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## A Salutary Shock: The European Suffrage Movement and Democracy in the European Community, 1948-1973

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## Abstract

This article examines the experience of democratic participation during the European Community's most undemocratic era, 1948-1973. An important segment of European activists, a suffrage movement of sorts, considered European-wide elections as the most effective technique of communicating European unity and establishing the EC's democratic credentials. Going beyond strictly information dissemination, direct elections would engage citizens in ways pamphlets, protests, and petitions could not. Other political elites, however, preferred popular democracy in the form of national referendums, if at all. This article examines the origins and implications of incorporating the two democratic procedures (national referendums and direct elections) into the EC by the end of the 1970s. It also identifies a perceived deficit in democracy as a spectre that has haunted European activists since the first post-war European institutions of the late 1940s, a spectre that has always been closely related to an information deficit. Based on archival research across Western Europe, this article touches upon the larger historiographical issues of European democratization, political communication, and the role of elections in European unity.

## Keywords

European Community; European Parliament; Democratization; Political Communication; Direct Elections; Referendum; European Movement

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Since European Parliament (EP) direct elections began in 1979, voters and commentators have noted an "information deficit"<sup>1</sup> among the ever-growing list of deficits, figurative or monetary, that afflict the European Union's (EU) reputation. Elections provide an opportunity for increased communication on EU issues, but polls show that despite the blitz of information that immediately precedes EP elections, voters still feel that they lack sufficient information and are unenthusiastic about EP elections.<sup>2</sup> Those who advocated the implementation of EP elections in the decades preceding the inaugural election in 1979 did so partly in the belief that supranational elections would provide essential moments of widespread communication on European issues and habituate voters toward casting a ballot at the European level. These activists also believed that elections could help remedy the emerging, perceived deficit of democratic legitimacy confronting the European Community (EC)<sup>3</sup> for the first time on a large-scale basis in the 1970s. Elections could cure the information and democratic deficits that some believed the Community faced. We know now that EP direct elections were not the panacea that activists envisioned – EP election turnout hit its lowest level in 2009 and the notion of a democratic deficit is as powerful as ever in contemporary EU

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<sup>1</sup> K. Brants, P. van Praag Jr., and M.-C. Noël-Aranda, 'The Campaign Communicators' Commitments. Enthusiasm, duty or indifference?', in J.G. Blumler, ed., *Communicating to Voters. Television in the first European Parliamentary elections* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), 125-151; L. L. Kaid, 'European Parliamentary Elections. Communicating a shared vision for Europe', in L. L. Kaid, ed., *The EU Expansion. Communicating shared sovereignty in the parliamentary elections* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008), 3-10; R. Upson, *Connecting with Citizens. Does the EU have the will to tackle its information deficit?*, Report by the European Citizens Action Service (Brussels: ECAS, 2006), available at [http://www.ezd.si/fileadmin/doc/4\\_AKTIVNO\\_DRZAVLJANSTVO/Viri/Connecting\\_with\\_citizens\\_ecas.pdf](http://www.ezd.si/fileadmin/doc/4_AKTIVNO_DRZAVLJANSTVO/Viri/Connecting_with_citizens_ecas.pdf). Accessed on 1 January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Upson, 'Connecting'.

<sup>3</sup> I use the terms European Community and European Parliament to refer to political bodies that did not always bear those titles but were in essence those institutions by another name.

discourse.<sup>4</sup> Yet examining the movement for direct elections provides a window through which we can witness European activists grappling for the first time with issues that would later come to harm the EU's reputation among the people it claims to represent.

The article takes as its guide what I call the supranational suffrage movement from 1948-1973. Like all suffrage movements, the point was to expand political participation into a new realm. The movement's common goal was voter participation in European unity, but its members did not form a single, cohesive campaign. Its disparate roster consisted of mostly federal activists from the umbrella organisation the Union of European Federalists and its splinter groups across Western Europe. Federalists that reflected the often-contrasting views of Jean Monnet (though not Monnet himself) and Altiero Spinelli both advocated for supranational democracy at times, but in general, those of Spinelli's ilk pushed for more immediate, radical solutions. The federal suffragists periodically fought each other, while at other times they were united in their criticism of the European Community's lack of popular political participation. In general those in the supranational suffrage movement advocated for greater popular participation in European integration by supporting direct elections to the European Parliament, increasing the Parliament's powers relative to EC's other branches, and discouraging national referendums. This article analyses the historical trajectory of the supranational suffrage movement, offers explanations for some of the key moments when it did not succeed, and explores how notions of supranational democracy became central to both supporters and opponents of the European Community.

Scholars often dismiss the federal movement, and in turn those that advocated for popular political participation at the European level.<sup>5</sup> If one is purely concerned with its impact on the development of the European Community's institutions, then European federalism was not an overwhelming success. One of the federal movement's proudest moments was the European Council's decision in 1976 to hold direct EP elections, for which it can take only partial credit.<sup>6</sup> Although federalists did not achieve many of their goals, they were not inconsequential.<sup>7</sup> Dismissing federalist goals as unrealistic or unviable overlooks the contested nature of supranational democracy and the contingency of their failures. At every step in the uniting of Europe those in the supranational suffrage movement challenged what they considered was the undemocratic status quo. This article confronts the development of the European Parliament,<sup>8</sup> but its main focus is on exploring broader notions of supranational democracy from primarily an empirical perspective. In order to understand supranational democracy, and by extension today's so-called democratic deficit, we must first historicise it. There are exceptionally few historical studies drawn from archives that significantly

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<sup>4</sup> A. Follesdal and S. Hix, 'Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU. A response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44, 3 (2006), 533-62.

<sup>5</sup> Since Walter Lipgen's death in 1984, much of the scholarship that explains European integration dismisses federalist influence. Most notably see A. S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 1992); A. Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For a recent example see H. Schulz-Forberg and B. Stråth, *The Political History of European Integration. The Hypocrisy of Democracy-Through-Market* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> J. Smith, *Europe's Elected Parliament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); J. Fitzmaurice, 'Direct Elections and the Future of the European Parliament', *West European Politics*, 1, 2 (1978), 208-225; V. Herman and J. Lodge, *The European Parliament and the European Community* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> M. Burgess, *Federalism and European Union. The Building of Europe, 1950-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> B. Rittberger, 'The creation and empowerment of the European Parliament', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 41, 2 (2003), 203-225; B. Rittberger, *Building Europe's Parliament. Democratic Representation Beyond the Nation-State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); P. Scalingi, *The European Parliament. The Three-Decade Search for a United Europe* (London: Greenwood Press, 1980); A.-M. Houbine and J.-R. Vergès, *Le Parlement européen dans la construction de l'Europe des Six* (Paris: PUF, 1966).

