on issues of institutional, economic, social, energy and international importance. During the legislative elections of 2012, the majority of socialist candidates took up

François Hollande's 60 proposals word for word; any straying from the line would have risked weakening the party.

The very organisation of political party life is difficult to reconcile with real intellectual work. The need to react rapidly to current events, deal with in-fighting amongst leaders and deputy leaders, and to be constantly present in the field means that political activity has become highly dependent on a key individual and their ability to respond swiftly and with an empiricist approach. The committees set up by the political parties to debate the major issues (broken down into the traditional categories of social issues, economic issues, international issues, sustainable development, culture, etc.) function without cross-checking with those in charge of election campaigns. True debate on the issues during the weekly meetings of the various decision-making bodies are few and far between and often fall to the wayside in favour of speeches on party line stances and the political mainstream. Under these circumstances, producing "ideas that can gain ground" is a real challenge.

In this context, the fact that political life revolves around a Socialist Party-UMP bi-polar reality is more a result of the institutional system and the majority voting system than of a true comparison of the party platforms. The irony is that it is those parties that have little access to the institutions, such as the Greens, the centrist party MODEM, and the right wing National Front that put forth new ideas and new policy proposals. These parties are able to make their presence felt more during alternative elections such as the European Parliament elections, which are proportional. On the other hand, the windfall of public funding in these cases can impede real differences from becoming apparent. For example, for the European Parliament elections in May 2014, there were a whopping 31 lists in the Ile-de-France (Paris) region alone; many of these parties state that they defend the environment; all of them

state they have ideas about Europe, but a loosely-defined Europe.

Should political parties outsource the work of producing ideas?

All of the major political families in France have a foundation charged with coming up with and spreading new ideas. There are six in total: the Socialist's Jean Jaurès Foundation; the UMP's Fondapol; the Fondation Gabriel Péri, which is related to the Communist party; The Robert Schuman foundation which specializes in issues related to Europe for the centrist parties; The Res Publica Foundation of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, and the recently established Foundation for Political Ecology for the Greens. The National Front has also expressed its desire to establish a Foundation and already has a think tank known as "Ideas Nation". Although they are independent from the parties in their work, the status and role of these foundations is currently being redefined. The foundations will have to find the right balance between analysing daily political life, promoting ideas in a society

that is weary of promises and seeking a vision for the future, and organising their European and international chapters. Considering the need for debate and the comparison of ideas, the French versions of these foundations still need to show that they are up to the task, and also expand their membership beyond insiders. Should the German model be emulated, in which political foundations are powerful, have access to significant funds allocated by Parliament and produce proposals that are then reported on in the press? That is at least one option that should be explored.

In addition to these political foundations, there are a number of think tanks that, through incorporation as an association, have a political role: Terra Nova, considered socialist; Institut Montaigne, liberal leaning; and the Fondation Nicolas Hulot, apolitical and involved in promoting major environmental issues. There is no institutional link between these entities and the political parties, which means that they can facilitate public debate in a freer and, at times more audacious, way. The recent boom in think tanks that do not really have a specific status or single definition as to their role does however raise a number of questions. Minimum disclosure rules should apply to their work methodology, links to networks of influence, and possible conflicts of interest.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to contemplate the consequences of this outsourcing. Accepting that structures external to the political parties themselves generate ideas is tantamount to accepting the professionalisation of politics without fully exploring the democratic limits to this system. How can we expect citizens to get more involved in politics if their elected officials are not even interested in the major debates affecting society today and are getting lost in the complexity of it all? The main subject that urgently needs to be addressed to resolve the current democratic crisis is that of the embodiment of a project by an individual.

Globalisation, sovereign debt crisis, environmental challenges, the apparently unavoidable divide between what is promised during a campaign and what is actually delivered when in power, all of these set a daunting context in which to put forth policy ideas.

Good policy ideas vs. bad policy ideas: an outdated dichotomy?

Globalisation, sovereign debt crisis, environmental challenges, the apparently unavoidable divide between what is promised during a campaign and what is actually delivered when in power, all of these set a daunting context in which to put forth policy ideas. People are inhibited when making proposals. Implementation, costs, timeframes: all of these things are compulsory conditions of policy making and difficult paths to navigate. Sometimes it seems that generating policy ideas has run into a dead end.

It seems as if the political parties are still reasoning within outdated schemas of the world. They are working off a blueprint based on a model of productivism that struggles to factor in the mechanisms of globalisation, that does not address the issues of resource depletion and the environment, and that does not give enough breadth and depth to the long term. The best illustration of these contradictions is the debate on the energy transition launched in the autumn of 2012. That debate should have been exciting, stimulating, and strategic and should have led to a real law that laid the foundations for a concrete plan. Instead it fell victim to all that was neglected: long-term management was neglected; questions were left open as to representativeness (NGOs, unions, employers - how should they be weighed? On what basis should decisions be made?); unknowns were left as to the appropriations; integration with employment and social policy was not dealt with. Additionally, there was no real debate on the concrete makeup of the energy mix for the 2025/2030 timeframe. Where should we stand on nuclear energy? Which plants should be closed and which should stay open? In which alternatives should we invest most heavily? Data and opinions on these issues have been piling up but have not resulted in a clear stance due to lack of solid political backing.

We can no longer proceed in a state of juxtaposition between the old world and the new issues. We must develop a new political mindset. This will require political parties to be updated for these new circumstances. This can be done by establishing the development of political ideas as a top priority but also, and most importantly, by understanding that these ideas must form a system that can, firstly, establish a vision and, secondly, function as a platform for achieving that vision. Without that resolve, citizens, who are already confused by the lack of coherent political platforms, will only become more disenfranchised by the democratic process. ◗

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Andreas Novy

The democratisation of all areas of life

The coming upheaval in our ways of living and working will require us to live an ecological lifestyle based on new forms of democratic participation that enable us to collectively and comprehensively reshape our social and physical environment.

Politics has then become something alien, distanced from people's daily lives, only occasionally impinging on them, perhaps helpfully or perhaps as a nuisance.

The world is in a state of upheaval which is shaking our routines, our institutions and our modes of production to the core. To take one example: the current model of fossil fuel-based mobility and urban living will be radically changed, not only because of dwindling oil reserves but also because of rising demand from developing countries. European society is therefore faced with the alternatives of either managing the coming changes today or of suffering the consequences of this upheaval in the near future.

The state as the intersection point of all political action

Fortunately, for some years now there has been an increasing awareness that we are at an historical turning point comparable in significance to the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. The Great Transformation of the 18th and 19th centuries saw the emergence of capitalist market societies which led to an historically unprecedented growth in productivity based on fossil fuels. This also involved a great transformation of the political system. The state became the point of intersection of all political action, while the economy and the society were subject to other kinds of internal logic, like the entrepreneurial search for profit or the principle of reciprocity. Parliaments and large centralised national state administrative structures – two political institutions that gradually established themselves throughout the world – created their own powerful sphere of politics. Political power was concentrated in the machinery of the state, principally through tax revenues and the monopoly on force, while economic power, represented above all by the power to decide on investments, was controlled by private companies.

In liberal market societies, it was the responsibility of the elected representatives of the people to ensure that social movements and interest groups could make themselves heard in parliament and the administration. It was parliamentary deputies who voiced within Parliament the extra-parliamentary opposition to the building of nuclear power stations; when miscarriages of justice occurred, citizens engaged in the issues could use the help of elected representatives in order to draw attention to them. But at the same time, it was precisely this development that led to the delegation of politics. The crisis of democracy we are currently experiencing is a crisis of this form of politics – a self-contained sphere operated by specialists. This is sometimes experienced as disenfranchisement; over the long term it often leads to a feeling of political powerlessness.

Politics has then become something alien, distanced from people's daily lives, only occasionally impinging on them, perhaps helpfully or perhaps as a nuisance. But delegation does not even work when all that is at stake is the perpetuation of the status quo. Our needs change, and they then require new rules and a new infrastructure, as is the case just now with regard to the care of children and the elderly. In such cases, efficient and effective administration of the existing arrangements is not sufficient to master the coming changes to our ways of working and living. That can only be achieved through public participation in decision-making and implementation. The roll-out of the *Energiewende* (the German energy transition) is as much a question of values as of systemic agenda-setting

More and more people are starting to participate in the search for alternative ways of living and working. In transition towns, new forms of human settlement are being created and urban living is being redefined.

or of concrete context: how much attention should be paid to nature conservation when wind farms are being built in order to reduce our dependence on oil?

Political decision-makers do not possess the diverse range of perspectives, of technical specialists and of the people affected, which are an essential component of systematic and context-specific knowledge. If this knowledge is properly utilised, different interests and points of view can be taken into account and better outcomes achieved. In this way, the political system can be made more responsive to popular movements and social innovations. This is what I call a public and open state. Such an opening-up of the political system is the first pre-condition for the management of the transformation.

A new ecological way of life
A second precondition for the collective management of the transformation is that those groups and individuals experimenting with alternative forms of enterprise and finance, with ecological consumption, fair trade and "soft" (or sustainable) mobility, must re-think the relationship between politics, society and the economy. There can be no doubt that the emergence – within an ecologically attuned and morally aware avant-garde of a new way of living based on a duty of care for humanity and nature – is a positive development. More and more people are starting to participate in the search for alternative ways of living and working. In transition towns, new forms of human settlement are being created and urban living is being redefined. The commons movement is reactivating traditional economic models and experimenting with new rules and new forms of ownership. In Austria, ecological agriculture is demonstrating how it could potentially provide good food for all.

Yet many civil society activists lack a shared vision of all-encompassing social change. Their unspoken hope is that an invisible hand will order the individual fragments of a sustainable society into a new and beautiful mosaic. But that is not how society works. *Laissez-faire* is an economic doctrine, not a realistic worldview. To cite another example, campaigns to raise awareness of *Peak Oil* are not enough by themselves to make commuters switch from the car to the train. Information about climate change and campaigns for new car-free forms of mobility are also necessary; but more important are new cycle paths, cheaper public transport, true cost pricing and an innovative youth culture with a new approach to mobility – using a borrowed car today, a "city bike" tomorrow, or staying in contact with friends and colleagues simply by surfing the net.

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Just as public institutions need to open themselves up, civil society organisations also need to undertake a critical self-analysis of their relationship to the individualistic contemporary philosophy of *Laissez-faire*. The coming revolutionary changes in our ways of living and working will require us to lead an ecological way of life based on solidarity and forward planning. This in turn requires – and this is the third pre-condition for the collective management of the coming transformation – a new form of democratic politics.

A bridge between state and civil society

So the big push for more democracy that is needed for the Great Transformation is certainly not limited to the narrowly defined sphere of politics, but is rather about creating new forms of participation in order to shape the social and material infrastructure required for a socio-ecological form of development. This includes the establishment of cooperative enterprises, whether banks or food cooperatives, as well as a mobility infrastructure that enables comprehensive mobility without car ownership. This socio-economic democratisation push cannot be created by political decree but has to take place predominantly outside the realm of conventional politics. Only when the understanding of democratisation has been severed from its links with established political institutions and themes will it be possible for the involvement of the people in the structure and organisation of community life allowing it to develop to its full creative potential.

A two-fold opening up is therefore required: that of state towards society and that of the people towards the community. In order for this opening up to work, dialogue and exchange are needed and certain institutions can provide a bridging function to enable this to take place. For example, neither the energy transition nor the mobility transition can be achieved with our current narrow and fragmented understanding of politics and society. Engaged and committed individuals need to recognise that small steps towards local sourcing and local recreation within a region are dependent on larger structural conditions and power relations: the economy is political, and the path to sustainability will involve overcoming the opposition of powerful lobbies and established and hitherto privileged interest groups. A regulatory framework that supports local markets and increases the price of fossil fuel-based mobility has to be fought for, and conflicts have to be fought out. Hearts and minds have to be won. All of this – rather than the simple faith that right will triumph – is a prerequisite for Transition Towns to be able to escape their niche status and become the norm for human settlements in the 21st century.

The party political foundations are well qualified to perform such a bridging function between state and civil society. At their best – that is, when they are adequately funded, as in Germany – they are in equal measure think tanks and instruments of political education. This gives them a dual role: on the one hand, they serve to enlighten and inform the citizens about their complex political systems; on the other, they raise awareness among political decision-makers that a transformation will only be possible with the help of an engaged citizenry and of many diverse local initiatives. Political foundations can thus create a new and positive vision of politics as the common management of the community, and can then demonstrate this vision in practice.

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Austrian Green Foundation and all-encompassing democratisation

In Austria, the _Grüne Bildungswerkstatt_ (Austrian Green Foundation) tries to act in this way, as a bridge between the political system and an engaged civil society. It is constituted not as a foundation but as a voluntary association and sees itself as part of civil society. Nevertheless, it receives the bulk of its funds due to its status as the organ for political education of the Austrian Green Party. This places it in close proximity to the political system and entails a legal responsibility for civic education of a kind that is above party politics. It tries to make the best possible use of this dual role.

The *Austrian Green Foundation* demonstrates to civil society organisations the continuing significance of state institutions.

