**European Parliament and Independence**

The role of the European Union has been debated in recent years. Some authors state that its impact on institutional developments, member behavior, ethics and fairness of the system is questionable. De Clerck-Sachsse And Maciej Kaczyński (2009: 1) reviews the success rate of integrating new members, representing countries in a fair way, distributing contributions and determining focus areas for development. The authors also state that the European Parliament has recently started using its increased power, especially in the 6th Term. (De Clerck-Sachsse and Maciej Kaczyński 2009: 1) The changes have been noted by national and international politicians, as well as political science researchers.

The main thesis statement and questions will be reviewed below. Nugent (2010: 34) concludes that the integration process in Western Europe is a ragged one and questions the authority, democracy, and independence of the European Parliament. Reviewing the related literature, European Parliament publications regarding initiatives, support, and member independence will form a basis for the research.

It is, however, impossible to understand the current trends and initiatives within the European Union without reviewing the historical background of the organization. Starting with this review, the authors would review the main goals, aims, and policies regarding the role of the European Parliament. While the European Parliament is designed to become an independent actor representing the affairs and cases of the EU, the effectiveness of this representation needs to be reviewed in the light of recent publication and criticism. The thesis question the authors are attempting to answer is:

Thesis Question: How effective the European Parliament is in representing the members of the European Union and how its policies, decisions are in line with the initiatives of the EU? Is there a reliable method to research this effectiveness discovered by political scientists?

Next, we need to review the legislative powers of the European Parliament. De Clerck-Sachsse And Maciej Kaczyński (2009: 1) list three of the European Parliament's legislative powers: consultation procedure, assent procedure, and co-decision procedure. While the members and leaders of the European Parliament have been focusing on efficiency regarding making decisions and increasing the power of the institution on an international level, it is also confirmed that concerns of legitimacy and transparency have arisen in recent years, questioning the authority of the European Union over countries' governments.

It is also important to review the different institutions and political powers within the European Union, as well as the forces that determine the decisions made by the European Parliament. The rule-making powers of the European Parliament are often transferred to the Commission. (Nugent 2010: 171) The management of EU finances is also carried out according to the administrative arrangements and budgets set by the Commission. The European Commission also supervises the implementation of the new policies and initiatives.

Reviewing the external relations of the European Union, focusing on the main thesis question, it is useful to quote Nugent' summary of the role of the EU on the European and world stage. (2010: 483) The EU is responsible for developing fair and easy to implement trade policies to benefit all member states, as well as those countries trading with EU members. Association and trade agreements are also developed by the organization and using extensive resources for economic research, the preparation of legislation is also the responsibility of EU Parliament members.

Norris (1997) reviews the types of representation within the European Union. According to the author, there are different channels of public accountability, assigned to the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

It is also important to investigate the political system and parliamentarism of the EP in detail. Kreppel (2002) and Staab (2013) review of the evolution of the European Union's powers and democratic features. The historical reviews conclude that the ideology of the European Union started at the end of the Second World War. (Staab, 2013:7)The United States was trying to motivate Europe for closer collaboration, hence the pluralist approach towards democracy instead of total parliamentarism, seen in national governments. (Coultrap 1999: 113) The Council of Europe was created in 1949 in Hague. This was followed by the creation of different economic and political communities, like the European Defence Community, until finally in the 1960-s the intergovernmental assertion was born. The new direction of Europe was introduced in the 1980-s, leading to European integration, followed by the Single European Act in 1986 and the Mannstricht Treaty, handing over even more power to the supranational governance bodies. The history of the European Union reveals that the main motivations within the community were based on collaboration on political, international, economic and ideological grounds, therefore, as the collaboration strengthened, the independence of nations started the get reduced, especially after the European Union became a legislator for member states. This process has made the governance of the European Union more effective and independent from single national governments.

Corbett (1998) analyzes the role and political background of the European Union. As a conclusion, the author also confirms that while the legislative roles of the EU and the European Parliament are still the most significant, it also has a great influence on the constitutional system of Europe. The political achievements of the past thirty years within the European Union can be translated to democratic movements within individual member states.

Christiansen (2013) describes the political and governance system of the European Union with the theory of intergovernmentalism. The approach is the one that led to integration initiatives and has increased the interdependence among states. Supranationalism and intergovernmentalism are not necessary for the European Parliament; they are a result of an integrative approach of international politicians.

Reviewing the political and voting system within the European Parliament, Burns (2013) explains that the qualified majority voting system has two main threshold requirements: at least 55 percent of the member states need to vote, representing at least 65% of the total population of the European Union. This given, it is evident that decisions (unlike in many European Parliament) cannot be made without the majority of the parties present. Further, the role of rotating presidency helps in to make the European Parliament fairer and more balanced. While the presiding state needs to adhere to the agenda, they are able to have an increased influence on debates, decisions, and initiatives during the six months, no matter the size of the state and the population represented.

Norris (1997: 275) also states that much of the EU system is “federal,” some powers still belong to the national governments.

Some authors state that the European Union and the European Parliament has a huge democratic deficit. This statement will be examined in the next part of the paper. Nugent (2010: 492) concludes that there are several problems with the equal representation of members within the European Union. One of these deficits is originated from the structure of the EU itself. (Laurelle and Mika 1998) As the European Union is not a state. Likewise, it does not have territory on its own. The author also confirms that “the EU's political, economic, social and cultural interests are by no means clearly defined.” (Nugent 2010: 492) The second deficit and problem are based on representation and influence inequalities. Some larger and established member states have extensive influence on decisions compared to newer members'. The third problematic area within the European Union is that some member states are trying to maintain their own international relationships and want to protect these. This results in disagreements in foreign policy, especially defense policies.

Coultrap (1999: 108) addresses the democratic deficit- based criticism of the European Union from a different perspective. The author states the question from a different perspective than Archick (2013: 10), namely that many of the national powers have been transferred over to the European Parliament. One of the main grounds of criticism is that national governments lose parliamentary control over their national issues. Coultrap (1999: 108) defines the European Union's democratic deficit as uncontrolled power and lack of representation. He also lists the deficiencies of the democracy within the European Parliament. These points need to be reviewed and addressed during the research. Therefore, they are listed below.

1. Lack of coordination and agreement

2. The dominance of national politics over supranational politics

3. Marginal position of the European Parliament as an institution

Consequently, the impact of these deficiencies on the work of the European Parliament is geographical dispersion, lack of polarization, lack of party competition within the EP, as well as missing parliamentary powers. This also means that there is no central government, polarization is not consistent, as every case is supported by different members, and the polarization is not based on majorities. Parlaimentarism in the form of supra-national governance means that party competition is replaced by a quest for consensus. The European Parliament is based on a decentered polity, instead of a polarized representative parliamentary system.

As a response to the debate, Moravcsik (2003) states that while the European Union, and consequently the European Parliament have their institutional constraints, it is not on the way to become a “bureaucratic despotism.” While there are some crucial and important development areas, such as market regulation, monetary policy, and environmental issues, it can act as an important autonomous supranational body that is able to maintain its independence. However, some authors argue that this independence only exists on paper, as some member states still have a greater influence on decisions than others. Even though the presidency of the European Union goes from one member to another, the decisions are still based on the number of EP members and the political forces, coalitions and collaboration between international committees, organizations.

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