address, rather than dismiss, the potential for any type of popular political participation that would transcend national borders before 1980.<sup>9</sup>

Researching supranational democracy before 1979 necessarily entails justifying it as a valuable research topic. Why research something that did not yet exist? Simply put, it is valuable because it is prominent in the historical sources on European integration. It is also a worthwhile pursuit because it helps expose some of the ideological fault lines among elites' conceptions of a united Europe that they communicated to the public. Purposely left unsettled was what type of polity elites were creating in Western Europe. Was the EC a burgeoning European government, or was it an intergovernmental organization primarily controlled by its member states? Was it in need of its own direct legitimation, or would the indirect legitimacy conferred on it by its member states suffice? How one characterized the EC polity has largely determined one's view of supranational democracy. As we will see, those most committed to supranational democracy tended to view the EC in a state of becoming, while those more ambivalent or opposed to supranational democracy saw the EC in its limited state of being. Did the EC only consist of strict areas of economic cooperation, or was it an infinitely expandable proto-government that required direct elections to justify its governing? Almost immediately after WWII European suffragists hoped that supranational democracy could be an essential element to the uniting of Europe, but the continually unfinished functional integration process relegated supranational democracy to a remote goal, or a faraway component to a perpetually incomplete polity.<sup>10</sup> In addition, we know today that a *demos* of the type found in national democracies never formed.<sup>11</sup>

Why did the suffrage movement consider it an imperative to introduce voter participation into the EC? It was hardly a winning electoral strategy for national politicians. Citizens regularly elected representatives based on criteria that excluded a candidate's positions on European integration. The notion of permissive consensus captures the *carte blanche* freedom political elites enjoyed in building, or not building, the EC's institutions due in part to the public's limited understanding of the integration project.<sup>12</sup> Activists' justifications for supranational suffrage changed as the movement evolved.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, federalists wanted to take advantage of what they perceived as the ripest period of positive public opinion on European unity in Europe's history. Activists set about creating circumstances where European citizens could cast a ballot in favour of European integration, thereby demonstrating in an era of rudimentary public opinion surveys that the public at large desired more European unity. Proposals for Council of Europe direct elections and European Movement (EM) referendums in a handful of Western European cities in the early 1950s reflected this goal. After the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954, federal activists advocated with greater urgency for supranational democracy as a technique of embracing – and creating – European citizens. Allowing people to vote at the supranational level, they believed, would force citizens to pay attention, and could do more for communicating European integration than any pamphlet, protest or petition. It would also necessitate the creation of European political parties and force political leaders to incorporate European unity more thoroughly into party platforms. As

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<sup>9</sup> Exceptions include: H. Kaelble, *Wege zur Demokratie. Von der Französischen Revolution zur Europäischen Union* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001); Rittberger, *Europe's Parliament*; Smith, *Europe's Elected Parliament*; W. Wallace and J. Smith, 'Democracy or Technocracy? European Integration and the Problem of Popular Consent', *West European Politics*, 18, 3 (1995), 137-157.

<sup>10</sup> K. Featherstone, 'Jean Monnet and the "Democratic Deficit" in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 32, 2 (1994), 149-70.

<sup>11</sup> J.H.H. Weiler, U. Haltern, and F. Mayer, 'European Democracy and its Critique', in J. Hayward, ed., *The Crisis of Representation in Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 4-39.

<sup>12</sup> L. Lindberg and S. Scheingold, *Europe's Would-Be-Polity. Patterns of Change in the European Community* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970); R. Inglehart, 'Public Opinion and Regional Integration', *International Organization*, 24, 2 (1970), 764-795.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Europe's Elected Parliament*, 46.

Belgian Socialist and EP member Fernand Dehousse often said, European elections could deliver the “salutary shock” that captured the full attention of the European people.<sup>14</sup>

Much to the chagrin of federal activists, it was not the first EP election in 1979 that shook people out of their ignorance and indifference, but rather accession and referendums. The inclusion of less enthusiastic nations into the EC in the early 1970s brought organised dissent and national referendums into the Community for the first time. And one of the primary themes of dissent, particularly among the British, was a loss of sovereignty to a consortium of capricious, unelected Eurocrats. Previously, federal activists had pushed for supranational democratization in order to strengthen the Community’s legitimacy and bring it closer to the public at large. But in the 1970s, EC opponents highlighted the lack of democracy at the European level to oppose their country’s entry into the EC. Anti-Marketeters like MP Michael Foot criticised the EC’s undemocratic nature not to improve the Community, but to undermine it. Accession in the early 1970s also produced the first wave of national referendums regarding European unity in France, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, and Great Britain, which mobilised significant anti-EC forces in each country. Suffragists hoped that elections would help create a European mentality and collective political identity for Europeans. Referendums served the opposite purpose. Although at the time they may have been the simplest and fairest decision-making method on EC accession, national referendums perpetuated the historical impression, and contemporary reality, that voting mattered primarily at the national level.

Democracy and democratic legitimacy can exist in a multitude of forms. Before 1979 and the first European Parliament elections, the EC could claim to be democratic because national parliaments and courts had sanctioned it, or because of its corporatist elements. There is a wide field of literature on democratic legitimacy that de-emphasizes the ballot box and shows how elections increasingly became in the post-war period just one of many cogs in the machinery of democracies.<sup>15</sup> The EC could also plausibly claim to unite and preserve the precarious existence of parliamentary democracy during the Cold War, which strengthened the bonds between Western European elites.<sup>16</sup> The EC could declare itself legitimate because it was an essential tool for nation states, or because it produced desirable results.<sup>17</sup> For the federal suffragists, however, only European-wide elections satisfied their conceptions of both democracy and legitimacy. They believed that democracy must entail popular political participation via casting a ballot directly relating to the European Community in a discrete process from national politics. They were the first to realise that the Community’s political exclusion of the public at large during its founding would eventually damage its reputation in the eyes of the citizens it today claims to represent. Initially, in the late 1940s and 1950s, only a small number of more radical federalists addressed the issue. But as the EC increasingly constrained the actions of democratically elected governments, and as its profile and membership expanded in the 1970s, the democratic concern that some federalists expressed in the EC’s earliest days became more widely recognised and contributed today to what many identify as the democratic deficit. The democratic deficit has grown into a voluminous academic field, but the essence of the phenomenon

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<sup>14</sup> F. Dehousse, ‘Rapport général de Fernand Dehousse, membre de l’Assemblée parlementaire européenne’, 30 April 1960, CVCE, available at

[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/general\\_report\\_by\\_fernand\\_dehousse\\_member\\_of\\_the\\_european\\_parliamentary\\_assembly\\_30\\_april\\_1960-en-89c2a74e-fb16-4b7f-b796-d3759876ddfe.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/general_report_by_fernand_dehousse_member_of_the_european_parliamentary_assembly_30_april_1960-en-89c2a74e-fb16-4b7f-b796-d3759876ddfe.html). Accessed on 1 January 2014.