This requires a clear and transparent self-conception, one that cannot be reduced either to the civil society dimension or to the party political dimension. At the core of this self-conception lies the practical utopia of a good life for all. This non-partisan goal enables it to conceive of its educational work as a contribution to the achievement of a sustainable civilisation. With the aid of a highly-developed feel for the processes of democratic negotiation, it transmits knowledge about the functioning of politics, society and the economy into the sphere of civil society.

Its bridging function enables it to prompt and stimulate its partner organisations in different directions. The *Austrian Green Foundation* demonstrates to civil society organisations the continuing significance of state institutions. The public financial resources available through central state taxation could make a very substantial contribution to funding the socio-ecological transformation. Therefore, the foundation collaborates in the civil society campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and for a "Budget for the Future", designed by civil society organisations. Transparency and democratic control over funding are core demands of the foundation.

In its dealings with state or government bodies, but also with the Green Party, the *Grüne Bildungswerkstat*t aims to encourage increasing experimentation with innovative participatory models and a systematic utilisation of the knowledge resources of civil society, of science and research, and of those directly affected by specific policies. It is precisely social movements, NGOs and NPOs which are important mediating factors within society and which politicise everyday problems with the aim of producing benefits for the common good. Good examples of such dual educational and political processes are the many growing networking initiatives such as "Another Europe is Possible!" or the post-growth and commons movements. With proper respect for diversity and with a commitment to utilising different respective strengths in the pursuit of a common goal, it is indeed possible for a beautiful new mosaic to be created out of the fragments that are already there: one that is multifaceted, sustainable, fair – and democratic.

Andreas Novy is the head of the Austrian Green Foundation "Die Grüne Bildungswerkstatt" and a Professor at the Vienna University of Economics and Business.

A foundation for the Green democratic recovery

Nuala Ahern

The European elections, held in tandem with local elections, proved to be a turning point for the Irish Greens. It was a real comeback at local level, particularly in Dublin, and came desperately close to electing an MEP. Green Foundation Ireland (GFI) has played a real part in this recovery.

Many Green activists have come together at GFI events over the past two and a half years to engage with fresh ideas and interests and to find a common approach with other European Greens. A forum for exchanging ideas was created outside of the political party's policy straightjackets, and GFI events became a forum for re-engaging with what it actually means to be Green. Most importantly, the cultural programme became an integral part of our summer schools, including celebrating the particular city or place where we gathered.

But while it was a modest although significant turning point for the Greens, the backlash continues against political elites both at home and across the EU. The perception is that austerity-driven cuts in public services have been imposed on those who were not responsible for the economic crisis. Thus, a return to prosperity is sought as a necessary, even though insufficient, means of returning to a positive engagement with the EU. However, the idea that such prosperity can only be achieved by a society that turns towards a sustainable future is far from being accepted, even if the Greens achieved a strong recovery at grass-roots level in Dublin. Therefore, GFI is continuing to work towards this outcome.

Ireland's Eurosceptic protest vote
In Ireland, the protest vote against austerity was a strong vote for Sinn Fein – the nationalist party which is the political wing of the IRA. This protest can also be seen as a soft Eurosceptic vote, with a strong underlying anti-EU subtext. Europe was popular in Ireland as long as it delivered prosperity and social reform. However, the twin miseries of unemployment and emigration have now returned to Ireland. The governing parties were annihilated in the last general election, while anger towards an out-of-touch and out-of-reach European elite was palpable during the European elections.

Infomatique
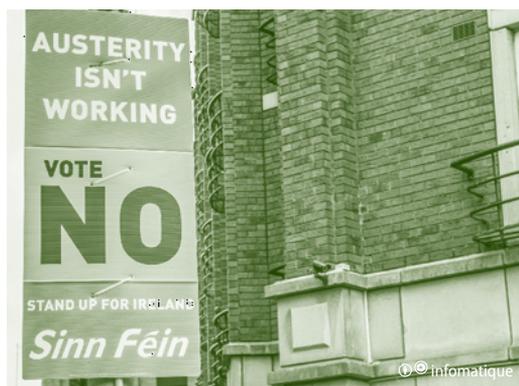
Of all the EU institutions, anger has focused in particular on the European Central Bank, under the leadership of Jean-Claude Trichet. The ECB is not only seen as responsible for forcing Ireland to take responsibility for a Euro-wide and systemic problem which Trichet, as one of the creators of the euro, refused to face, but also for not addressing employment concerns as other central banks must do. Rather than a real and operational central bank, the English-speaking world sees the ECB as being both autocratic and failing to respond to the concerns of those who actually live in the current economy. Although Mario Draghi is regarded as having restored confidence in the euro zone virtually single-handedly, the ECB is still seen as not addressing the real economy. This will only change if the euro zone can adapt to the necessary reforms. The inept way in which the euro was constructed, as a sort of *Titanic* currency which was all superstructure with no proper foundation, and which crashed into the iceberg of the global financial collapse, remains a source of anxiety.

To fix this we will need more fiscal integration in the EU, which cannot happen without real democratic control, as control over how taxes are distributed is the essence of democracy.

The EP elections results demand that we do not simply oppose populism with rhetoric but must deal with the situation that has created it – unemployment and economic insecurity, even

It is GFI's intention to create a better response, using digital platforms to provide an ethical and philosophical context for green activism that can be communicated simply and persuasively.

homelessness and precarious living. However, citizens feel that rather than defending their social rights, the EU undermines them, and economic counter arguments seem to fall on deaf ears. In this context, GFI has held a number of seminars and summer schools which have continued to address the European dimension and put the crisis in context.

A new medium for a new movement
In the current age of globalisation, a central feature is that the state, the markets and the use of natural resources are interconnected. We cannot continue to measure our economic performance as nation states and people cannot simply blame governments. The Green European Foundation, alongside national foundations – through the journal and summers schools – is playing a vital role via an intelligent response to this in Europe.

Another approach, which the GFI is interested in piloting, involves interactive digital platforms on sustainability and global justice whereby both ideas and experiences can be shared. Many programmes and discussions focus on the concept of sustainability, but without any context. It is GFI's intention to create a better response, using digital platforms to provide an ethical and philosophical context for green activism that can be communicated simply and persuasively. This will be allied to the practical management of sustainability in a currently unsustainable present. Digital platforms can help to bring about better penetration of mainstream culture by green ideas.

We need to move to new mediums because even the established political parties across Europe are losing members, and party volunteering is in freefall. There is a crossover between the crisis in politics and the crisis in the media and communication industries. The intertwining of media and politics is about to undergo a new twist with digitalisation of the former, which will make

it easier for political movements to generate their own TV platforms. Having already seen the genesis of this among the populist right-wing media in the US and Europe, and it is obvious that the Green movement cannot ignore this trend.

European influence
Ireland is a polity that has been greatly influenced by European political thought, particularly that coming from Republican France. However, despite having been an independent state for 90 years, in many ways it remains culturally attuned to United Kingdom, perhaps because of strong linguistic, economic, historic, juridical and indeed familial ties. Thus, the rising Eurosceptic vote in the UK is very problematic for Ireland , which values its EU membership not only for its field of operation across Europe, but also for the forum it provides for cooperation with the UK on a range of issues – if not quite as equals, then certainly often as allies.

There is a shared attitude among the public to political parties in these islands where they are considered as a necessary evil rather than a repository of leadership. They are not usually seen as a repository of ideas – as is perhaps more the case across Europe – but as pragmatic decision-making and a managerial approach to day-to-day affairs. However, whereas there used to be more trust between citizens and their governments, politicians are now regarded more as inept hirelings who can be sacked for incompetence.

The landscape of foundations in the UK and Ireland
It is this lack of political ideas and a leadership vacuum that the Green Foundations are in a position to address. There are no publicly funded political foundations in Ireland or the UK. Many European political foundations emerged after the Second World War to help to rebuild democracy. They do not exist in the English-speaking world except as an adjunct to foreign aid programmes.

Green ideas, currently in a deep recession, are not a luxury but rather a way of recovering a new economic and social order.

Political ideas have often evolved from elsewhere, for example, from the US or privately funded foundations and think-tanks. The oldest of these, the Fabian Society, which was founded to establish socialism, is 130 years old and is affiliated to the UK's Labour Party and the Party of European Socialists. However, it remains a membership organisation which is not publicly funded. Similarly, Green foundations in the UK and Ireland are not publicly funded, are politically independent, and are usually organised as educational charities and regulated as such. They include the Green Alliance, the Forum for the Future, and the Greenhouse and Green Foundation Ireland.

Despite this, there is a rich tapestry of civil society organisations and NGOs creating what has become known as social capital. These are often single-issue or practically focused bodies, and there tend to be far fewer concerned with

ideas on how society might be organised. Political foundations or think-tanks have appeared in this gap, which used to be filled by the party apparatus. In the eighties and nineties, right-wing think-tanks began to proliferate in the English-speaking world and proceeded to dominate political discourse until the recent crisis when they began to be seriously challenged.

Green ideas, currently in a deep recession, are not a luxury but rather a way of recovering a new economic and social order. The managerial political culture which exists in the EU is not sufficient to energise and engage with citizens. More democracy is vital although this could become more complex. People also need to experience European systems of governance to realise that they are not only accountable but are also accessible and intelligible. The Green Foundations and *Green European Journal* can play an increasingly vital role in creating a better understanding of each other's different needs and the positive contributions they all can make, while working together on common green projects. ◖

www.greenfoundationireland.ie

Nuala Ahern is chair of Green foundation Ireland. A psychologist and green activist, she is a former member of the European Parliament for the Green Party and is particularly interested in the developing discipline of ecological psychology.

Re-engineering politics through civil society

Given the current political climate, it behoves ecologists to thrust imagination, innovation and experimentation to the forefront of political action and thought. This requires a "benevolent distance" between the Green foundations and the Green parties.

Christophe Derenne

Mohssin El Ghabri

"…although men must die, they aren't born to die but to create."
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

As ecologists, we must reaffirm that, more than ever before, civil society has become the harbinger of social change.

Innovation is a sine qua non to facing up to the stakes: *regulating globalisation*, climate change, regulating the financial sector, reducing inequality, overhauling the welfare system, further EU integration, fending off populism, and naturally cross-cutting all of these challenges, regenerating our democracy. This is not so much about technological innovation since ecologists would rather focus on social innovation.

To provide sustainable, fair and effective solutions – that is to say ecological solutions – to these challenges, the temptation of conservatism must be avoided. Conservatism concerns determining what is desirable and acceptable based on past successes and failures, or existing ones elsewhere (as in "benchmarking"). However, it is through innovation that constraints and difficulties are transformed into opportunities. And the first requirement of innovation is open-mindedness. To clarify, having an open mind is not to surrender to pragmatism, nor abandon one's values, but to agree to renew one's language and modus operandi. It is not to make "tabula rasa" either of the past or of what exists elsewhere, but to invent anew with boldness and courage.

This is the context in which the foundations of the Greens must reassert their essential mission: to be of service to social and political innovation, to think and act differently. To do so, they must rely on the creativity of civil society. As ecologists, we must reaffirm that, more than ever before, civil society has become the harbinger of social change. Through civil society and the pressure it can exert on both the state and market, we hope to leave the crisis behind. By opening up to civil society's vigour, the intellectual capital required to intelligently manoeuvre the environmental transition can be harnessed.

The respective position of green foundations and parties in Europe – separated by a "benevolent distance" – is a central lever to achieving this.

It all comes down to determining the right balance between them, according to the specificities of national and political contexts. Generally speaking, the optimal distance should be: "Far enough" to give foundations the means to reflect far from the pressures of short-term political trepidations and to engage in dialogue with civil society, partially removed from the burdens of partisan politics; and "close enough" to enable them to stand as closely as possible to political reality and contribute to party strategy and development, sowing seeds for the future.

Driving force for a "new democratic deal"

As mediators between civil society's creativity and the exercise of power, Green foundations can contribute to the emergence of a new way of doing politics, thereby driving a "new democratic deal".

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Representative democracy is in crisis everywhere. Estrangement from politics has perhaps never been as strong as it is today. European democracies are being undermined by the political impotence resulting from increasingly globalised problems, growing mistrust among constituents and the resulting populist or abstention repercussions at the polls (namely in countries where voting is not compulsory). At the same time, never have we seen so many petitions, memoranda, strikes, demonstrations, transitional initiatives and so much activism embodying a true form of citizen involvement, thereby refuting the so-called withdrawal into individual private lives.

Thus, only far-reaching reforms will reignite the vibrancy of democracy. This new democratic deal can be found in civil society's "reservoir of creativity" where new forms of citizen involvement able to restore people's power over their lives are experimented with on a daily basis. Furthermore, new technologies bring new potential implications, which have yet to be explored. The mission of a Green foundation is to stay close to initiatives, to the field, to the in-between spaces, to public or collective labs, where such practices are literally invented.

Etopia's contribution
As ecologists, at the heart of our project and since its inception, we have yearned for a more ethical, more transparent and more participative democracy. We reject the idea that democracy is reduced to its representative component. In French-speaking Belgium, the recent years have not changed us.

Against the conservatism of traditional power structures and while the Greens were occupied with "government affairs", both in Brussels and Wallonia, from 2009-2014, Etopia (the Belgian Francophone Green foundation) was busy promoting a new democratic paradigm. Here are three examples of our contribution to this vibrant bottom-up approach to politics and policy-making, often carried out with the help of Green MEPs.

