

BEYOND THE TROIKA: WHICH DIVIDES AND FACES FOR THE EU?

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The Troika interventions in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus have generated long lasting political damage for the image of the EU that need to be fixed or compensated: this requires promoting a European political game organised along national and party lines. This is the purpose of this Viewpoint co-signed by Yves Bertoncini and Valentin Kreilinger.

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1. The eurozone crisis has fuelled an intense democratic debate in the EU

Composed by experts from the IMF, the Commission and the ECB, the Troika symbolises the exercise of enormous powers by technocratic actors and, as such, perfectly echoes the traditional critic of the EU's "democracy deficit". The emergence of this new body must lead not only to a better assessment of the [real nature and scope of the EU powers](#) regarding its member states, but also to identify more clearly the way EU decisions are made and the "input legitimacy" they are based on.

On this second issue, it is striking that the eurozone crisis has generated unprecedented lively debates across Europe, which naturally contribute to the input legitimacy of EU decisions, albeit making the EU less effective and also less popular. Such debates are indeed time-consuming and make it more complicated for national and European authorities to adopt decisions. They have led to decisions that are considered unsatisfactory, for example regarding austerity-growth balance. But these debates also contribute to the democratic nature of European policy making, and then reveal genuine political divides that need to be better analysed.

In this perspective, it is interesting to see that the real new political divide that has emerged from the crisis is not the one opposing European and international

experts to the peoples, but rather the peoples of Europe themselves. Promoting the images of a "Europe of Brussels" / a "Troika from elsewhere" detached from any ties to citizens, and that would successively act against all the European peoples, appears to be ideologically driven. A [more attentive examination of political realities](#) shows that the EU decisions are shaped by the positions expressed by citizens of EU countries, at times strongly divided about what path to take, within countries and between countries.

The equation that has often structured the crisis management is then not "Brussels vs. the people" but rather "the German people vs. the Greek people" and other variations of this kind, for better or worse. In any case, the explicative power of the latter is much greater than that of the convenient "Brussels vs. the people" divide. But since this situation is also potentially dangerous for the European construction, it is vital to promote a debate more visibly organised on classical political grounds, i.e. on national and party confrontation as alternatives to the "people elite" or the "people-people" divide.

2. The divides between member states should be made even more visible

The antagonisms between member states have often been mentioned in the last period, particularly during the series of European Council meetings and eurozone summits dedicated to resolving the crisis, subject of a huge amount of media coverage.

[Making these political divides more visible](#) would help the citizens understanding the reasons behind the different positions of the member states. The "*commedia del arte*" at European Council meetings has at least

the merit of showing the issues at stake. It can also make citizens more aware of the possibility to express their European preferences at the domestic ballot box, given that national elections change the composition of the intergovernmental EU institutions. Currently 13 heads of state or government belong to the EPP, 10 to the PES, 2 to the ECR, 2 to ALDE, 1 to a centre-left party not member of PES: the situation was quite different at the heart of the crisis (i.e. autumn 2011), with 16 member states led by the EPP and only 4 by the PES, 2 by ALDE, 2 by ECR and 2 governments of national unity with an independent Prime minister.

When EU leaders gather at European Council meetings, they go there double-hatted, with a national hat and a party hat. Ahead of the June 2012 European Council, Spanish PM Rajoy teamed up with French President Hollande and Italy's PM Monti and thus did not put "party before country", because otherwise he would have had to forge a centre-right alliance with German Chancellor Merkel. Wearing their national hat, leaders often claim that they represent their country and have the "people" behind them. In parallel, the [European party system has steadily become more integrated](#), and PES, EPP and other parties organise pre-summits of "their" leaders.

The situation is not transparent enough as regards the functioning of the Council of Ministers, even if its [voting records](#) are now made public by its Secretariat general. As regards the vote on the draft 2013 budget of the EU, it is for example possible to see that [three member states were opposed and voted against](#). On a longer period, it is also [possible to state](#) that the United Kingdom is outvoted the most often while France and Lithuania only find themselves in a minority in exceptional cases. But there could still be more transparency in those cases when the Council acts as a legislative body: such transparency does not exist for legislative acts that are *not* adopted and the decision-making process within the Council itself is largely invisible (intergovernmental bargaining and non-papers). More transparency would help putting faces and flags on the very intense political discussions going on in the Justus Lipsius building when the Heads of State or Government have left.

3. The divides within the European Parliament also deserve more attention

The European Parliament is the other institution within which more visible divides and faces can be offered to the EU citizens. The level of cohesion of European political groups indeed reaches a level of 90% (compared to 80% for national parliaments), which underlines the primacy of party lines (see [VoteWatch Europe](#) website).

The majorities are naturally not the same in different areas: most recently, EPP has been able to move to the position of the political group in the European Parliament that tips the balance and wins the most votes. On civil liberties, ALDE MEPs often vote with the centre-left, on trade or economic governance they vote with the centre-right, as it was the case on the [Six-Pack](#). The analysis of some votes also illustrate that a national delegation sometimes does not follow the line of its European political group, for example recently on the issue of [starting negotiations on the EU-US Free Trade Agreement](#), as the majority of the French MEPs from S&D abstained.

These party divides are bound to be increasingly mentioned ahead of the May 2014 European elections which will provide the arena for a democratic confrontation between all the political forces in the EU. It will be enlightening for citizens to confront the incumbents and the candidates to become MEP with the voting records of the 2009-2014 legislature. In addition to party "manifestos", rival candidates running for the Commission Presidency (via debates and hustings) will also offer clearer faces and divides to the European voters, making them more aware that their votes in these elections could lead to different majorities, and then to different political choices.

The affirmation of these national and party divides will underline better that the debate on EU decisions is more open than it seems. It is also a good way to recall that critics of such decisions should not call them "anti-democratic", but rather work to change the balance of power in the European and national elections, and then respect the outcome of the votes.

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