<sup>15</sup> W. Hogan, *Representative Government and European Integration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967); P. Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); P. Rosanvallon, *Democratic Legitimacy. Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Achim Trunk, *Europa, ein Ausweg? Politische Eliten und europäische Identität in den 1950er Jahren* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2007), 75.

<sup>17</sup> C. Schrag, ‘Languages of Legitimacy. Imagining the European Communities at the Times of “Permissive Consensus”’, European Research Group: ‘European Democracies’, Joint Doctoral Seminar in International Relations 2006: ‘European Governance, Global Governance’, available at

[http://oxpo.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/joint\\_doctoral\\_seminar/jds06\\_schrag\\_paper.pdf](http://oxpo.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/joint_doctoral_seminar/jds06_schrag_paper.pdf). Accessed on 1 January 2014.

had already provoked lively debate both inside and to a lesser extent outside of the EC long before the explosion of social science literature on the topic started in the early 1990s.<sup>18</sup>

One can roughly divide into three eras the trajectory of inchoate European democratization from the 1948 Hague Conference to the 1973 accession of Great Britain. The first period, from 1948 until about 1960, marked the years when activists worked both inside and outside the nascent institutions of Europe to make the uniting of Europe a process that included popular political participation. During the second period throughout the 1960s activists channelled all their energy into the institutions of the European Community. There existed credible plans starting in 1960 to democratize the EC that did not come to fruition, primarily because of Gaullist opposition. In the third era, beginning in the early 1970s, national governments began holding nationwide referendums regarding European integration. These referendums ran contrary to the goals of the supranational suffrage movement. They were national, not supranational, political phenomena, and they introduced the referendum as the preferred democratic instrument of national governments on the topic of European unity. The vastly different democratic procedures – elections and referendums – have co-existed since the 1970s, but referendums have been utilised significantly more often: between 1972 and 2009 there were 43 referendums in Europe regarding European integration, and seven European Parliament elections.<sup>19</sup>

## PHASE 1: COUNCIL OF EUROPE, CITIWIIDE REFERENDUMS AND THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE

European suffragists saw in the Council of Europe's creation in 1949 their first chance for democratic participation at the European level. The powerless component of this already weak organization was its Consultative Assembly. Early federalists, such as Paul Reynaud, René Courtin, Hendrik (Henri) Brugmans, and André Philip drafted proposals for direct elections to the assembly that failed to advance. 'If it [the Consultative Assembly] were to raise the interests of Europe above those of the different nations it was necessary to give a psychological shock to public opinion in those nations,' former French Prime Minister Reynaud wrote in 1951. 'So it is to the people themselves, I argued, that we must talk by the democratic means of an election.'<sup>20</sup> In this early period we see many of the arguments in favor of European direct elections that suffragists would advance for the next three decades: to transfer the democratic center of European unity from national parliaments to a European parliament, to force national political parties to create a strong European dimension, and, as Reynaud wrote, to deliver a "psychological shock" to the people.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, elections would stimulate democratic politics at the European level in ways other forms of political communication could not. There was no consensus among the ten original member states, however, especially among the British and Scandinavian countries, that democratic politics needed stimulation, or even origination, at the European level. Although there existed a strong core of Western European continental countries that may have endorsed direct elections to the Consultative Assembly, opposition by the Council of Europe's other members ensured that no such democratic experiments would take place in the council.

<sup>18</sup> Rittberger makes a similar argument. He argues that the necessary effects of pooling sovereignty had since the beginning of post-war European integration prompted elites to search for strategies of alleviating a perceived deficit in legitimacy in the European institutions: see Rittberger, *Europe's Parliament*.

<sup>19</sup> S. Hobolt, *Europe in Question. Referendums on European Integration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Reynaud, *Unite or Perish. A Dynamic Program for a United Europe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 192-93.

<sup>21</sup> W. Birke, *European Elections by Direct Suffrage. A Comparative Study of the Electoral Systems Used in Western Europe and Their Utility for the Direct Election of a European Parliament*, European Aspects No. 5 (Leyden: A.W. Sythoff, 1961), 18-24.

If citizens could not elect European representatives, then perhaps they could vote in a different form. European voters first cast ballots regarding European unity in the European Movement referendums of the early 1950s. The controversial cousin of elections, the referendum, emerged in the early 1950s as a tool of some pro-unity factions. Under the banner of the European Movement, an umbrella organisation of pro-unity organisations, activists held at least six successful referendums in selected cities in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Supranational suffragists looked suspiciously upon referendums in general, but for the moment, however, those most committed to European-wide elections supported these early referendums as a technique of expressing popular support for European unity. Even among national governments, referendums were contentious forms of political expression, especially in the years immediately following WWII.<sup>22</sup> They often brought to mind a less democratic era in Europe. The national referendum had been the democratic instrument of the modern dictator since at least Napoleon III, with roots tracing back through his uncle. But it had become a tool for liberal democracies, too, such as Switzerland. National referendums rarely occurred in Western Europe in the first few decades after WWII given the practice's stigma and the consensus of the parliamentary democracy model. The French Fourth Republic, which came into being following a series of elections and referendums in 1946, did not use it again until it dissolved itself by referendum in 1958. The Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands banned them for nearly all issues at the national level. Italy abolished its monarchy by national referendum in 1946 but did not call another one for almost 30 years; its constitution, while allowing for referendums on domestic issues, bans the practice for international treaties. Belgium held a referendum on its own monarchy in 1950, nearly resulting in a civil war, and it has not held one since. In Britain, the consensus of the parliamentary model had created a political culture in which there had never been any UK-wide referendums. Referendums occurred more often overall at the local level in the immediate post-war period, but were still not common.