Let us start by mentioning the Green Minister of the Environment and Urban Renewal's support for conceptualising "Sustainable Citizen Neighbourhoods' ("Quartiers Durables Citoyens") in Brussels. Focusing on citizen empowerment in transitional towns, this policy aims to encourage and accompany collective and sustainable civic initiatives at the neighbourhood level. As for the state, its role is to provide resources and encourage citizen participation.

Mention should also be made of the assistance given by Etopia to designing the first Interdisciplinary Congress on Sustainable Development. This event was organised by Wallonia's Green Minister of Sustainable Development: a vigorous scientific community aiming to involve civil society in research networks and thus remove the barriers among researchers.

Calling growth into question
Finally, let us refer to the work Etopia has carried out on an issue that remains taboo in the current political climate: economic growth, the alpha and omega of all public policies. It is especially difficult to question growth from a governmental point of view – particularly in a typical Belgian coalition system – but with Etopia's assistance and after a long participatory process, Wallonia's Green Minister of Sustainable Development has nevertheless succeeded in implementing new "flagship" indicators to complement Wallonia's regional GDP. One pressing task for green foundations is to prepare the kind of ideological groundwork which can boost those medium-term policies that are not indexed to an outdated GDP fetish. Far from being technical, this debate is fundamentally democratic in nature as different conceptions of the means and purposes of social organisation are confronted. In addition, a growing disaffection for politics is not unrelated to the increasing number of unfulfilled promises related to growth. To find other more sensible and more sustainable promises is one of the most exhilarating mental exercises for our collective democratic imagination.

A vital strategy

In light of the magnitude of democratic challenge, these achievements may seem minor derisory, which in effect they are. However, they show that it is possible to "move the boundaries" of the political system, providing we invest in civil society, where citizens do not expect to be confronted with politics.

This political strategy will find the means for fulfilment on a wider scale – where citizens come together as a society – when a political coalition capable of prioritising such a strategy can be constituted. Evidently, for Ecolo – the French-speaking Belgian ecologists reduced by half in the last general elections – betting on such a strategy is vital. ◙

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Moreover, with various civil society partners, we have sought to promote new themes in the public debate.

First, Etopia has translated and co-edited in French Tim Jackson's "Prosperity Without Growth". We organised a well-rounded programme of publishing activities and events among various participants (including universities, journals, etc.) in order to raise awareness around the theories in the book. The goal was to propagate a high-level exit from the caricatured "growth vs. degrowth" public debate in the French speaking community. Thanks to help from civil society associations, similar work was done to translate and co-edit Wilkinson and Pickett's "The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone".

Finally, every year, Etopia organises "Encounters of New Worlds", mobilising youth around an innovative topic and involving a large number of civil society participants. The latest edition sought to bring to light the importance of the collaborative economy.

Christophe Derenne is the founder and director of Etopia, a Belgian Francophone Green Foundation, with close ties to the Green Party, Ecolo.

Mohssin El Ghabri is Adviser on Studies of the Prospective at Etopia.

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Bridging the gap: autonomy as a pathway to civil society

Ralf Fücks

Political foundations play a key role in strengthening democracy in Germany. Through all its activities, the Heinrich Böll Foundation contributes to increasing civil participation in a country where involvement in public activities is very much a part of life for much of society. An interview with Ralf Fücks.

More and more, political activity from the grassroots, from civil society, is developing not within the party system but rather in opposition to the party system.

GEJ: Could you explain what the role of political foundations in Germany is and how they are trying to address the democratic problems or crisis that we are witnessing nowadays?

The basic task of the German political foundations is democracy promotion both domestically and internationally. So we are addressing democracy issues, citizens' participation, equality, not only in Germany but also in other areas, especially Central Eastern Europe and also in the Global South. I should add that we are working independently from the Green Party. Not only on account of our legal framework but also because we are convinced that the efficiency of political foundations is very much linked to their autonomy – in other words that they are not perceived as a party branch.

Concerning the political situation in Germany, perhaps similarly to the economic situation, Germany still seems to be an exception in terms of stability. The German party system is still working and up until now has managed to prevent the political extremes from gaining a strong parliamentary representation.

There are no radical left or right-wing extreme parties in the Bundestag. The post-communists are swinging between systemic opposition and reformism. From time to time, in some of the state-parliaments (the German Länder) there are some small extremist right-wing groups but without any major political impact.

So on the surface the party system seems quite stable. The participation in elections is still relatively high compared to other European countries, although it has been going down steadily over the last decades. But if you look closer, there are signals of a crisis of confidence in the party system. The gap between political

institutions and society is widening. Parts of the German society, especially the more socially precarious groups, don't participate in the political process any more.

More and more, political activity from the grassroots, from civil society, is developing not within the party system but rather in opposition to the party system. So we have more and more protest movements and citizens' initiatives, which are no longer connected to specific political parties. Still the Greens are in a different position. They are no longer working as the parliamentary wing of social movements but there is a lot of communication and open channels between the Greens and the environmental movement, citizens' rights groups, and so on – in other words the traditional constituency of Green parties.

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Obviously there is a need to redefine the relationship between parliamentarian democracy and the party system on the one hand, and civil society on the other hand.
I wouldn't say the parliamentarian system is being brought into question fundamentally, but it is clear that it has to open up more channels, not only for communication with civil society but also for decision-making, beyond the traditional representative institutions. Issues such as local democracy, plebiscites, public participation play an increasing role in the German political fabric.

We see ourselves as a kind of relay system or a bridge between civil society and the party system.

A two-year programme on the future of democracy

GEJ: Presumably the Böll Foundation is reflecting on this, does the foundation consider that it has a key role to play in this?

Yes, because we see ourselves as a kind of relay system or a bridge between civil society and the party system, especially the Green party of course. One of our main activities is to bring together activists from the different spheres of political engagement – parties, parliaments, civil society – and to promote debates and political dialogue between them. At the same time we are doing some conceptual work, especially on new types of representation and participation, be it in urban planning, public services, or in the education system – to expand the field of civil participation in political decision-making.

GEJ: Can you explain how the Foundation works to achieve this concretely, on the national or federal or regional levels?

For instance, we are running a two-year programme together with our state organisations (the Böll foundation itself is a federal organisation with 16 decentralisations branches) on the future of democracy. There are three main areas within this programme. First, the future of the party system, how the role of parties is changing vis-a-vis a more self-confident society and a lot of political initiatives now developing beyond the party system, as we mentioned. The second pillar is about how the public political sphere is changing, especially with the rise of the digital sphere, with internet and social media as new forms of communication and of political activism – how does that change the political process.

The third pillar is about how to make democracy more inclusive and how to strengthen citizens' participation in decision-making on the municipal and federal level. This is the debate on the relationship between representative and citizens

democracy. We are providing workshops on these issues, conferences, publications - this is how we try to stimulate both the debate within the Greens and the public discourse on this issue.

GEJ: Do you think that the Green foundations are still considered as an important partner from the perspective of these new social movements even if, as you mentioned, there is growing scepticism among these movements towards political parties?

Up to now, we are seen as an open space for political thinking, debate and dialogue. Our relations with societal movements, think tanks and the cultural sphere are not less intense than with the Greens. In general the proximity between the Greens and these new social movements is more intense than it is with the other political parties. But of course there are also situations of tension especially when the Greens are in government.

For example, there was the famous case of Stuttgart 21 – a big underground railway station project with huge costs and a very critical ratio of input and improvement compared to other preferences in the public transport sector. So there had been a huge mobilisation from civil society especially in Stuttgart, and the Greens initially supported that movement, taking part in public rallies giving them a parliamentary voice – in fact they were the only political party to do so. But then when it came to the sweeping victory of the Greens in the Baden-Württemberg elections, we had to negotiate a coalition with the social democrats, who were in favour of this project. So the compromise was to have a referendum at the state

Of course people have particular interests, and the art of politics is to create the best combination of legitimate particular interests and the common good.

level on the project, at which there was a narrow but definite majority in favour of it. So now the Greens in the government are obliged to run the project and the only way to keep a certain critical distance from it is to put a cap on public subsidies to it, and to carry out serious environmental monitoring and regulation. So it's not always easy to keep that alliance if you are in government!

GEJ: We have seen in other places as well, where citizens are using the democratic and consultative procedures that were implemented by the Greens, against ecological projects...

Absolutely, and that's a very serious issue in Germany too now, as we come to the necessity to build new power grids – to connect the wind region in the north of Germany with the industrial core regions in the west and south – you have a lot of local resistance to that. And here it becomes very evident that without a proper process of information and early participation of citizens, you get stuck into this kind of contradiction. So the whole issue of citizen participation has become a precondition for effective government.

GEJ: But are we Greens sometimes too optimistic about this? Ingolfur Blühdorn writes that participation is not necessarily compatible with "ecologisation" – paraphrasing the Winston Churchill quote and saying that ecological democracy is "the worst system apart from all the others" – so don't we have to take into account the contradictions of the current state of individualism?

Of course people have particular interests, and the art of politics is to create the best combination of legitimate particular interests and the common good. Politics is about a concept of the common good which gives you both the moral authority and the political legitimacy to take decisions which may be opposed by specific interest groups. So this tension between particular interests and the public interest is an ongoing challenge.

Political autonomy and dialogue with civil society

GEJ: Coming back to this tension between the foundations, the movements and the parties: you say you are independent from the party, yet the foundation, in Germany as in other countries, is working on Green goals, which are nearly always the same as the party's goals.

Of course, our programmatic goals and political attitudes are not different, we openly refer to the Green political project and we are part of the Green political family – but an autonomous member of it. If you want to have a serious dialogue between the Greens and some critical social movements, on the one hand, or the industry, on the other side of the spectrum, it is good to be seen as an independent facilitator and not just a party agency. So maybe it is one of the specific achievements of the Böll Foundation that we are seen as a place for open and controversial debates between different actors. This definitively gives us a bigger outreach than if we only operated in the shadow of Green politics.

GEJ: It is clear that all European democracies are not on the same level when it comes to citizen participation. It seems German democracy is particularly lively, and this is the result of history as well as the economic situation, but it's also the result of efforts in the areas of culture and education, do you share this view?

There have been ups and downs but in general you have a very high level of involvement; one in three adults in Germany is at least temporarily involved in public activities

There is quite an extended network of democracy education in Germany, starting with the school system, as in other countries, but then you have a lot of agents of public political education and discourse, it's a very dense network of partly state-funded, partly private institutions. And since the late 1960s you have a very deep-rooted tradition of citizens' initiative. There have been ups and downs but in general you have a very high level of involvement; one in three adults in Germany is at least temporarily involved in public activities, across a large spectrum from explicitly political NGOs to local initiatives and social services.

Beyond the traditional sorts of local associations there is a new kind of civic political engagement: environmental movements, feminist groups, civil rights activists and so on. In addition to that, you have a very diverse and pluralistic media landscape with lots of public debates. This is the positive story. But looking at developments in other European countries, I'm not sure what would happen if the basic arrangement of German democracy – the combination of economic growth, social progress and democracy – is seriously put into question. If social inequality, insecurity and fragmentation will become dominant, I'm not sure how stable the German democracy would remain.

GEJ: The director of the Austrian Green Foundation Andreas Novy underscores the importance of social innovation, and believes the foundation there should play a key role in supporting this innovation. Do you think the same?

The Böll foundation is in the very centre of these debates – sustainable lifestyles, another kind of mobility, open source, sustainable agriculture and consumption – our "Meat Atlas", for example, gained enormous public resonance in Germany as well as abroad. At the same time we are very keen to be in a dialogue with the industry pushing for green innovation in the car industry or in the energy sector. And of course we're working on a new regulatory framework for social and environmental innovation. Policy matters, so do institutions. We can't reduce ourselves to social movements if we want to be a driving force for the Great Transformation. ◗

Interview conducted on June 23, 2014.

Ralf Fücks is Co-President of the German Heinrich Böll Stiftung and a member of the GEF Board. He formerly served as Co-President of the German Green Party.

THE GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION/GEF NETWORK

The GEF is a European level political foundation. GEF works to bridge the gap between Green activism at national level and decisions taken at European level. It is a platform where Green actors can discuss Europe's shared challenges.

GEF's mission is to encourage citizens' participation in European political discussions in order to forge a stronger, more participative European democracy.

20

Partner foundations are part of GEF's network

17

Countries

GREEN EUROPEAN FAMILY

GEF is linked to, but independent of, other European Green actors such as the European Green Party and the Green Group in the European Parliament (Greens/EFA).

