

LET THE EUROPEAN UNION EMBRACE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY!

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Introduction

Europe Day 2023 may be an appropriate occasion for proclaiming that the European Union (EU) has found its constitutional destination as a transnational democracy. Fourteen months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and one year before the 2024 elections for the European Parliament, ideologists should cease their almost theological battle over the so-called *finalité politique* of the Union and value the EU for what it is: [an unprecedented democracy of States and citizens](#).

Ever closer Union

In its present form, the EU is far from perfect. The desire to lay the foundations for an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe must inspire contemporary politicians to strive for improvement in many domains. The EU has to tackle climate change, social injustice and migration. Moreover, the Union has to learn to defend itself. On a day like 9 of May, however, it should also be realised that the EU constitutes [the most significant improvement of the modern States system](#) since the end of the Middle Ages.

The EU paradox

The paradoxical situation, in which the EU has manoeuvred itself, is that its institutions and its Member States are still bickering over the identity of the Union, whereas it is considered by the outside world as a democratic polity on the global stage. Shortly after the entry into force of the [Treaty of Lisbon](#) in 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) has recognised the special status of the EU through [Resolution 65/276](#) of 3 May 2011.

The EU enjoys a number of rights in the framework of the UN which have not been accorded to other regional organisations of States like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Southern Common Market, the African Union or the Council of Europe.

European democracy

Although the Treaty of Lisbon was regarded by many in the Brussels bubble as a setback in comparison to the rejected Constitution for Europe, it served as the starting point for the democratisation of the EU. Both the Commission Juncker (2014-2019) and the present Commission Von der Leyen included EU democratisation in their policy priorities. While the services of the Commission focused their energy on experiments with deliberative democracy and citizens participation, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) gave the process a constitutional dimension. In its [case law](#), the CJEU upgraded the status of the citizens of the Union, established that the EU has an autonomous democracy (i.e. a democracy at the transnational level alongside the national democracies of the Member States) and confirmed the transformation of the EU from a Union of democratic States to a European democracy. In its [verdicts](#) of 16 February 2022 concerning the conditionality mechanism, the Court also found that the EU has abandoned the Westphalian system of International relations as guiding paradigm for its internal functioning.

Democratic International Organisation

Despite these unprecedented developments, the EU continues to describe itself in its printed and digital [publications](#) as 'a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries'. Fortunately, outsiders perceive the Union entirely different. United States President, Joseph R. Biden, has acknowledged the democratic evolution of the EU by inviting the Union as the only regional organisation to contribute alongside all but one of its Member States to the [Summits for Democracy](#). The aim of the Summits, which have been held in December 2021 and in March 2023, was to highlight the vitality of the democratic model. While a third edition is scheduled for 2024, more than 120 States participated in the meeting of March 2023. For a proper understanding of the argument, it should be noted that the EU did not attend the Summits as an observer but actively contributed to its goal of promoting the democratic model. Consequently, the EU acted as and was perceived by the other participants as a Democratic International Organisation.

Transnational Federation

This year's commemoration of the Schuman Declaration forms an opportunity for realising that the drive towards an ever-closer Union is resulting in the emergence of the EU as a new kind of international organisation. As it has evolved from a Union of democratic States (Copenhagen, 1973) to a Union of democratic States which also constitutes a democracy of its own, the EU may be characterised as a democratic Union of democratic States.

Its internal evolution warrants the identification of the EU from the UN perspective of global governance as a Democratic International Organisation. The EU distinguishes itself from other regional organisation through its practice of pooling sovereignty. Theorists of international relations may therefore identify the [EU as a transnational federation](#), in which the exercise of sovereignty is divided between the Member States and the Union.

Reflecting on the European session of the Summit for Democracy in The Hague, [Dutch non-governmental organisations](#) called for concrete action in support of democracy. May Europe Day 2023 be remembered as the day on which the EU started to embrace its European democracy!

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