Although the local referendums were generally successful, they merely constituted democratic theatre. Their small scale and non-binding character ensured that they would have no meaningful impact on the process of European integration. In the summer of 1950, the EM organised referendums in two small West German towns: Breisach, and Castrop-Rauxel. About 95 per cent of voters approved of the proposition, which asked people if they supported the abolition of economic and political borders among European nations. Turnout of more than 73 per cent exceeded the turnout of the previous elections to the regional parliaments (Landtage).<sup>23</sup> The Dutch EM referendums in 1952 in Bolsward and Delft were even more successful. Voters overwhelmingly approved of the proposition for greater European unity; between the two cities, about 30,500 voted in favour of European unity versus 2,100 against, mostly Communists.<sup>24</sup> The international media took notice. Dutch national media reported that the top 28 American broadcasters covered the referendums.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary reports recognised that hometown citizens showed off a little for the international media during the "test vote for Europe." Those who wore typical Dutch clothing like wooden shoes and earrings ended up on camera more than nondescript locals, illustrating that foreign media took pains to portray local citizens as Dutch rather than European.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, the referendums' success made international headlines and drew positive attention toward European unity and in particular to favourable popular sentiment.

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<sup>22</sup> See the contributions in David Butler and Austin Ranney, eds., *Referendums. A Comparative Study of Practice and Theory* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> French Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany André François-Poncet internal French foreign ministry memo, 17 July 1950, French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve, Conseil de l'Europe files, folder 16.

<sup>24</sup> 'Federal Europe Backed by Dutch in Referendums in Two Towns', *The New York Times*, 18 Dec. 1952, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Geschiedenis 24, *Referendum in Bolsward en Delft over Europa. Steden mochten stemmen in 1952*, 12 December 2011, available at <http://www.geschiedenis24.nl/nieuws/2011/December/Referendum-in-Bolsward-en-Delft-over-Europa.html>. Accessed on 1 January 2014.

<sup>26</sup> 'Federal Europe Backed by Dutch in Referendums in Two Towns'.

The final EM referendums, in Roeselare and Verviers, Belgium, in 1953, marked the end of the EM voting experiments. These occasions mimicked full-scale, governmental elections. There was a three-week campaign period, the police and elections offices were on full election duty, ballots were sealed, elections officials made voter registration rolls available to both sides of the issue, and the state television and radio stations granted time to both sides of the question.<sup>27</sup> These elections differed from official state elections only in that voting was not compulsory. The question put to voters was: 'Are you of the opinion that the European peoples should henceforth manage certain of their political and economic interests on a common basis, and do you agree with Belgian integration in a United Europe with a European Authority and democratic representation guaranteed by a European constitution?'<sup>28</sup> Belgian ministers Paul-Henry Spaak, Jean Rey, and P.W. Segers led the "yes" campaigns. Voters approved the referendums' question by strong majorities. But more so than the German and Dutch referendums, European Movement leaders found the number of abstentions troubling. In Roeselare, of the 20,000 registered voters, a little more than 65 per cent of voters showed up; in Verviers, of the 27,000 registered voters, slightly less than 65 per cent participated.<sup>29</sup> Bundled together, the number of "no" votes and abstentions in Verviers outnumbered the "yes" votes. According to a French official in Belgium, the French-language newspaper *La Cité* wrote, 'The average Belgian citizen is not lacking in political maturity or common sense. He is willing to engage in Europe, but wants to know where it leads, toward which structure, and under what conditions. He perhaps did not have enough information. One had wanted to convince him, but it would have been better to inform him.'<sup>30</sup> We see here one of the earliest acknowledgments of an information deficit among European voters; we also see that the mere existence of Europe-related balloting did not necessarily foster the requisite communication of information that voters desired.

And with that, the referendums experiment ended. How could the suffragists "inform" the public? How could they communicate European unity? Referendums would not suffice. Suffragists believed that nothing short of elections could force Europeans to make an informed choice, not between approving or rejecting a proposition, but between multiple representatives with competing visions for European unity within a European parliament. The referendums were meant to demonstrate support for a united Europe, and in that they largely succeeded. But many in the movement recognised that voting would have more impact if the campaigns took on a more informative role and if the act of casting a ballot absorbed the voter into the election's political system. Almost a decade later in the early 1960s, as politicians and scholars debated direct elections to the European Parliament, some commentators made the dubious contention that European voters possessed the requisite political maturity for direct elections because of the practice citizens received during the European Movement referendums.<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, however, the referendums more accurately represented an affirmation of positive opinion toward a united Europe rather than any meaningful democratic practice at the European level. Voters need to know what they are voting for, and they need to see results from their action. Neither occurred in the early EM referendums.

Altiero Spinelli believed he could accomplish those goals in a single, dramatic *coup de grâce* of the nation-state system. Spinelli, a founder of modern European federalism and the supranational suffrage movement, embarked in 1956 on a radical, ultimately failed course to establish European unity and supranational democratic participation in one swoop. His Congress of the European People

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<sup>27</sup> Memo titled 'Consultation populaire sur l'intégration de l'Europe' by M. Daniel Lamaziere, France's consul general in Liege, to French Foreign Affairs Minister Georges Bidault, 27 Nov. 1953, French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve, Conseil de l'Europe files, folder 16.

<sup>28</sup> 'Two Belgian Cities Vote to Bind European Ties', *The New York Times*, 21 Dec. 1953, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Memo titled 'Référéndum du "Mouvement Européen"' by M. Pierre de Vaucelles, French charge d'affaires in Belgium, to French Foreign Affairs Minister Georges Bidault, 23 Dec. 1953, French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve, Conseil de l'Europe files, folder 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Birke, *European Elections by Direct Suffrage*, 23.



(CEP) was the pinnacle of participatory politics in the first thirty years of European integration. From 1957 to 1962, across seven countries, more than 630,000 people voted for 611 representatives who were charged with writing a purely federal constitution for Europe.<sup>32</sup> National governments could not be entrusted to negotiate a supranational Europe, Spinelli believed, so the CEP would bypass them by setting up its own elections in European cities for membership in a European constituent assembly. The Congress stemmed from the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954. European suffragists had pinned their hopes to a potential European Political Community articulated within the EDC treaty that called for the creation of democratic supranational institutions and potential advancement toward a European federal structure. But the treaty's failure severely divided federalists, and caused a significant rift in the suffrage movement.<sup>33</sup> Some, such as Europa-Union Deutschland in West Germany, wanted to continue to work within national governments and the nascent European institutions of the new European Coal and Steel Community. More radical activists, like the Italian Spinelli, desired to bypass nation states altogether. At their first conference, in Turin in December 1957, Spinelli's group declared that their path to existence had been 'strewn with obstacles by the often open hostility of many so-called "Europeans" who are terrified to speak to the European people and understand their claims.'<sup>34</sup> It pronounced itself a "European front" in opposition to the nation state.<sup>35</sup>