European Green Party (EGP)

Green European Foundation (GEF)

The Green Group in the European Parliament (Greens/EFA)

SOCIETY

GEF

EUROPEAN POLITICS
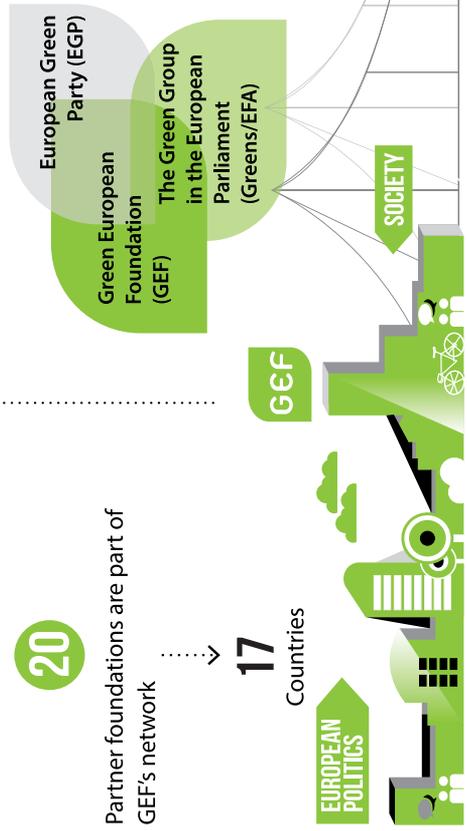
GEF KEY WORK AREAS

Study and Debate

Conducting research, studies – disseminated through publications

Education and Training

Through transnational workshops, seminars, e-learning

Networking Platform

Providing a framework for cooperation between Green actors at European level
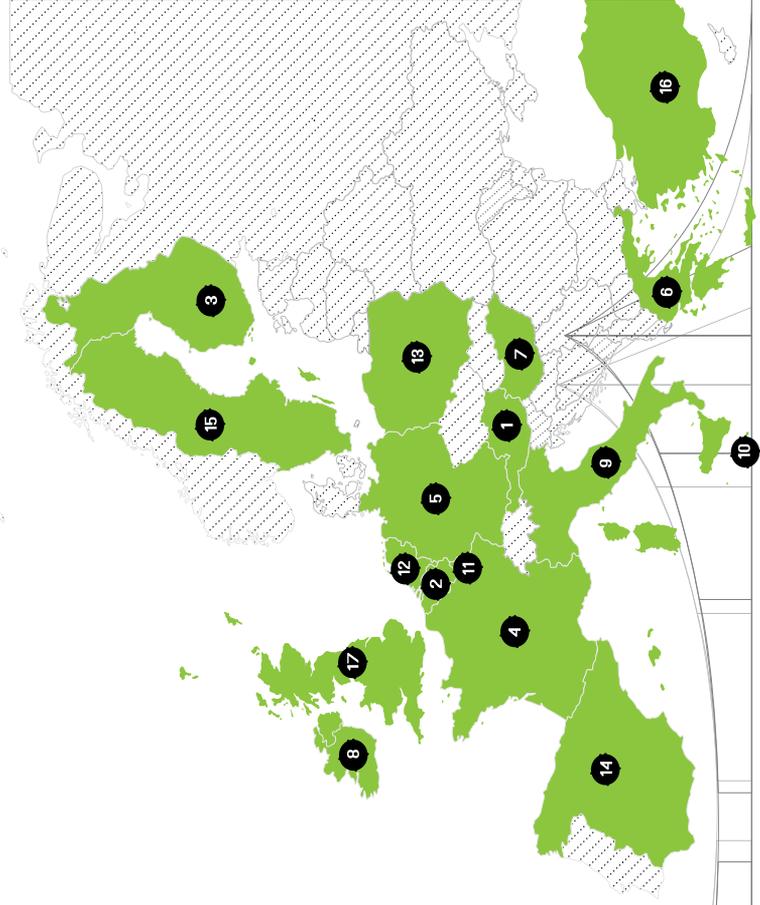
1 **Austria**

Grüne Bildungswerkstatt (1987)

A non-profit foundation, providing political education. It has 10 independent regional offices.

2 **Belgium**

Oikos(2009)

Oikos is an independent think tank, delivering content on political ecology.

Etopia(2004)

A non-profit organisation and Green archive centre and a training academy .

3 **Finland**

Visili (1990)

Visili is an NGO with 28 member organisations providing Green education aimed at adults.

4 **France**

Fondation de l'Écologie Politique (2012)

An independent association, providing intellectual contributions to Green thinking.

5 **Germany**

Heinrich Böll Stiftung (1997)

Heinrich Böll Stiftung is a foundation with 16 regional offices in the German Federal States and 29 worldwide. Its activity is focused on democracy promotion, ecology and sustainability.

6 **Greece**

Green Institute (2011)

A non-profit organisation promoting ecological thinking through education and supporting Green policies.

7 **Hungary**

EcoPolis Foundation (2010)

EcoPolis Foundation contributes to the development of political culture in Hungary.

8 **Ireland**

Green Foundation Ireland (2011)

An independent volunteer-run organisation educating the public about sustainability and how to achieve it.

9 **Italy**

Fondazione Alexander Langer Stiftung (1999)

A non-profit organisation focusing on peace, development and international relations.

10 **Malta**

Fondazzjoni Ceratonia (1999)

Ceratonia is a NGO working in particular on sustainability, organic farming and Green jobs.

11 **Luxembourg**

Gréng Stëftung (2009)

A non-profit association promoting a Cultural Transition towards sustainability (democracy, equality, education).

12 **Netherlands**

Bureau de Helling (1999)

Bureau de Helling is an independent foundation working to influence public debate on economic and social issues.

13 **Poland**

Fundacja Zielony Instytut (2009)

Foundation promoting Green politics & policies and Green social thinking.

14 **Spain**

Fundació Nous Horitzons (Catalonia, 1960)

A foundation working to initiate civil participation in political debates.

Fundació EQUO (2011)

EQUO is promoting sustainable development and the protection of the environment.

15 **Sweden**

Cogito (2005)

A think-tank focusing on ecology, solidarity, peace and human rights.

Green Forum Foundation (1999)

A foundation committed to development work in Eastern Europe, South America and Africa through projects.

16 **Turkey**

Green Thought Association (2008)

Organisation set up to expand Green thinking and politics. It focuses on environmental justice, democracy, gender and LGBT issues.

17 **United Kingdom**

Green Economics Institute (2003)

A non-profit organisation promoting reform of economic theory and policy.

Karl Palmås

Democracy in Sweden: firmly rooted?

While seeming solid, democracy in Sweden faces serious challenges, such as the rise of populism and voter disengagement. In this context, Green foundations are well-placed to propose new initiatives that may help re-engage citizens in the political process, notably through structural changes.

In an oft-cited radio address broadcast on Christmas Day 1965, Olof Palme declares that "democracy is firmly rooted in our country". Though he qualifies this statement, alerting the listeners to the deviousness of seemingly harmless everyday prejudices, the soon-to-be prime minister in the Kingdom of Sweden expresses a firm confidence in the sturdiness of its democracy. Would a present-day Palme be as bullish about it today, almost fifty years on? Arguably, the thinking statesman of today would be considerably less sanguine on the issue.

The paradox of populism

A diagnosis of the current state of Swedish democracy may well start from the issue that Palme discussed some fifty years ago - xenophobia. The increased support for right-wing populist and extremist parties in Europe is also detectable in Sweden. For instance, the Sweden Democrats – an anti-immigration, self-professed nationalist party that emerged from the Swedish neo-Nazi movement of the 1990s – is making inroads into the political establishment. At the 2010 national elections, the party won 5.7% of the popular vote and thus secured twenty seats in the parliament. In the European elections of this spring, almost one in every 10 Swedes voted for this party. We have yet to see what effects this presence has on policy outcomes, and whether the party's discourse and conduct will become normalised.

ⓘ News Oresund

It is, of course, unlikely that the Swedish Democrat voters actually support neo-Nazism. However,

this increase in support is a cause for concern regarding the state of Swedish democracy. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has suggested that contemporary political power can emerge from the exploitation of citizens' cynicism towards democratic institutions. Voters may play along in the election game, but do not really believe that the public office really means something. In other words, voters are not necessarily fooled by shrewd populists – they simply seem not to care whether their representatives are incompetent or corrupt. Žižek thus concludes that while such an incompetent or corrupt politician "is what he [or she] appears to be, this appearance nonetheless remains deceptive" – because in the end, the cynical voters are ruled by this very politician.

Crisis of confidence

A certain amount of public cynicism towards elected leaders has however been a permanent feature of democracy. Political scientist David Runciman argues that historically, the democratic process has always been characterised by an alternation between two states. The general state of affairs is that citizens are relatively disengaged from the nitty-gritty of politics. Voters are all too happy about ceding power to elected politicians, so that they themselves do not have to worry about the running of things. This general state of affairs is however punctuated by crises, in which voters lose confidence in the people they have elected, and possibly in the system as a whole. So far, however, democratic systems have managed to resolve such crises. Indeed, major political reforms tend to be introduced at these precise moments of crisis.

For Runciman, the 2008 crisis still plaguing both the EU and the United States is another instantiation of this general pattern. Sweden, having remained outside the Eurozone and thus out of harm's way from the Troika, has remained relatively unscathed by this financial, social and democratic breakdown. It is not however, exempt from the structural problems that the Occupy movement has objected to.

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The tendencies towards a concentration of wealth and power are at work in the Swedish society, and so is the financialisation that some would argue signals the return of feudalist relations between creditors and debtors. While the relative detachment from the Eurozone crisis has had a dampening effect on dissent, there are good reasons to believe that a democratic reboot of some sort will prove necessary in the not too distant future.

The Green movement, including Green foundations as well as Green parties, is well positioned to point out one factor that further complicates the future of democracy. On the one hand, the democratic reforms of the past century have been pushed through in conjunction with rapid economic growth. On the other hand, economists – even non-green ones – are increasingly sceptical of the prospect of this growth continuing at the same rate. Even though mainstream politics insists that all present ills will be cured as soon as growth returns, HSBC chief economist Stephen D. King suggests that the idea of ever rising incomes is "no more than an illusion humming with quasi-religious fervour". The question King raises in *When the Money Runs Out* is fundamental to the future of democracy: "How should societies adjust to a world where economic growth is no longer guaranteed?"
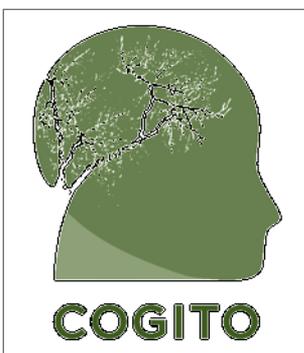
Promoting participation
Arguably, presenting such a "growth realist" position may well be the most significant Green contribution to the wider discussion about the challenges of democracy. Fittingly, economic growth is one of the

main issues that the green think tank Cogito seeks to politicise. It is relatively alone in doing so, as the Swedish think tank landscape is dominated by actors financed by either the employers association or the major unions. Both sides of the labour market agree on the growth issue, as well as many other economic issues. Incidentally, this is the blessing and curse of being a green think tank operating in Sweden. On the one hand, there is a definite space to be filled by a politics that questions the employer-worker consensus; on the other hand, it may be difficult to match the resources of unionised labour and big business.

Such difficulties aside, Green think tanks may prove instrumental in future-proofing democracy, uprooting the status quo that sustains the above-mentioned voter cynicism. Here, it is important that policies regarded as economic may well prove beneficial from a democratic point of view. For instance, a rebalancing of working hours may facilitate the deepening of democracy, in which citizens enjoy what Benjamin Constant called "the liberty of the ancients" rather than "the liberty of the moderns" – that is, the freedom to participate in public deliberation on politics, rather than the freedom to ignore it.

At any rate, given the present crisis, it is crucial to remember that democracy can be understood as a profoundly radical concept. While we tend to see democracy as a state of affairs, it can also be associated with an experimental attitude towards societal arrangements. Today, we can scarcely afford to only ask whether democracy as we know it is "firmly rooted" or not – that is a reactive response to the present situation. The democratic challenge is also one of proactive guesswork: What will the term "democracy" have to imply in the future? ◼

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Foundations for democracy: a special role for GEF

Pierre Jonckheer

The Green European Foundation aims to provide a platform for Green foundations to interact and collaborate at a European level. The diversity among these partners is both a strength and a challenge for the task of steering Europe towards a Greener course in the future.

The ancient, though fundamental debate on the transformation of democratic regimes taking place, and its compatibility with the societal imperative of an ecological shift in our lifestyles still remains inconclusive

Colleagues from national foundations composed the articles collected in this section of the ninth edition of the Green European Journal. Based on my reading of them, the majority share a common set of findings - three in particular, stand out. Firstly, a general "crisis" is afflicting democratic representative political regimes, as much in terms of popular legitimacy as in terms of their ability to ensure social justice. Secondly, political parties suffer from a common and structural shortcoming when it comes to producing different policy initiatives, as confrontation is essential to a healthy democracy. Lastly, the social and cultural dynamics of existing civic initiatives are portrayed as complementary elements of a parliamentary democracy, needed to effectively adapt policy to current environmental challenges.

To overcome the EU's democratic and environmental crisis, the articles emphasise that independent, national political foundations associated to Green parties can and must play a role in renewing political practices. As activist contributions, the readings are based, implicitly or explicitly, on the assumption that the struggle for a more democratic society and efforts aimed at making lifestyles more sustainable are two sides of the same coin. Andreas Novy's contribution in particular exemplifies this approach.

