DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

‘Democratic deficit’ is a term used by people who argue that the EU institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen due to their complexity. The real EU democratic deficit seems to be the absence of European politics. EU voters do not feel that they have an effective way to reject a ‘government’, they do not like, and to change, in some ways, the course of politics and policy. The current form of European governance is such that there is no ‘government’.

The public are still generally pro-European, but they do not understand the political system that sometimes appears to threaten their way of life.

Disaffection with Europe has been expressed in the low turnouts at European elections, which reached an all-time low in 2009 with an EU average of just 43%.

The issue of democratic legitimacy has been sensitive at each stage of the process of European integration. The issue was addressed in the intergovernmental conferences leading up to the signing of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties by giving more powers to the European Parliament (EP) and extending the areas in which had joint decision-making powers with Council. As a result, the EP has evolved from a consultative assembly to a co-legislator.

The Lisbon Treaty, has strengthened the European Parliament’s financial, legislative and supervisory powers. The EP has acquired considerable influence in the appointment of the Commission and its President.

In addition, the European Citizens’ Initiative was created and the importance of dialogue between civil society and the European institutions was recognised. Lastly, certain Council sessions have been made public to improve citizens’ information.

SEE ALSO

- Citizens’ Initiative
- Civil society organisation
- European Parliament
- Governance
- National parliaments
- President of the European Commission
- Subsidiarity
- Transparency (access to documents)
- Transparency of Council proceedings