The effective end of the Congress by 1962 after five plenary sessions and without a finished constitution reinforced what other pro-unity organisations had insisted to the congress all along: that nation states were a necessary political reality and they represented a natural political ecosystem for the vast majority of European voters. The Congress of the European People could simply not organise elections on a large enough scale, nor could they attract the requisite public attention to incite political revolution against national governments. Spinelli's correspondence during the congress's tenure revealed chronic financing shortages and insufficient support.<sup>36</sup> Spinelli himself did not seem to think much of the Congress in hindsight. In 1966 he wrote that the experiment 'showed the popularity of the European idea but also the difficulty of transforming this general consensus into a living, popular political force in a situation lacking the institutions of a democratic Europe.' The best he could muster was an admission that the congress 'was probably not useless.'<sup>37</sup>

It was clear from the Council of Europe's elites-only structure, the inconsequential citywide EM referendums, and the failed Congress of the European People that the nation state was still the most viable crucible of European-wide democracy. And without the acquiescence of the nation state, which essentially held a monopoly on the mechanisms of democracy and electoral communication, extra-national formulations would simply not work. Spinelli's "big bang" conception of democracy reflected his overall conception of how European unity should begin (rather than end): a full-scale European democratic government. Here we see how one's notion of a united Europe directly affected one's conviction in the appropriate threshold of democracy at the European level. Spinelli believed in a maximalist federal Europe, therefore he advocated for a extremely high levels of democratic participation: election of a constituent assembly to create a federal constitution that would then be put to voters, similar to some national constitutional processes after WWII. But

<sup>32</sup> S. Pistone, *The Union of European Federalists. From the Foundation to the Decision on Direct Election to the European Parliament 1946-1974* (Milan: Giuffr  Editore, 2008), 118.

<sup>33</sup> In 1956 the Union of European Federalists split into the Mouvement F d raliste Europ en and Action Europ enne F d raliste.

<sup>34</sup> Founding document of the Congress of the European People, 'Actes et Documents du Premier Congr s du Peuple Europ en', French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve, Questions Internationales, microfilm P07527; Pistone, *Union of European Federalists*, 87-122.

<sup>35</sup> E. B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe. Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-1957* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 26.

<sup>36</sup> See Altiero Spinelli files (AS) in the Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence, Italy.

<sup>37</sup> A. Spinelli, *The Eurocrats. Conflict and Crisis in the European Community* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 193.

Spinelli's group was undeniably an outlier. So were earlier federalist proposals for direct elections to the Council of Europe Consultative Assembly. Since it was clear that most political elites could not subscribe to the "big bang" federal explosion, and therefore its conception of instant, European-wide democracy, then suffragists would have to work within the emerging functionalist model of European unity, exemplified by the Treaty of Rome. As leading suffragist Reynaud said in the early 1950s even before the Treaty of Rome, 'we have now retreated to the functionalist approach.'<sup>38</sup> It appeared evermore likely that as functionalism deferred integration, it also deferred popular participation and the political communication that elections could provide. European elections would become a goal of European unity, rather than one of its means.

## PHASE 2: DEHOUSSE AND DE GAULLE

The second era of supranational democratization, unlike the first, occurred strictly within the bounds of the European Community and the purview of the nation state. The 1950s witnessed strong popular support for a vague notion of European unity, without strong supranational institutions. Conversely, in the 1960s we see a slight drop in popular interest, but in this decade the institutions of European integration matured. The supranational suffragists channelled all of their energy into the new European Community, which from the 1958 Treaty of Rome onward became the only viable setting of meaningful political and economic European integration. By working strictly within the bounds of established diplomatic and transnational channels, the suffrage movement became further institutionalised and removed from popular politics. Their strategy was not to communicate integration directly to voters, but to construct an apparatus of elections that would necessitate broader information campaigns by the media and political parties. After Spinelli's grand failure, the suffrage movement concentrated almost exclusively on official negotiation and institutional reform from within. Despite a low public profile, the suffrage movement was poised to succeed in this era. Plans for European direct elections garnered significant support within the EC. But given the EC's insistence in this era on consensus, French President Charles de Gaulle effectively torpedoed all blueprints designed to bring elections into the EC.

Suffragist testimony in this period makes clear that direct elections would serve a number of purposes. They would habituate voters to casting a ballot at the supranational level, normalise supranational elections within European political processes, necessitate information dissemination, and increase the EC's democratic legitimacy. The first significant proposal for direct elections after the Treaty of Rome emanated from Belgian socialist and federal activist Fernand Dehousse starting in 1958. Dehousse, as president of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and a member of the new European Parliament attached to the European Community, led a working group that composed proposals for supranational direct elections, which the Treaty of Rome explicitly approved. Some political elites wanted to focus first on increasing the power of the European Parliament, by far the EC's weakest institution, before committing to direct elections. The Parliament, after all, enjoyed very little practical power compared the vastly more powerful Commission and Council of Ministers. Would citizens bother to vote for an impotent parliament? Similar to Reynaud's plan for direct elections to the Council of Europe Consultative Assembly, suffragists endorsed immediate Europe-wide elections not as a reflection of what the European Parliament was at that moment (powerless), but what it could grow into. Dehousse and his team, backed by less radical – by Spinelli standards – suffragists such as Walter Hallstein, Robert Marjolin, Heinrich von Brentano, André François-Poncet, Robert Schuman, and Henri Brugmans among others decided that the immediate establishment of European-wide voting was critical toward habituating voters to European elections and enhancing the democratic credentials of the new supranational community. The powers of the Parliament

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<sup>38</sup> Reynaud, *Unite or Perish*, 209.

should be increased, Dehousse believed, but direct suffrage cannot wait. 'The election is justified because the Europe that's necessary to build has always been known as a democratic Europe, and by definition democracy implies the direct participation of the people. For this reason the argument of legitimacy occupies a place of equal importance to the argument of (the parliament's) effectiveness,' he wrote.<sup>39</sup>

Elections were not intended to undermine nation states, Dehousse said in a veiled reference to Spinelli's CEP, but rather to pinch citizens out of their ignorance or indifference and to embrace citizens who until now had been kept at arm's reach in the building of Europe. 'The Communities have been the domain of a few hundred specialists, politicians and officials' Dehousse's working group wrote in 1960. 'The public has only the scrappiest knowledge... Some have held this to be a perfectly normal state of affairs, given the general public's inability to grasp the subject matter.'<sup>40</sup> Dehousse's group emphasised the wide reach of the new European Community and its imminent effect on European life. 'It is high time therefore that the peoples be drawn into this venture, that they grasp what is at stake and its attendant risks and make known their will.'<sup>41</sup> International relations were no longer the strict prerogative of diplomats, but rather now a matter for domestic scrutiny by an informed electorate, Dehousse wrote. Above all, he believed, the Community needed an "injection" of democracy. 'European elections would not only arouse public opinion, it would also reinforce the integral democratic character of our institutions.'<sup>42</sup>