Most of our authors would likely concede that this assumption is highly debatable, as Ingolfur Blühdorn excellently put it in his article, republished in the first part of this edition of the GEJ. The ancient, though fundamental, debate on the transformation of democratic regimes taking place, and its compatibility with the societal imperative of an ecological shift in our lifestyles still remains inconclusive. Beyond this theoretical analysis, the full political spectrum of activism still exists: from democratic optimism to eco-political skepticism. I would venture to say that our authors are biased towards a willful yet pragmatic approach to social interventions and innovations: a novel application of the precept "one need not hope to undertake,

nor succeed to persevere". There's certainly wisdom in recognising that the future remains open and uncertain.

Naturally, the mission of national foundations falls within different national histories and different contemporary political tendencies within European political ecology, not to mention unequal human and financial resources. Nevertheless, as we mentioned before, the chief concerns remain the same. One of the tasks of European political foundations is, thus, to disseminate knowledge regarding social innovations taking place in EU countries in order to enrich and reinforce new democratic experiments. This, in any case, is the mission that the Green European Foundation has chosen for itself since the beginning of its recent creation. All of the activities and programs that the GEF financially supports are spurred by network dynamics, be it websites dedicated to the "Green New Deal", executive training courses, the journal itself, or consortium projects, such as the reindustrialisation initiative. Thus, in spite of its limited financial and human means, we can expect that the GEF will actively participate in the journal publishers' call for a Green democratic reboot.

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One of the main focuses of GEF's work, however, is only marginally addressed in this edition's contributions. Geopolitical and civilisational in nature, the focus has to do with the future of the European Union's process, as a democratic regime at the heart of the European continent and other regions of the world. GEF's ambition here

is to ensure that this topic remains present in the development of ecological thought and political practices. National foundations, and particularly the Heinrich Böll Foundation, have dedicated research, publications, and seminars to this subject. However, efforts aimed at denationalising perspectives should be continued. In other words, the goal should focus on a Europeanising of ecological political thought and projects, including the question of the EU's future.

Linking back to the principal theme of this journal's issue, the future of the European process, of "unity within diversity", is arguably fundamental to reinvigorating democracy. Thus, referring back to Blühdorn's article again, a partial answer to the "sustainability of democracy" question is to actively participate in the European Union's construction by developing policy alternatives in opposition to the status quo conformity. ◗

Pierre Jonckheer is the Co-President of the Green European Foundation and was a member of the European Parliament between 1999 and 2009.

May East

The EU Fifth Project: democracy for sustainability

The EU Fifth Project is creating a network of community-based movements as part of a broader transition, starting at the local level and gaining international momentum, with the aim of building a sustainable future.

The EU Fifth Project aims to harness the creative ideas of community based movements to achieve the social, economic and ecological transition they have been calling for.

Communities and leaders must join in common cause

"We need alternatives to GDP growth as the goal of public policy and we need alternatives to work and wealth accumulation as the driving forces in our lives. A genuine transition in the way we live is the only true path to sustainability. But it must be accompanied by a transition in the way we govern. This is Europe's fifth project." Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

As the new political map of Europe takes shape after the European elections, the new Europe faces a pressing challenge – how to build a sustainable future for its 500 million inhabitants.

While the UK has returned to economic growth, the picture elsewhere in Europe is less positive. According to recent statistics, more than 26 million people in the European Union are unemployed, almost 11 per cent of the active working population. Damningly, almost 125 million people (25 per cent of the population) are at risk of poverty. The problem is particularly acute for young people.

Europe also faces a major ecological challenge. Each person in the EU consumes on average 16 tonnes of material annually, of which six are wasted, with half going to landfill. The European Commission has warned that sources of minerals, metals and energy, as well as stocks of fish, water, timber, fertile soils and clean air, are increasingly under pressure as a result of over consumption.

To address the challenge, the EU Fifth Project was recently launched building on the impressive growth of social movements that are working towards the transition to sustainable societies. With more than 2,000 community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability in Europe, a number which is growing rapidly, the Fifth Project aims to harness the creative ideas of community based movements to achieve the social, economic and ecological transition they have been calling for.

Source: http://www.transitionnetwork.org/

The sustainable growth of community based projects

This recent explosion of community-based initiatives has also prompted the establishment of a new European network, Ecolise, which aims to support exchange and co-operation between initiatives, and to promote a more supportive environment for the emergence of new initiatives in communities across Europe. The Ecolise network brings together a range of partners from across Europe, including the Transition Network and Transition hubs from across Europe, the Global Ecovillage Network, Permaculture UK, Gaia Education, ICLEI (local governments for sustainability) and others.

Despite the EU's advances towards sustainable societies – whether in the social arena through social security schemes, in the ecological sense through greater resource efficiency and recycling of waste, or in economic terms with increasing support for social enterprises – most social movements consider the EU to be a remote and abstract concept, an organisation not well connected to local communities.

There is certainly a divide between the two constituencies, living in mutual ignorance – grassroots social movements on one side and the Brussels-based decision makers on the other hand. The Fifth Project is proposing to bridge this gap, while Ecolise is paving the way towards a structured engagement in order to bring about real change.

We all know of the need for urgent action on climate change and sustainability. Time is a key issue in terms of reducing carbon emissions, stopping the loss of biodiversity or protecting other finite resources. This is why both Ecolise and the Fifth Project are pushing for a more supportive policy environment, to encourage policymakers to bring forward policies and programmes that support community-based action.

The world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision.

This moment in Europe's history requires a new social contract between its citizens and its leaders. Teaming-up the transition town movements, the eco-municipalities, the eco-villages and other grassroots initiatives with economic and political leaders to develop new ways of producing and consuming, moving and eating has to be the answer. Governments can't do it alone, neither can communities. But recognising the contribution that each side can make, and fostering a joined-up approach, may just be enough, just in time.

www.cifalscotland.org

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The crisis of the Fifth Republic

Marion Paoletti

The Fifth Republic in France has become characterised by an increasingly narrow political class, while the political engagement of citizens has plummeted. The EU has not succeeded in improving these weaknesses in democracy, which can only be surmounted through a successful campaign for deep reform: a transition to the Sixth Republic.

As in other European democracies, the emergence of populism is embodied in new, younger faces, in competent and professional looking profiles, and, above all, a self-confident discourse.

With a turnout of 42.43%, the extreme right wing party leading with 25% of the votes, leaving behind the Government's Socialist party with less than 14% of the votes, the results of the 2014 European elections in France were not only stupefying, they also generated (along with a flurry of commentaries) a general sense of resigned indifference towards the expected, forewarned and predictable electoral outcome. Heavy fatigue with respect to entrenched politics adds to onto an increasing trend of defiant and remonstrative behaviour as seen since the early 1990s. The clearest indication of this fatigue was perhaps when street mobilisation against such results simply failed, in stark contrast to what had happened in 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen qualified for the second round of the presidential election.

As in other European democracies, the emergence of populism is embodied in new, younger faces, in competent and professional looking profiles, and, above all, a self-confident discourse and a belief in its capacity to act (exiting the Euro, national sovereignty, etc.). In contrast, what is largely lacking in policy-making discussions among the Government's main party leaders is the citizenry's denial of credibility and trust. Political discussions among professional politicians have become vacuous, marked by disbelief, particularly when it comes to the mythical return of economic growth while offering no other alternatives.

Europe – failing to fill the void
Faceless as it is, including austerity as its defining policy, Europe is unable to fill the democratic vacuum. While national policy appears to be largely determined at the European level, it is the election of one man to the Presidency of the French Republic, that continues to fascinate the French every five years. Contrary to the European elections, electing a representative to the Elysée mobilises more than four out of five French citizens at the end of a campaign that captivates the national media before and beyond. But this one man's capacity for action (always) quickly

turns out to be illusory. With every passing election, the newly elected president is rejected more quickly and deeply than the time before. Elected in May 2012 on the promise of a growth pact that was negotiated at the European level in alignment with the January 2013 Budgetary Treaty, François Hollande is a case in point.

Persistent doubts regarding the ability of governments to act while at the same time the European relay appears very weak are prevalent throughout Europe, not just in France. The disconnect between a political democracy focused on the national level and government interventions that largely escape it is everywhere. However, the French variant of political distrust now seems mixed with cold anger and worrying contempt. One would almost hope that indifference would prevail.

For far too long, the Fifth Republic's institutions have struggled to adapt to contemporary political behaviours ever since the beginning of the 1990s, including the country's long-lasting democratic ideals. At the root of its maladaptation are individuals who, in living from and for a political profession, stall evolution in defence of what they believe are their vested interests. Dating back to 1958 and General du Gaulle, the presidential election of the Republic by direct, universal suffrage weighs heavily on the way today's Fifth Republic operates. Bestowed with far-reaching

powers, once elected and throughout his tenure, the French president becomes politically irresponsible.

The French parliament is weaker than in most European parliamentary regimes. As a result, the culture of policy discussion has not been more developed. Given the fact that tiers of local authority have multiplied over the course of recent decades, a local-level President (be it of a Municipality, an intermunicipal association, a Department, or a Region) morphs into a caricature of the former. Local presidentialism is not a conducive context for discussion and deliberation either among elected representatives or with constituents. Despite efforts in recent years to increase citizen engagement and participation, local power has been found to be both strong and flaky. The demand for greater democracy and participation among the French expresses itself in a thousand ways, in particular through the massive results of a recent survey (TNS Sofres, June 2014).

Popular disengagement: the professionalisation of politics

The need for more horizontal power, a frequent topic of public policy discussions and deliberation, stumbles on the notion of vertical power resulting from direct universal suffrage that paradoxically generates a powerless head of state. Parliamentarians, who frequently head their local authorities in addition to occupying their seat in the senate, have long resisted imposing limits on multiple mandates against regularly polled public opinion, because they are deeply tied to the corporatist interests of a representative democracy. The laws on decentralisation as well as institutional regulations regarding political representation illustrate this attachment. It is unclear whether François Hollande's reform on multiple mandates, limited and deferred as time goes by, will be able to adequately open up democratic politics.

In addition, the presidential election drains political parties who live to designate their champions for the ultimate race and place elected and salaried officials in local government. Political parties have abandoned all doctrinal ambitions in pursuit of electoral outcomes. With less than 1% of French registered as party members, most French are now repulsed by party politics. Parties in Government consist of representatives, future representatives, and salaried political appointees. The professionalisation of politics that historically accompanied massive access to politics (by allowing the less fortunate to live from it), is today leading to its attrition.

Indeed, few individuals feel attracted to the world of politics (or feel entitled and allowed to enter it). Consequently, the French feel hardly (if not poorly) represented. Significant reforms were undertaken during the early 2000s, such as gender parity in politics as French democracy had historically excluded women. Gender parity allows for a more gender sensitive representative democracy. Today, leading candidates pay more attention to the "colours of representation" on their lists and are a little more attentive to young candidates. However, working class categories remain the forgotten strata of political representation. Although a little more representative of French society's diversity, representatives are still perceived as primarily motivated by professional interests, with little or no concern for the travails of everyday life, and as rather corrupt, which recent scandals cannot deny.

Representative democracy in crisis: the struggle for the Sixth Republic

Academics, civil society, political parties (Europe Ecologie - The Greens, the Front de Gauche) have for a long time, been fighting for a Sixth Republic, parliamentary and participatory. But explicit refusal to change the rules of the political game by those who play it, or the embracing of the

Fifth Republic by those who fought it (from François Mitterrand to Arnaud Montebourg), seem to make these episodic attempts futile. Is it too late for change? Are the conditions in place for a leader (Fifth Republic obliges) to harbinger a parliamentary and participative Sixth Republic, in sync with French citizens' aspirations? Did we miss the boat after April 21, 2002 and the presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election, which remains a trauma for many?

A "crisis of representative democracy", which has now lasted for more than 30 years, is a sign of a deep and sustainable change. Defensive politicians fighting for what they perceive to be their interests, as representatives, prevents the political system from adequately adapting to changes in society (e.g. in education, critical capacities, individuation, active Internet participation, media multiplication, etc.). Marine Le Pen meets France's democratic aspirations by reaching out to the people, to the losers of globalisation, by commitments to referendums and popular initiatives, and by denunciations of the "political class" made up of the two largest parties. She does so effectively, convinced, convincingly, and with a smile on her face.

While Europe fails to create new democratic and economic prospects for the future, and simultaneously disarms the Republican monarch, the President of the French Republic, France is unlikely to emerge from its state of political depression any time soon. It would be a game changer if Europe were ecological, social, democratic, and libertarian…

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The Finnish Citizens' Initiative: changing the agenda

Saara Ilvessalo

In an unprecedented step towards direct democracy, Finland adopted a national Citizens' Initiative law in March 2012. Although it has succeeded in opening debates in the national parliament on a number of issues, serious questions remain over whether citizens really have the power to effect change through the tool.

The FCI is the first actual national step towards a more direct democratic system and the first tool that allows citizens to directly affect legislation in Finland.

Although Europe has been a breeding ground for democracy for centuries, direct democracy has not taken any giant steps in Finland, as it has in some other European countries. Since 1945, only one national referendum has been organised – on Finland's accession to the European Union. In the Finnish legal system, the referenda are only consultative, not binding. This means that the Parliament first decides whether or not to organise a referendum and then about whether to act on the result or not. Citizens do not really have the means to affect the political agenda between elections.

