UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMPETING IDEOLOGIES OF EU DEMOCRACY

EU democracy between Resisters and Promoters

PhD Dissertation 2018 · Ditte Maria Brasso Sørensen

Competing ideologies of EU democracy – EU democracy between *Resisters* and *Promoters*

Department of Political Science

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For Carl & Vilde

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SECTION I – POLITICAL THEORY AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Chapter 1 – Introduction

When I began my research for this dissertation in the spring of 2014, the European Union (EU) was in the midst of an unparalleled crisis. The European sovereign debt crisis was still unfolding. With the Greek sovereign debt crisis, the Eurozone crisis seemed to reach a political zenith, challenging the stability of the Union.[1] During the summer of 2015, Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras broke off negotiations with the Eurogroup, rejected the terms of the bailout program and announced a referendum in which the Greeks were to approve or reject the preliminary agreement. Tsipras recommended a "no," and was supported by a majority of the Greek population.[2] Since then the EU has been challenged repeatedly. In 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the EU in what became known as the Brexit referendum. Most recently, the French presidential election was fought between the committed Eurosceptic Marie Le Pen (Front National) and the overtly pro-European candidate Emmanuelle Macron (En Marche!). Macron won, but the stand-off between Macron and Le Pen made evident the possibility of a president of a core European state (arguably the most central member state besides Germany) who opposes the EU.

These events illuminate how contestation of the EU highlights central issues of democratic legitimacy and social justice. The confrontation between the Eurozone and Greece and the popular rejection of the bailout terms raise the question of how to conceive of popular sovereignty within the EU. In addition, the devastating consequences in the aftermath of the European sovereign debt crisis suffered by the Greek population in particular and the Southern European populations more generally precipitated politicization not only of the debt issue but also the structural relationships within the Union – accentuating issues of power, dignity, justice and democratic self-governance. With the Brexit referendum, EU membership was made optional.[3] The UK's vote to leave the EU caused widespread debate about the desirability of EU membership and led other European leaders to call for similar referenda. What these events, including the French election in particular, demonstrate is that the political debate about the EU has become increasingly polarized, questioning not merely the policies of the EU but rather the desirability of the polity altogether.

This dissertation is driven by a curiosity to understand competing conceptualizations of democratic legitimacy as they are expressed in political language. It is driven by a curiosity to understand right-wing Euroscepticism and the ideology of EU democracy it advances – both to understand a phenomenon of broad public resonance and to explore the democratic implications of rising right-wing Euroscepticism. Moreover, I am curious to understand the ideology of EU democracy that this right-wing ideology opposes. The literature on European integration underscores how European integration has moved from a "permissive consensus" to a "constraining dissensus."[4] The EU has, accordingly, evolved from a period where it was evaluated primarily on its performance to the current state where disagreements about the benefits of European integration are cast in a language that ventures beyond outcomes to question the legitimacy of the EU. Indeed, the "democratic discourse" has been unlocked, making it difficult, if not impossible, to return to a debate confined to output.

[1] Cramme and Hobolt 2015, 2.
[2] 61% rejected the bailout terms. The voter turnout was 62.5%.
[3] According to a recent survey, a majority believes that more member states will leave the EU within the next 10 years (Chatham House 2017, 17).
[4] Hooghe and Marks 2009.