General de Gaulle rejected the Dehousse Plan and any other circumstance that would accord the European Community direct democratic legitimacy. De Gaulle insisted on an intergovernmental Europe with a permanent political secretary at the service of the member states, sanctioned by a European referendum. Referendums were central to de Gaulle's governing strategy. In fact, French Fourth Republic Gaullists pioneered a strategy in the early 1950s that others all over the continent would later adopt: they called for popular referendums on items related to European integration that they opposed.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1960s, with Gaullists no longer an opposition party, de Gaulle considered referendums instead to legitimise his conception of European unity rather than prevent proposals he loathed. De Gaulle detested parliamentary democracy, which put him at odds with most EC member state political elites, and could not envisage transposing that cacophony of inaction to the European level. Gaullists and European Movement officials agreed to a compromise in November 1960 that fused parts of the Fouchet and Dehousse plans, which would have instituted direct European Parliament elections in exchange for implementing de Gaulle's reforms spelled out in the Fouchet Plan and the possibility of referendums on de Gaulle's European blueprint.<sup>44</sup> Many federal suffragists opposed the deal because the Fouchet Plan envisioned a European polity antithetical to a federation, but the point was moot when it soon became clear that de Gaulle could not countenance even a powerless directly elected EP in a strict intergovernmental European design.

European Parliament direct election debates in the 1960s reveal that the European Community and nearly all member states were prepared to move toward representative democracy except French Gaullists, particularly de Gaulle, whose opposition could not be overcome. French parliamentarians Maurice-René Simonnet and André Rossi separately introduced bills into the French National

<sup>39</sup> F. Dehousse, 'Des Élections Européennes en 1962?', *Communes d'Europe*, magazine of the Conseil des Communes d'Europe, March 1960, 11.

<sup>40</sup> K. Kyle, 'The European Parliament', *The World Today*, 28, 12 (1972), 530-537, 532.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>42</sup> F. Dehousse, 'Etat des travaux concernant les élections européennes au suffrage universel direct', 14 Apr. 1960, Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence, Dehousse files: FD 286.

<sup>43</sup> See for instance the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* calls for a referendum on the European Defense Community: 'Pas d'armée européenne sans recours au référendum', *Le Monde*, 13 November 1952.

<sup>44</sup> European Movement resolution titled 'Conférence Internationales en faveur d l'élection au suffrage universel direct de l'assemblée parlementaire Européenne, Luxembourg, 11-12 novembre 1960', 12 Nov. 1960, French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve, Maurice Couve de Murville files, box 346.

Assembly on behalf of a majority of parliamentarians who endorsed direct elections in 1962 and 1963.<sup>45</sup> German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer continued to voice his support for direct elections in January 1963, followed by SPD Bundestag member Karl Mommer's proposal in 1965 that West Germany hold popular elections for their own European Parliament members regardless of the other EC member states.<sup>46</sup> Although it was not an issue of high salience, member-state citizens approved of European elections as well. By 1970, 60 per cent of European Community member-state citizens agreed with the concept of direct elections.<sup>47</sup> In an insightful book, historian Hartmut Kaelble generally argues that national democratic models were not transposed to the European level because national democratization followed a bloody, arduous process that the European political body had not endured.<sup>48</sup> More specifically, Kaelble argues that any hope for European democratization that may have come from the 1950s dissipated in the 1960s for myriad reasons: elites turned their attention from European unity toward the Cold War, the EC had failed to unite diverse, transnational sections of society, national democracies had re-established their supremacy, and general interest in European integration waned in the 1960s. Yet despite all of the hindering forces that Kaelble identified, the Dehousse Plan could have succeeded. European-wide elections would not have fully constituted European democracy in the federalists' sense, but it would have been a significant early step. Kaelble accurately captures the era's democratic dilemma, but a simpler explanation for supranational democracy's obstruction may in fact be more powerful: de Gaulle prevented it. While there is legitimate debate on the General's legacy toward the European Community,<sup>49</sup> there can be no doubt that he severely stunted the institutional development of the European Parliament. The Benelux countries had significant concerns about their voting power in a changing EP, and other elites were relieved to use de Gaulle's intransigence to cover their own apprehensions, but it is highly likely that without de Gaulle's opposition the European Parliament would have instituted direct elections and perhaps increased its powers fifteen years or more before these developments actually occurred.

### PHASE 3: THE CHANGED DYNAMICS OF DISSENT

Community enlargement and a series of national referendums in the early/mid 1970s forever changed the way the public engaged European unity. Most prominently, the EC encountered an unprecedented level of dissent. Previously, member-state citizens who opposed European unity had been certain national Communist parties, economic protectionists, and a tiny cadre of uncompromising xenophobes. Referendums and enlargement brought opposition to European unity further into the mainstream. People who had never given the subject much thought were now asked to develop an opinion. Referendum campaigns in France, Britain, Denmark, Norway, and Ireland to a lesser degree, generated formidable anti-EC propaganda, and the inclusion of less-enthusiastic Europeans, especially Britons, incorporated organised dissent into the Community on a scale previously unknown.

Central to the Community's newfound dissenters was the EC's undemocratic structure. In many ways the issues raised in the 1970s were the sorts of problems European suffragists had hoped to remedy from the start. Suffragists were no longer the only group noting the Community's political insulation

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<sup>45</sup> Pistone, *Union of European Federalists*, 142.

<sup>46</sup> The Bundesarchiv in Koblenz contains a lengthy record of the Federal Republic's internal maneuvering in favor of direct EP elections. See B136/8511 European Parliament Bundeskanzleramt. The Federal Republic eventually decided against directly electing their EP representatives ahead of the other member states.

<sup>47</sup> Europa-Union Deutschland press release that quoted a *Paris-Match* poll, 15 May 1970, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Archive of Social Democracy, Bonn, Europa-Union Deutschland files, box 287.

<sup>48</sup> Kaelble, *Wege zur Demokratie*.

<sup>49</sup> M. Sutton, *France and the Construction of Europe, 1944-2007* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

from its member states' citizens. For decades, the federal suffragists had been the Community's biggest critics (other than Communists), and its lack of participatory democracy and the weakness of the European Parliament had been some of their strongest critiques. The Community had the luxury of having the most enthusiastic advocates for European unity as one of its most focused critics. The arrival of the British into the European supranational family changed the dynamic of dissent. Those that opposed British membership honed in on the undemocratic decision making of the Community as a technique for expressing their desire to keep their country out of the EC. Criticism changed from how to improve the Community to attacking its fundamental political design and its reason for being.