However, new tools for participation have been developed lately. The Finnish Citizens' Initiative (FCI) was introduced in May 2012 after years of preparation and hard work, especially by the Greens in the government. Through the FCI, 50,000 Finnish citizens (approximately 1.2% of those entitled to vote) can give notice of their support in order to get a bill into Parliament. Basically, the FCI is a route for the citizens to suggest new legislation or changes to existing legislation.

At the end of 2012, a web service was opened for the FCI to provide a way to launch and manage initiatives online. The aim of the new system is to promote and support free civic activities as well as to strengthen civil society. Before 2012, it was only possible to start an initiative, either about a specific issue or regarding the organisation of a municipal referendum, at the municipal level.

Animal rights, equal marriage and drink-driving

The first FCI to break the minimum of 50,000 signatures was an initiative by animal rights organisations demanding the prohibition of fur farming. The initiative was handed over to the Finnish Parliament in March 2013 and was dealt with by the Parliament in June. At the hearing it was dismissed by 146 to 36 votes (3 empty, 14 absent) and did not therefore lead to any further measures. Apart from this first FCI, another initiative suggesting changes to energy certificates

for housing was also later dismissed by the Parliament.

Besides these two initiatives, there are four others that have collected the minimum of 50,000 signatures in six months and are currently being processed by various committees. The initiatives concern the law of copyright, equal marriage rights for gay couples, the status of the Swedish language in schools and harsher penalties for drink-driving. None of the six FCIs has so far been accepted by the Parliament or led to further moves. At the moment, there are approximately 30 ongoing FCIs and 210 FCIs that never collected the minimum number of signatures and have therefore ended.

The FCI is the first actual national step towards a more direct democratic system and the first tool that allows citizens to directly affect legislation in Finland. The idea was to strengthen representative democracy by giving citizens the opportunity to have their voices heard even between elections. On the other hand, the FCI can only make suggestions on behalf of the people to the Parliament, which does not have to accept any of the changes proposed. If the Parliament dismisses

Democracy means acting for a better and more equitable society and must be constantly maintained and developed.

an initiative, the initiators have no recourse to any other means of promoting their agenda.

Public debate – is it enough?
The FCI has managed to raise questions and discussion about both the contents of the initiatives and Finnish democracy as a whole. Even some Members of Parliament have criticised the FCI system and claimed that it is a "fast lane past representative democracy" – this seems somewhat absurd since that's exactly what it was created for, to strengthen representative democracy. After one and a half years of attempting to introduce changes, none of the initiatives have actually led to any alterations in legislation but many of them have proved to be openings for introducing new parliamentary debate on a number of political topics.

The FCI on equal marriage rights collected a record 166 851 signatures, 100 000 of which were collected during the first day. Before the FCI there was a similar initiative put forward by Members of Parliament which was however dismissed by the Law Committee. This made the discussion remarkably lively and even boosted the other initiative on the same issue. The initiative was again dismissed by the Law Committee but will now continue to the plenary of the Parliament where a slight majority seems to support it. Thus, the FCI has been a part of a widespread political debate as well as numerous events and therefore supports the strengthening of the civil society.

Mistrust as a democratic crisis
After two years of the FCI one could still claim that the fundamental problem remains: the people still do not wield actual political power and none of the citizens' initiatives have led to legal changes in our society. The voting percentage in elections is relatively low: for example, only 39.1% of the people entitled to vote actually voted in the European parliamentary elections this year. In municipal elections in 2012 the equivalent percentage was 58.3% and 67.4% in national parliamentary elections one and a half years before.

The mistrust between politicians and citizens is, according to the research, on the rise and only one half of the population actually votes in the elections. This means that the other half is for some reason left outside the democratic process. On the other hand, the politicians do not seem to be ready to give the people enough actual power to make decisions in politics. Many of the FCIs have even been criticised by the politicians for being poorly prepared and conceived.

Even though the world around us has changed rapidly, our democracy has not changed significantly in the past decades. Of all the different forms of social organisation, democracy is still the most respected, but is one that requires mutual trust between the representatives and the electors in order to function. Democracy means acting for a better and more equitable society and must be constantly maintained and developed. Cosmetic changes are not enough to stop democracy from drifting into crisis. A necessary improvement to our democracy is direct empowerment of citizens in order to guarantee the legitimacy of institutional politics, to restore citizens' faith in democracy and to broaden the means available to the citizenry to influence society.

More direct democracy
If people feel that they do not have a say in decision making, a dangerous platform is given to extremist and illegal movements that want to be heard yet feel marginalised and excluded by society. We should have learnt from our past that the lack of actual legal participation can lead to frustration and anger towards the "elite", even to violence and unpredictable, inhumane actions. That is why it is important to give citizens power and to constantly develop democracy.

Even though the FCI is a good start to reducing the gap between politicians and citizens, it is not enough to fix our lack of democracy. We need more direct democracy in which the Parliament does not have the right to veto whether or not

a referendum is organised or any result from that referendum. This means that it should be possible to require a referendum on a citizens' initiative if the result of the Parliament's processing does not satisfy the initiators. The biggest changes in, for example, the constitution, should always be decided upon in a referendum. Of course, minority rights and basic human rights have to be respected in order for direct democracy to work.

The opponents of direct democracy sometimes say that people do not have sufficient knowledge about the issues that they are directly voting on. However, in countries where direct democracy is constantly used, people are more aware of the societal issues, problems and solutions. Direct democracy leads to increased awareness and even

happiness when people feel that they can affect their own society. Additionally, my experiences in local politics and as a candidate both in the European parliamentary elections and in the Finnish parliamentary elections have taught me that politicians have the same ability to acquire information and make decisions as regular citizens. People should demand their power back – it is only being borrowed by the politicians.

Saara Ilvessalo is a Finnish city councillor, member of the Finnish Greens' Executive Committee and The Finnish Greens' EGP delegate. She has written a book about direct democracy in Finland.

Every vote counts: social themes on the political agenda

Dirk Holemans

In Belgium voting is compulsory. Nevertheless, more and more people choose not to vote. This means that the voices of socially weaker groups tend to fade away, unless civil society organisations take conscious steps to put social themes at the top of the political agenda. This is exactly what was done during recent elections in Flanders.

"Every Vote Counts" is a participatory project offering socially vulnerable groups a megaphone in the run-up to elections.

Weak voices during election season

In election season, it is often the strongest that prevail: prominent politicians are given the most airtime, while organisations that represent major economic interests gain privileged access to political party HQs. This also means that the needs and voices of socially weaker groups tend to fade into the background – unless civil society organisations take conscious steps to put social themes at the top of the political agenda. This is exactly what they did during recent elections in the Belgian region of Flanders, under the campaign banner "Every Vote Counts". The aim was to influence the political and public debate by working with people in socially vulnerable positions. The campaign instruments included policy proposals, lobbying, press conferences and a website reminding the public that "voting is not a game".

In the words of the organisers themselves: "Every Vote Counts" is a participatory project offering socially vulnerable groups a megaphone in the run-up to elections. People in socially vulnerable circumstances help to devise policy proposals that are essential in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The campaign thus aims to create more room in public debate for citizens who are in a weaker position in socio-economic terms. These are also the people who are most likely to turn away from politics, who don't turn out to vote and who feel abandoned by politicians.

The community perspective

This is confirmed by Ilse Hackethal, the director of *Samenlevingsopbouw*, a community development organisation which was one of the driving forces behind the campaign: "Community, youth and welfare workers come across situations like these all the time; people who believe that politicians have nothing to offer them. Surveys show that a quarter of the electorate failed to vote in 2012. In Borgerhout, where I live, as many as 35% of those entitled to vote did not do so. Which pains me. Because this means that some of the people standing with me in the morning queue at the baker's, mums and dads at the school gate, young people at the tram stop, some of my neighbours, etc. are not politically represented.

Source: http://stemmenisgeenspel.be/

"Every day in the town where I live and work, I notice that there are still widespread disparities between people. Not everyone lives in a decent, affordable house with enough bedrooms for their children, not all young people are gaining qualifications in areas that suit them, not everyone manages to find their way through all the red tape. To tackle issues like these, it remains vital for "ordinary people" to keep raising their points with politicians. Whether it's about cycling safety, affordable housing, a school for their children: their vote does count. It does make a difference.

"Based on our own and our partners' development work, we believe it is important for people to make their voices heard, to roll up their sleeves and to band together to seek solutions to their problems. To become more active and responsible, but in relation to politics. With the "every vote counts" project, several different organisations took a joint initiative to bridge the gap between politics and people's reality. And they succeeded."

Taking action for change

Sound theoretical? It had at least one immediate, tangible result: at electoral debates with party leaders held in 13 cities, the halls were thronged with people from different backgrounds and walks of life who would never normally have attended such an event. People from socially vulnerable

groups made careful preparations, had their say, and put forward their policy priorities.

Samenlevingsopbouw sets itself the aim of "supporting and strengthening vulnerable groups so that they can draw on their own resources to find solutions to problems that affect them locally". To this end, the organisation worked with over 200 other local partners in Flanders. They interviewed over 8,000 people, speaking to groups that usually ignore mainstream politics and often see politicians as beyond their reach. Based on these interviews, they drew up a memorandum on social topics with solidarity and redistribution as its key words.

Source: stemmenisgeenspel.be/

Memorandum in hand, they approached party HQs and local candidates arguing, amongst other things, for a fair and transparent tax system that ensures that the strongest shoulders bear the heaviest burden. The campaigners believe that state-collected funds should be invested in accessible, high-quality basic facilities for all, in sustainable, worthwhile jobs, in education as a lever against social exclusion, in decent, affordable housing for all, and in accessible health care.

Changing politicians' perspectives
Actively approaching politicians means that professionals and volunteers alike can confront them with problems that they never or rarely experience in their own lives: how do I manage on benefits? How many Pampers does a two-year-old need every month? Can we afford

little gifts to hand out at school? How can you supervise children's homework while living in cramped conditions? For the volunteers posing the questions, it was quite an experience. They found that the politicians who take decisions on important matters of social policy were equally at a loss when it came to making decisions that the volunteers faced on a daily basis.

Another important tool was the website "Voting is not a game". This invited voters to find out more about the social challenges to be tackled after the elections. The site used photos to gauge how much visitors knew about the social problems in their country. It also provided information about the solutions put forward in the memorandum and those proposed by the political parties. Visitors were able to vote for social policies by posting selfies on the website.

Finally, visible action (including a tented camp) was used to highlight sticking points such as the issue of high rents. Specific messages were communicated: for example, for rents to be truly "affordable", people should be spending no more than a third of their incomes on housing.

In conclusion: the "Every Vote Counts" campaign shows that people from vulnerable social groups are keen to be involved in elections if they feel that they are being taken seriously and that their input is sought and appreciated. And, for politicians, it represents a unique opportunity to establish a productive dialogue with groups that they would otherwise find hard to reach. ◼

http://stemmenisgeenspel.be/

Dirk Holemans is coordinator of the Belgian Green think-tank Oikos and writes on issues such as the future of cities, economy and ecologism as ideology.

Reyes Montiel Mesa

Hacking into Congress

Agora Voting is an innovative project using free software to establish social citizen networks for the development of a system for secure electronic voting. Spanish Green Party Equo collaborated on this project to carry out Spain's first real experiment with direct democracy.

The exercise of political representation needs not be what the traditional parties seem to think it is.

"Honourable Member, would you be prepared to give up your vote if it meant you could represent us better?" That was the question which started it all. Eduardo Robles and David Ruescas, the founders of "Agora Voting", attended an Open Meeting with Joan Baldoví, called by EQUO Madrid, to remind us why the initiative was born: to demonstrate that the exercise of political representation need not be what the traditional parties seem to think it is.

So we set to work. We wanted to show that democracy does not consist merely of voting once every four years, that we have the technology and the political culture to enable citizens to express their views instantly about what legislation our representatives should introduce and how they should do it. "Congreso Transparente" is a tool used by the Agora Voting platform to consult the people and show what our member of parliament, Joan Baldoví, is doing in Congress. The first experiment concerned the final debate on the Transparency Bill and the second, the latest legislative reform of the Spanish electricity sector.

In both cases, our website explained the principal contents of the legislative texts so as to inform the people about the different positions and the amendments to the bill being discussed. By using a validated registration (a scanned DNI or electronic signature), everyone who is entitled to vote could vote for the amendments they thought most appropriate, even if they were not members or supporters of "Coalición Compromís" or EQUO. In the debates, the Member of Parliament adopted the stance which reflected the peoples' vote.

Adapting the parties

Does this demonstrate that direct democracy is possible? Not exactly, it is just our modest contribution to filling a gap which is widening every day. We want to show that politicians should stop speaking FOR citizens and start speaking WITH them. It is true that, at election time, the political organisations introduce themselves with a programme, a manifesto, but no government has ever shown such contempt for the contract it offered its citizens as the Government of Mariano Rajoy. However, we should not resign ourselves to voting every four years and expect an electoral programme to coincide completely with all our expectations. It is certainly possible for the majority of People's Party (PP) voters to agree with the Government's economic policy, but at the same time, disagree with the transparency of the Government over its planned reform of the electricity sector.

"What would happen if they all did that?" asked some, as if it were a threat, as if it would be a disaster. "Would it mean the end of political parties?" If they are determined to carry on operating as they have until now, it probably would. However, instead of discrediting this openness or looking the other way, they should investigate and try to adapt themselves to the requests for participation and openness from the people who elected them to the posts they occupy. Permanent delegation, adequate knowledge and the sovereignty of "ownership" are at stake, as posited by Antoni Gutiérrez-Rubí. We want to explore where those debates are going and formulate the response.

It has been encouraging to see
how the teams of Agora,
Compromís and EQUO have worked
to achieve their objective

Assessing the experiment

Rather than focusing on the possible adverse consequences, I would like to focus on the lessons the experiment can teach us. Firstly, the value of co-operation, for without Agora Voting's initiative, we'd probably just go on theorising about political participation. However, the Agora team is a good demonstration of how much talent and interest in politics there is outside the political organisations. It has been encouraging to see how the teams of Agora, Compromís and EQUO have worked to achieve their objective. There is no doubt that it has been hard, but at the same time, very gratifying.

Secondly, it's clear that many reforms are needed, but we now have the tools to make a start – if we have the political will, we can do it. It's not without risk, but we should be encouraged to at least give it a try – this is just the first step. We shall assess our progress share it with those institutions, parties, organisations and entities that are ready to make a start, so that the successes are more sustainable and mistakes can be corrected.

Thirdly, the parties and organisations will have to increase their legitimacy every day, not every four years, and will have to wake up, however much constitutional recognition they may have, if they want to be the tool with which collective projects are carried out. Our citizens, our men and women, are on the march.

In his book "El futuro lo decides tú" [You decide the future], Zarin Dentzel says "success is achieved in a context of failure". The PP's absolute majority, our discredited institutions and the people's disaffection with politics might make us think there's no point in trying- but that is not true. Now more than ever, people must take part. We're already working on our new experiment; stay tuned! 🌿

http://agoravoting.com

Reyes Montiel Mesa is a patron of the Fundacion EQUO foundation and a former spokeperson of EQUO.

Alterfederalism as a way of rethinking the crisis of Europe

Łukasz Moll

Do we really want more Europe, integration and solidarity? Or should we perhaps first ask exactly what 'more Europe, integration and solidarity' should look like? The results of the European elections in Poland show that 'old federalism' is retreating.

The debate on European issues in Poland is stuck at the same point at which it was during the pre-accession debate. Its main question is still the same – are you a euro-enthusiast or a eurosceptic?

In November 2011 the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs made a speech in Berlin that made waves in our country. Although the words, which appealed for European unity and for Germany to bear more responsibility for the EU project, should have been music to every federalist's ears, when stripped of their rhetorical catchphrases they revealed a neoliberal plan for the continent.

Radosław Sikorski emphasised the need for member states to maintain strict financial discipline, which has been strengthened during the ongoing debt crisis, and to create a system of automatic sanctions for countries that fail to exercise such discipline. Germany – in his eyes – should become a sort of "European policeman" due to the fact they have the strongest economy in the bloc.

The right-wing critics of the Polish minister were irritated by two things: firstly, shifting "bits of sovereignty" to the European level and, secondly, putting Germany at the centre of such a project. Polish conservatives are known for their staunch euroscepticism – but as soon as they take responsibility for governing the country they will be taking part in the same integration process they previously criticised.

What did Sikorski *really* say?
Anti-German sentiment on the Polish right makes them blind to the issues that Sikorski would want to remain within the sovereign remit of the member states: "national identity", religion, lifestyle, public morality, but also the levels of income taxes and VAT. Nor would Sikorski mind retaining national differences regarding family law or working time.

The effect of such a process would be a continuation of the conservative-liberal status quo in Poland. It would mean a neoliberal path of "development" – creating a peripheral economy that competes with others in a "race to the bottom" for low taxes and cheap labour. Even the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency chose to promote the country to foreign capital with

a video of a smiling woman who, turning to the camera, says that "here labour is cheap, because the rise of wages is slower than the rise of productivity".

The European project is seen as hostile in terms of the imagined threats it poses to "Polish identity" – these "threats" include access to abortion, the fight against violence directed towards women and legalising gay marriage.

A new perspective
The debate on European issues in Poland is stuck at the same point at which it was during the pre-accession debate. Its main question is still the same – are you a euro-enthusiast or a eurosceptic?

This question cuts the debate off from a perspective that in times of crisis should be shared by all progressive, political forces. I call this perspective "alterfederalism", which can be summed up as follows: yes, I support the idea of the European Union and the deepening of European integration, but in a different way from that which has been pursued over the last 20 years. In practice this means abandoning support for most of the current policy choices made by the EU, that in Poland were supported by progressive forces due to their fear of the rise of euroscepticism.

Teto's Space

Initiatives, such as the march of Indignados on Brussels or the blocking of rail shipments of radioactive waste from France to Germany, can make us think about new ways of doing European politics.

We now need to ask what solidarity means to its proponents. Is it just confined to a common market and a common currency, or does it include something more, such as social and ecological objectives? Do we think about integration in a top-down manner, built on inter-governmental cooperation, in which the strongest member states have the most influence; the European Commission, which is not directly elected and prone to lobbying; and the European Central Bank, which works in the interests of capital and over which there is no democratic control?

Or maybe we want a form of integration that would make the European Union more democratic and more focused on the needs and interests of its citizens? Should solidarity mean just promoting austerity for the sake of common debt reduction, or should it mean sharing responsibility for debt, harmonising our tax and social security systems and investing in the ecological transformation of our economy?

Where the eurosceptics are right
Before and shortly after Poland joined the EU there was no political space for an alterfederalist narrative. Discussions centred around the issue of whether or not to join the EU. One could have argued that, although not everything in the European project was as bright as it should have been, criticism should have been postponed, because it was assumed that any critique of European policy choices would fuel the eurosceptics and result in Poland not joining the EU.

But, disciplined by the international financial organisations after the transformation of 1989 and the EU during the accession negotiations, Poland didn't have the strength to try to influence the shape of the Union before getting on board, nor did it wish to– the EU was an object of desire and a place where we would soon find ourselves if we politely pursued the neoliberal policies that were proposed to us.

Now is the time to seriously look at the critiques that are being put forward by eurosceptic populists – not for the sake of destroying the EU but, on the contrary, to strengthen it. The critique of the lack of democracy in the European institutions – even if made by right-wing politicians with authoritarian tendencies – is not baseless. If we want to build a different, better Union it is nonetheless important to accept that some critiques of the EU can be legitimate.

Bottom-up integration
It seems that the beginning of an alterfederalist stance can be seen in the social movements that are taking shape during the ongoing crisis. Initiatives, such as the march of Indignados on Brussels or the blocking of rail shipments of radioactive waste from France to Germany, can make us think about new ways of doing European politics – in a supranational and bottom-up way.

The alterfederalist stance requires us to remember how closely intertwined we are with each other and that this goes beyond borders. Fighting for the German social model, that could create more debt problems for the southern EU countries; protesting against nuclear reactors in Poland, while ignoring similar plans in the Czech republic; fighting for greater unionisation of the workers in Swedish corporations, but not anywhere else – all of these are examples of strategies that are not fit for the world of today. The alterfederalist stance could offer a way out of them.

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GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL

The failure of "old federalism"
The lack of such a perspective on the Polish political scene was palpable during the European elections. The two mainstream parties considered to be the most pro-European – the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Europe Plus – Your Movement (EPTR) coalition, did not try to propose an alternative vision for the EU. Just like the main ruling party – Civic Platform (PO) - they focused on presenting the EU as a positive project, which brings progress to Poland: democracy, human rights, development, prosperity and modernity.

The right-wing eurosceptics had a monopoly on criticising the EU. While the Law and Justice (PiS) party looks at Brussels with some degree of sympathy in order to present themselves as a "responsible" political force, they are the arch enemy of Janusz Korwin-Mikke. The return of this controversial figure from the margins of Polish politics, in which he dwelled for years, could be seen in 2010, when he came fourth in the race for the office of president of Poland. In the EP elections, thanks to the low turnout (23.83%) he managed to once again come fourth (7.15%), gaining four MEPs.

The euro-enthusiasts' projects – on the other hand – were defeated. The SLD once more failed in gaining new voters (9.44%), and the EPTR – despite boasting some serious celebrities and well-known politicians on its lists – failed to even pass the 5% threshold (3.57%).

The eurosceptics' new clothes
The profiles of those who voted for Korwin-Mikke are not the same as those of former populists and eurosceptics in Poland. Until recently opponents of the EU came mainly from the groups that had lost out during the political and economic transformation of 1989 – poorly educated people from smaller towns and the countryside, prone to the influence of the Catholic Church.

The Congress of the New Right (KNP), on the other hand, has a young, male electorate. Their mixture of extreme free market policies, social conservatism and a complete rejection of the EU is particularly attractive to students: university pre-elections are won by the KNP by a wide margin despite the fact that Korwin-Mikke doesn't shy away from misogynistic, racist and anti-semitic remarks – or maybe precisely because of this…

Issues that made headlines during the campaign in the countries of "old Europe" – the debt crisis, alternatives to austerity, financial sector regulations, changes in the structure of the EU, climate change – were almost completely absent from the campaigns of the mainstream Polish parties.

These issues were put forward by the Green Party, which tried to connect "European-ness"- positively understood as a vision of a high quality of life – with a new vision for Europe, forged by social movements in the spheres of ecology, digital rights, feminism and participative democracy. Although, due to the high requirements involved in collecting signatures, the Greens were present in only 5 of 13 electoral districts, they were nonetheless able to present their new vision for Europe to the electorate.

Democratic sovereignty beyond the Nation and the State
The debate on Europe in Poland is still marked by an "us" (Poles) vs "them" (Europe) divide. Both sides of this division are trying to work together in a common political project, which at the same time is being questioned due to a desire to return to national sovereignty.

The alterfederalist project must try to present ambitious proposals which will form the basis for a more social Europe, e.g. with common responsibility for pension systems and joint and just efforts towards an ecological transition or a European minimum wage.

Although it seems unlikely that the eurosceptic attitude will achieve dominance, neither the pragmatic nor the overly-optimistic stances on the EU can claim much success in having brought the Union closer to Polish society, be it in real (e.g. "quality of life") or symbolic (e.g. "European identity") terms.

The alterfederalist project must try to present ambitious proposals which will form the basis for a more social Europe, e.g. with common responsibility for pension systems and joint and just efforts towards an ecological transition or a European minimum wage.

In European nation states democratic sovereignty was achieved thanks to common territory and nationality. The EU, blurring the borders between nation states and opening them up for greater mobility, takes some of this democratic sovereignty away, putting it in the hands of financial markets and "independent experts". The big problem with which we are faced today is how to both gain political space in Europe and also regain some kind of democratic sovereignty, which is not suited to the enclosed spaces of nation-states, but rather for the situation we currently have in the EU: the space of flows.

Łukasz Moll is a member of the Green Party in Poland from the Silesia region and social theorist from Silesian University.

Sandrine Bélier

Fulfilling the promise of the ECI: learning from the Right2Water experience

The European Citizens' Initiative opened a much needed channel for citizens to reach the European Institutions directly, and brought with it immense potential to reinforce the EU's democratic legitimacy. Yet weaknesses remain in its implementation and regulation, as illustrated by the Commission's response to the Right2Water ECI. Green members of the European Parliament have advocated a number of changes to improve it, such as binding the Commission to offer a clear legislative proposal to successful ECIs.

The only real way to tackle the growing crisis of confidence that dominates European politics is a more democratic Europe and a stronger involvement of citizens at all levels. The possibility to influence the EU's political agenda should encourage citizens to engage and lead to more European discussions and debates. These debates among citizens as well as between citizens and political institutions can pave the way to the badly needed emergence of a European public space.

The feeling of their own disempowerment among EU citizens clearly has to be tackled if the gap between them and their institutions is to be overcome. It is with this purpose – to bring citizens and EU institutions closer together and thus renew the EU's legitimacy – that the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was included in the Lisbon Treaty and implemented by the Regulation 211/2011. Thereby the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy was created in the EU in order to enable citizens to be politically more active within the European framework with a potential to influence the political agenda of the EU.

ⓘⓢⓔ European Parliament

Two months ahead of the European elections, the Commission finally presented its response to the first successful ECI on the universal right to water (Right2Water), which managed to mobilise over 1.6 million European citizens. However, the answer remains remarkably vague and unsatisfactory in terms of potential changes in EU law, despite a successful European campaign. This raises again the issue of how people power can be made more effective.

A networking, fundraising and promotional challenge

When we were designing the implementation rules of the ECI in the European Parliament, we tried to make it as citizen-friendly as possible. Nonetheless, organising an initiative in at least seven member states and collecting one million signatures remains a challenge for the networking, fundraising and promotional capacities of any organiser. In this regard, the first official response from the Commission to the Right2Water initiative was a vindication of the excellent campaign carried out by those defending the universal right to access water.