Calls for democratization, for a decade sealed within diplomatic channels and the EC institutions, entered popular political life little by little in the 1970s. European integration was also increasingly communicated to the public in the language of criticism and dissent. The French referendum in April 1972 on the proposed enlargement of the European Community allowed for more than a month of energetic campaigning by political parties and interest groups on all sides. Communists like Georges Marchais found more platforms than usual to oppose integration on capitalist terms and called for greater "democratization" of Europe's institutions, by which he meant more Communist representation.<sup>50</sup> The French referendum, however, was a cynical exercise in Fifth Republic power politics that had very little to do with competing visions of a united Europe.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, in October 1972 the EC heads of state held a highly publicised summit in Paris. The referendum and the summit each attracted popular demonstrations by both advocates of European unity and an increasing number of opponents, manifesting a strange twist in the European sage: those most supportive of European unity had become outsiders to the process and had become vocal critics. The strongest supporters of European unity lined up in protest with the EC's fiercest opponents, each protesting (for different reasons) the Community's lack of popular political input.

In Britain, the all-encompassing issue of British sovereignty transcended all the other complaints of potential membership. Anti-Marketees were distraught that Britain's leaders would even consider subjecting the British Parliament – in their eyes Europe's most stable democratic institution – to the whims of continental volatility. 'To join the Common Market would mean transferring many of the powers of the Westminster Parliament to untried and undemocratic institutions outside this country, beyond our control, and not answerable to us,' wrote anti-Marketee Ron Leighton.<sup>52</sup> He continued: 'The striking feature of the institutional structure of the Common Market is the complete lack of democracy... In the strictest meaning of the word, the Common Market is a bureaucracy not a democracy.' Michael Foot, a Labour MP who had attended the 1948 Hague Congress became in the late 1960s through the 1970s one of the spokesmen for Britain's democratic superiority. 'The British parliamentary system has been made farcical and unworkable by... the semi-secret law-making process of the Council of Ministers,' he wrote in May 1975.<sup>53</sup> And of the European Parliament, he wrote, 'This last unique and ineffable invention – dumb legislature – must surely have been the touch of some Laputan satirist.'<sup>54</sup>

United Kingdom popular consultation on the EC first arrived not in the 1975 national referendum, but during local test referendums in 1971. Similar to the European Movement's democratic theater of referendums in the early 1950s, these votes held little political weight and carried few political consequences. As the debate whether to join the EC reached its climax in Parliament in the late

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<sup>50</sup> G. Marchais, *Le Défi Démocratique* (Paris: Bernard, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> See *Tracts et papillons de propagande en vue du référendum approuvant la ratification du traité relatif à l'adhésion de la Grande-Bretagne, de l'Irlande et du Danemark aux Communautés Européennes du 23 avril 1972*, pieces collected by the French National Library, 1972.

<sup>52</sup> R. Leighton, *The Labour Case Against Entry into the Common Market* (Manchester: Labour Committee for Safeguards on the Common Market, 1971), 13.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Foot editorial in *The Times*, 23 May 1975; reprinted in M. Jones, *Michael Foot* (London: V. Gollancz, 1994), 378.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

summer and fall of 1971, pro-and anti-integration organisations staged public referendums in at least 16 British cities, ten of which were organised by Keep Britain Out.<sup>55</sup> Members of Parliament and local groups produced the other six against the wishes of the leadership of the three main parties, who all opposed referendums in principle. The referendum question asked citizens if they favoured British entry into the European Community, and voting was primarily conducted through mail-in ballots in all but two cities. Only one of the 16 referendums produced a result in favor of British entry. Overall, more than 160,000 electors voted to stay out, and slightly less than 85,000 voted to enter the Common Market.<sup>56</sup> Turnout ranged from one-quarter to one-half of the electorate, a far cry from the 65 to 80 per cent participation in the European Movement referendums of the 1950s. Opinion polls during the summer of 1971 appeared to show a majority of Britons opposed to entry, but the polls were prone to swings at that time. A very small number of MPs, such as Philip Goodhart of Beckenham, endorsed the local referendums because they truly wanted constituent feedback on the divisive issue. But it was clear that Keep Britain Out chose some of the referendum cities precisely because they would produce negative outcomes.<sup>57</sup>

The European Movement was once again involved in these local referendums, but the circumstances were tremendously different than the organisation's mini-referendums in the early 1950s. The British EM supported entry into the EC, and enthusiastically proclaimed so publicly. But like all major British political parties, and unlike Gaullists in the 1960s and 1970s, the European Movement did not consider the national referendum an appropriate method for determining European issues. 'It [The British EM] believes... that a referendum, which is not a British method of sounding public opinion, would be a misleading mechanism for guiding Parliament in coming to such a decision,' the British EM responded in a letter to Keep Britain Out.<sup>58</sup> Suffragists on the continent who once utilised local referendums decades ago had long since focused exclusively on European-wide elections. European activists undoubtedly noticed that Keep Britain Out intended to wield public opinion, expressed democratically, as an uncomfortable obstacle to the increasingly likely accession of Great Britain into the EC. Richard Crossman, editor of *The New Statesman*, wrote in 1970 what became evermore obvious in the ensuing five years: 'The campaign for a referendum is in fact a campaign against joining the Common Market.'<sup>59</sup> The early EM referendums of the 1950s hoped to broadcast people's assent for European unity, but that time had long passed. Opponents of the EC communicated to the public in the language of democracy just as often and energetically as supporters of the EC. In any event, the only vote that mattered in 1971, the vote in Parliament, assured Britain's inclusion into the EC.

European Commission President Sicco Mansholt recognised that the dynamics of dissent had been dramatically altered by Britain's accession into the EC. He spent his last few days as Commission president in January 1973 in England welcoming them to the Community in a somewhat apologetic manner: 'I do not think I am going too far when I say that what we have done so far has not come up to the European public's expectation,' he said.<sup>60</sup> Mansholt was days away from ending his eight-month tenure as Commission president, capping a 15-year career in the Commission. He dubbed his nothing-to-lose strategy 'verbal radicalism to shock people out of their lethargy' partly in an attempt to combat the significant opposition that accompanied Britain's accession.<sup>61</sup> 'They [the European

<sup>55</sup> H. Noyes, 'Party Leaders Keep a Wary Eye on Market Referendums', *The Times*, 1 Oct. 1971, 5.

<sup>56</sup> P. Goodhart, *Full-Hearted Consent. The Story of the Referendum Campaign – and the Campaign for the Referendum* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), 31.

<sup>57</sup> U. Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain Joined the Common Market* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 249-50.