In 2013, when celebrating the first year of the ECI and the European Year of Citizens, the Greens started to collect and analyse the feedback from NGOs and citizens in view of the revision foreseen in 2015. On the one hand, EU institutions failed to publicise this pioneering tool, which remains unknown by many citizens as not a single cent was actually spent on promotion. On the other hand, organisers of ECIs are facing difficulties such as strict and bureaucratic technical and procedural requirements for the online collection system – not to mention the fact that it did not work initially, causing delays and the spending of extra financial resources. Therefore the revision must address both issues by informing citizens and removing the barriers that still hinder the effective use of the ECI.

Drawing lessons from those experiences, we will also have the opportunity to bring back to the table some of the proposals of the Greens. Three years ago, and despite our work in the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, we did not succeed in securing a longer period for the collection of signatures.

We had called for 18 months, given the complexity of setting up the required structures Europewide, but the Council and Commission insisted on no longer than 12 months. In my opinion, much more can be done for the improvement of the ECI with the help of the European Parliament.

The readiness of decision makers to embrace citizens' participation

The main question concerns the attitude of the European institutions towards this new participatory instrument. The readiness of decision makers and bureaucracies to embrace citizens' participation as a chance for a more legitimate process of policy formulation, rather than as a threat to their position in the power structure, is still surprisingly low. The response of the European Commission to the Right2Water initiative illustrates today the main weakness of the ECI in that a successful initiative is not binding on the Commission. It is all the more outrageous in light of the unanimous support of the members of the European Parliament expressed during a preliminary hearing a month ago.

Yes, the Commission has committed to ensure that all future EU activities contribute to the maintenance and improvement of water quality, upholding the necessary environmental standards, affordability of water supply and transparency in the award and exercise of appropriate services, both within the EU and internationally. Faced with the pressure of millions of citizens, EU Commissioner Michel Barnier had already removed water from the scope of the concessions directive. An appropriate reaction should have given a clear timeframe and commitment to ensure that the forthcoming review of the Water Framework Directive delivers a substantive response towards guaranteeing the right to water. It should also have given an unequivocal commitment to refrain from pushing for the privatisation of water services, either directly or indirectly, as has been the case in the context of the Troika's involvement in crisis countries. European citizens also deserve more clarity on how the EU intends to ensure the protection of water supply in the course of EUUS trade negotiations (TTIP).
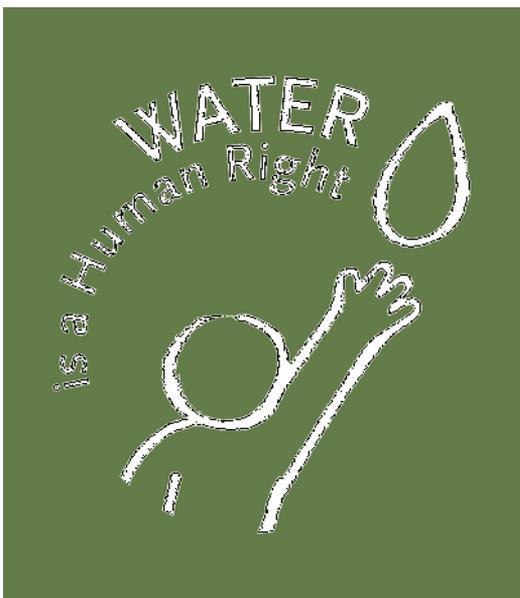
The Commission's response is vague and must be swiftly followed by concrete proposals to ensure that the objective of the Right2Water initiative will be truly delivered. The Greens, who have strongly supported this initiative, therefore call on the Commission to present concrete proposals in order to ensure the initiative will be delivered as European citizens have the right to expect.

Fulfilling the promise

It is undeniable that the ECI allows citizens to raise and bring crucial issues into the emerging European public space. But if their proposals die away without any real impact, the ECI will fail and foster frustration instead of dedication. Between the technocratic way of policymaking that strives to exclude transparency and participation, and a populist, nationalist rollback, there is just a narrow path that will allow us to protect

It is undeniable that the ECI allows citizens to raise and bring crucial issues into the emerging European public space. But if their proposals die away without any real impact, the ECI will fail and foster frustration instead of dedication.

and develop our economic, social and cultural achievements in the context of globalisation. It is the way of democracy. Thus it is really up to the European institutions to fulfil the promise that has been given to them

As the regulation provides for a revision of the rules in 2015, the newly elected members of the European Parliament should immediately engage with this revision. European citizens and their representatives are also entitled to expect that the Commissioners nominated this summer will commit to improving public awareness of this tool and upgrading its effectiveness.

In view of the difficulties met by the first ECIs, in order to improve this democratic tool to truly empower citizens, and in view of the revision foreseen in 2015, the Greens propose:

– That a real budget should be granted to the ECI in order to carry out a strong promotion of this tool and to give the Commission the keys to help the ECIs in their campaigns.

– To give the citizens' committees the choice of the starting date of signature collection.

– To extend the period of signature collection from 12 to 18 months.

– A harmonisation and a simplification of the member states' requirements for signature collection.

– To bind the Commission to a clear legislation proposal in the case of successful ECIs.

Over and above those considerations on the European Citizens' Initiative, the challenge is to turn European integration from a project of elites into a project of all the citizens. We need to generate more participation and democratic legitimacy for decision-making on the European level. In the long run, we will either have a Europe of the citizens – or no common Europe.

Sandrine Bélier is a former member of the European Parliament in the Greens-EFA group as part of the French delegation. As an MEP she contributed to the development of the ECI.

Christian Beck

Joan Groizard

Guillaume Sellier

The next democratic revolution: from the Green Primary to European lists

The Green Primary was an unprecedented democratic experiment at a European level. It allowed green sympathisers everywhere in Europe to participate in the process of selecting the leading candidates of the European Green Party in the May 2014 European elections. A transnational assessment of the primary from the perspectives of France, Germany and Spain.

Without involving European parties in the process of building European answers, our continent will remain split

"This time, it's different" was the European Parliament's slogan to campaign for the idea of leading candidates. And indeed, as Jean-Claude Juncker overcomes a few last obstacles, the small democratic revolution is won. In five years, European parties will have to present leading candidates again as voters will be more aware of their newly gained power; this is democratic institution building in action. Yet, most EU citizens were not convinced by this process and abstained or gave their votes to a growing number of populists. The rest of the European parties did not care about European issues and seemed only to speak from national perspectives. Without involving European parties in the process of building European answers, our continent will remain split, between creditors and debtors, north and south, and winners and losers of Globalisation and the EU common market.

European lists have to follow the European top candidates

The next necessary step in European institution building is transnational lists. The Duff Report from the European Parliament proposed an additional constituency of 25 MEPs, for whom citizens everywhere in the EU could vote, in addition to the MEPs in their respective countries. The aim was to encourage voters throughout the EU to identify with the European project as a whole, rather than just using the MEPs as national delegates representing national interests. The hope was that this would be in place by the 2014 election – however, to date, there has been no agreement even on this small number of extra MEPs.

Had the citizens had the chance to vote for transnational lists as well as their national parties, the focus might well have shifted to the European political options on offer, their proposals, and their performance historically. It would have been a first step towards changing the narrative to "what Europe do we want" rather than "is my country getting more out of Europe than it's

putting in". The populist discourse revolves around national identity, but without truly European programs negotiated inside European parties, there will not be a convincing counter narrative.

The Green Primary as a transnational campaigning experiment in comparative perspective

People in different countries coming together for a common objective is not something new. From anti-nuclear movements to protests against war, the first successful European Citizens' Initiative 'right2water' or even campaigns by international NGOs, it has been possible to mobilise people in different countries simultaneously. However, the Green Primary was the first transnational primary in history. Despite being a transnational project, different national contexts and perspectives shaped it in different ways.

Source : http://www.boell.de/de/2014/01/13/green-primary-endspurt-bei-den-europaeischen-gruenen

Germany

German voters had little previous experience of Primaries. The German Green party *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* had already chosen their leading candidates for the 2013 national elections in a poll put to all its members. Yet the turnout remained modest and it did not keep Merkel from winning another term. The Green Primary came at a time when the party was experiencing a period of soul-searching.

Yet, in absolute terms, more votes came from Germany than from any other member state in the primary. However, this was accounted for by the comparatively large overall population and numerical strength of its party membership. In relative terms, other countries had a higher turnout. Some regional European affairs working groups started mobilisation campaigns inside the party, e.g. by demonstrating how and why to vote in local groups.

Overall, the discussions as to why engaging with this process might be beneficial came too late. There was a lack of communication following the Council of the European Green Party of April 2013, when the idea of a Green Primary was first decided, between the delegates who attended and the general party membership. Although this was a useful first experience, it is clear that the procedures for campaigning and voting will have to be started earlier and made technically easier to persuade more people to participate next time.

France
For French citizens the concept of primaries is also a relatively new one. Traditional political parties always nominated their candidates through internal procedures which lacked transparency. The 2012 presidential elections represented a major change in this respect. *Europe Écologie Les Verts* organised a primary to select their candidates, which was also opened up to non-party members. This proved highly successful as more than 35,000 people registered for the vote (including around 15,000 party members). Four candidates were selected, of which, two were party members and two were not.

The Socialist primary organised in autumn 2011 to select their own presidential candidate was completely open to non-members. The turnout was impressive, numbering 2,661,231 and 2,860,157 for the first and second rounds respectively, proving to be an asset for Socialist candidate François Hollande. The primary was extensively followed by the media, including TV debates and both became important models for the Green Primary. Even the right-wing (UMP) is now expected to follow suit when choosing their candidate for the 2017 presidential election.

The Green European primary therefore took place in a context in which the popularity of primary elections is growing. The media coverage was modest but rather positive in France, probably due to the popularity of candidate and green MEP José Bové. The main difficulty for the Green European Primary was that it took place during the campaigns for local elections which ultimately drew away attention leading to a disappointing turnout.

Spain
Primary is a popular word in the Spanish political arena. It is seen as a way to promote transformation in the political system and stop party elites from becoming too entrenched. Most of the recently-created parties in Spain (such as the liberal UPyD, the Green party *EQUO* and the left party *Podemos*) set out to choose their candidates by primaries from the start, and there is strong pressure on the older parties on the left (Socialist Party and United Left) to introduce them. The popularity of primaries in Spain may help explain the relatively high participation in the Green Primary (being the third largest contributor of votes) despite a small Green presence and little visibility of European issues in the campaign.

Primaries are not an automatic path to success, however. *EQUO* has been organising primaries – and other methods of direct participation – since its inception (around three years ago). It has had substantially less success than *Podemos*, a party which ran a primary already knowing who the winner was going to be, yet reached around 30,000 votes in the primary and over a million votes in the European election - in comparison, *EQUO* attracted around 3,000 votes.

We can view the Green Primary as a starting point for the building of the genuinely European party structures we will need.

What the Green Primary teaches us

The careful framing of the Green Primary as an experiment in European inner-party democracy turned out to be a wise choice. Attempting to involve people in choosing top candidates who were unfamiliar to them proved to be an uphill battle. Yet a comprehensive evaluation of the primary can be a rewarding and valuable exercise. We can view the Green Primary as a starting point for the building of the genuinely European party structures we will need, even more so for transnational lists when it will not just be the top candidates but perhaps all the candidates who will be selected by members and delegates from all over Europe.

We distinguished several positive aspects emerging from the experience of the primary upon which Greens can build for the future:

(1) The Primary did prove the European Green youth branch, the Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG) to be a reliable and effective structure for campaigning, as Ska Keller's selection testifies to.

(2) Many member parties already comprise EU affairs working groups. Such groups e.g. *Belgian Ecolo, Dutch Groen* Links and (German) *North-Rhine-Westphalia's Die Grünen* have already used their close proximity to each other to organise joint events.

(3) Every few years the European Green Party should assemble the Congress, through which we could elect a truly transnational European Green list. There are potential problems, such as funding and a lack of experience in how a Congress should operate on such important matters. Up until now, the delegates exist only when Congress is about to assemble - we need to give Congress delegates an online presence in the time between the real assemblies. As a representative group, they can be invaluable when it comes to feedback to the EGP.

Symbolising the Green approach to "opening up" politics for everybody, the Green Primary also entailed challenges related to harmonising very heterogeneous procedures and membership structures between parties. It is clear that developing the procedures will be a long-term investment that will take up considerable time, energy and other resources. Successfully taking up this challenge will depend on how strong our commitment is to becoming a genuinely European movement. ◼

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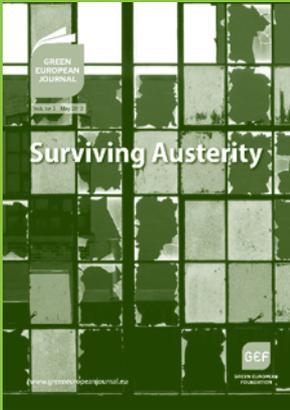
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The Green European Journal gives a concrete answer to a common European challenge: how to make debates and ideas travel across Europe's cultural and political borders?

As an online platform for outstanding articles of interest to the Green movement and beyond, it aims at contributing to the construction of a European public space that it is most urgently needed for strengthening European democracy.

The Green European Journal is published by the Green European Foundation (GEF), as part of GEF's remit to bring the EU closer to its citizens and encourage debate about the future shape and direction of Europe.

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