<sup>58</sup> Tim Jones, 'Anti-Marketeers to hold referenda on entry', *The Times*, 28 June 1971, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Goodhart, *Full-Hearted Consent*, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Sicco Mansholt speech titled 'A Time of Hope and Promise – and of Forewarning', 2 January 1973, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Sicco Mansholt files, 227: Fanfare for Europe.

<sup>61</sup> J. van Merriënboer, *Mansholt. A Biography* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 547.

public, especially Britain] complain for instance that the Community is undemocratic. And it is a fact that the Community has developed a network of “official channels” which the man in the street can make nothing of. He knows that important decisions, which affect his own immediate affairs, are being taken at the European level, but he does not know exactly who takes them, or who has to carry them out, or how.<sup>62</sup> The European Community had never before encountered such a strong degree of dissent, and in the early 1970s many of its leaders recognised that it faced a legitimacy and communication problem among the people whose lives they increasingly governed.

Accession and referendums in the early 1970s provided the salutary shock that Dehousse had hoped for in 1960. But by then, it was too late to prevent the EC's lack of popular political input from becoming a detriment to its public perception. Furthermore, the stream of referendums in the early 1970s, including an unsuccessful referendum in Norway, ran contrary to the goals of the federal suffrage movement. National referendums asked citizens to think like national actors and consider their national interests. Is it in France's national interest to allow England to join the European Community? Is it in Ireland's national interest to join the European Community? The referendums were national phenomena that mobilised a nation's entire political spectrum toward answering a question as a nation of individuals. European suffrage activists hoped that elections would change European mentalities so that they thought like Europeans. EP elections would hopefully initiate a stronger realisation of a European collective entity. National referendums reinforce one's national identity. One needs only to identify some of the proponents of national referendums – British anti-Marketters and Gaullists – to recognise that referendums were not meant to endear citizens to the EC or popularly sanction the EC. In the words of intellectual historian Frank R. Ankersmit, a referendum forces one to think only as a “political primitive”.<sup>63</sup>

Yet one could also describe democracy in the EC before 1979 as “primitive.” In the absence of a European-wide *demos*, how else other than referendums could elites gain consent from the public for EC accession? The necessity of national referendums reflected the failure of the suffrage movement to effect the uniting of Europe in a way that transcended national democracy. Suffragists envisioned a democratic, united European polity in the making, while referendum advocates for the most part strictly considered the EC a collection of sovereign states. The proliferation of referendums demonstrated the undeniable contemporary reality that even for European-wide issues, the nation-state was still the ultimate crucible of democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Burgeoning national referendums, coupled with the creation of the European Council in 1974-75, appeared to complete the Gaullist vision of Europe and the defeat of the suffragists. Representative democracy eventually became entrenched within EC, but the continuation of national referendums as the most common method of popular consultation perpetuated the political mentality that elections matter first and foremost at the national level. The supranational suffrage movement enjoyed only partial success. Direct elections occurred, but once citizens began voting in the EP, the legislature's powerlessness became painfully obvious. Commentators after the first EP elections also noted the strong “national flavour” of the 1979 elections.<sup>64</sup> It has taken thirty years to strengthen the EP's powers to match the Commission and Council. European federalists, who reunited in the early

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<sup>62</sup> Mansholt, 'A Time of Hope and Promise – and of Forewarning'.

<sup>63</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, 'Representative Democracy. Rosanvallon on the French Experience', in K. Palonen, Tuija Pulkkinen, and José María Rosales, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Politics of Democratization in Europe: Concepts and Histories* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 34.

<sup>64</sup> J. Lodge and V. Herman, 'Direct Elections to the European Parliament. A Supranational Perspective', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8, 1 (1980), 45-62.

1970s under their original name Union of European Federalists, did not celebrate for long after their decades-long struggle for direct EP elections: 'The European means for action – the European elections, the European political parties – are not enough to attract the press and public opinion,' federalist leader Mario Albertini wrote in a letter to UEF members in December 1976.<sup>65</sup> He continued: 'By way of our actions to obtain the decision on having the European elections take place, we gained a new influence. There has been a change of situation. At first it was only to obtain European elections. Now it concerns the problem of what to obtain from it.'<sup>66</sup> Based on the previous three decades of activism, suffragists in the 1970s realised that elections without accompanying reforms that further connected the EC to citizens and commanded the public's attention would not fully succeed.

Despite elections' inability to instantly transform the Community, the federal suffragists succeeded in anticipating some of the most severe problems the EC and EU have endured for many decades. The political distance between elites and the public that suffragists identified in the earliest days of European integration – partly the result of the functionalist process that delayed creating a polity that would indisputably require democracy via elections – has become one of the most significant issues the Community faces. Some scholars believe that the permissive consensus, the European people's political apathy toward European integration, shattered during the contentious referendums surrounding the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s.<sup>67</sup> That period also witnessed the first debates about a democratic deficit. But we have seen in this article that referendums and accession stirred up a significant number of European Community member-state citizens, who, whether EC friend or foe, derided the EC's absence of elections or popular political participation. The Community has spent the last few decades working toward achieving at least a parallel degree of allegiance as its member states, but most likely the best the EC can hope for is a dual allegiance from "dual democracy."<sup>68</sup>

In this article we have also seen the mixed effect of elections as a form of political communication. Elections help transform people into political actors, but casting a vote for a political system does not always ensure the voter's loyalty to that system. The federalists were mistaken that elections would systematically and immediately organise politics on the supranational level in comprehensible ways to citizens. Had supranational elections begun in the early 1960s, perhaps they would have habituated voters sooner to that style of participation, rather than referendums, which is now the dominant democratic method of voter expression in EU member states. They may have also helped define the EC as a democratic polity, rather than the characterization it has since earned: a polity with a deficit of democracy. Regardless, despite its failure to achieve its ultimate goals in this period, the federal supranational suffrage movement reveals that notions of supranational democracy were continually contested and often linked with aspects of European communication. Exceptional solutions to the information deficit would likely go a long way toward addressing the democratic deficit.

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<sup>65</sup> Open letter from Mario Albertini to Union of European Federalists members dated 3 December 1976, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Archive of Social Democracy, Bonn, Europa-Union Deutschland files, box 262B.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> M. Franklin, M. Marsh, and L. McLaren, 'Uncorking the Bottle. Popular Opposition to European Unification in the Wake of Maastricht', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 32, 4 (1994), 455-472.

<sup>68</sup> T. Snyder, 'How Democracy Can Save Europe', *New York Review of Books Blog*, 7 Feb. 2012, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/feb/07/we-people-how-save-european-democracy>. Accessed on 1 January 2014. But Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer show that "double loyalty" is highly contested: 'European Democracy and its Critique'.



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