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ADDRESSING THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE AND BEYOND: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S DEMOCRACY PROMOTION STRATEGIES IN HUNGARY, TURKEY AND UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how the European Union (EU) has been addressing the crisis of democracy both internally and internationally. For that purpose, it articulates a multi-level governance lens of analysis with a process tracing methodology. Multi-level governance is here understood both as an analytical framework seeking to explain the vertical and horizontal exercise of authority in complex structures composed of multiple actors, and as an answer to the challenge posed by the management of “transnational common goods” or global threats. It implies an attempt to establish a delicate balance promoted by sufficiently decentralized governance that does not, however, fail to provide networks of interactions and good practices capable of promoting collective action. This approach assesses the distribution of authority across different levels.

Based on these definitions, the paper seeks to identify the EU's democracy promotion strategies in: Hungary, as a Member State whose democratic performance has been regressing considerably; Turkey as the most complex candidate state; and Ukraine, which was previously part of the European Neighborhood Policy and is now on a fast track to enlargement. The goal is to understand how EU's actions towards these case studies have contributed to address the crisis of democracy both within Europe and beyond.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The goal of this paper is to analyze how the European Union (EU) has been addressing the crisis of democracy both internally and internationally.

The crisis of the sovereign state is an empirical and academic observation that is a few decades old and it is noticeable the strengthening of a consensus regarding the root cause of this phenomenon: transnational challenges that put the survival of the sovereign state at risk, at least in the way it is currently organized. Faced with this broader scenario, academia has been developing prolific work on reflection and scientific research into possible solutions to this challenging reality. In a nutshell, proposals emerged that defended the delegation of competences to intergovernmental, supra-state structures, at the same time that others were devoted to analyzing the effectiveness of a logic of devolution of competences to subnational levels.

In the 1990s, theorists essentially linked to European Union (EU) studies, such as Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks¹, proposed the concept of Multilevel Governance (hereinafter, MLG). With the advancement of the single market project, the growing role not only of European institutions, but also of subnational economic agents, was recognized. Drawing inspiration from neofunctionalist proposals seeking to explain the process of European integration, these authors - and those who followed them - began to overcome the then traditional tension between neofunctionalists and intergovernmentalists, understanding the EU as a political system whose form of exercising authority it would have to be framed within another – and more innovative – theoretical proposal. This approach began to generate major academic debates, successive contributions of conceptual delimitation and a broad set of categorizations; in such a way that one of the criticisms recognized in the meantime is that of its dispersion or excessively abstract character.

Thus, the MLG came to be understood as an analytical framework that aims to explain the vertical and horizontal exercise of authority, in a complex structure, with multiple actors and a challenge to the management of “transnational common goods” and where it seeks to establish a delicate balance promoted for a sufficiently decentralized form of governance that does not fail, however, to provide networks of interactions and good practices capable of promoting collective action.

Michael Zürn identifies the following as constitutive elements of governance: a plurality of actors; a set; set of agreed or agreed standards; the exercise of authority; common goals; agreements not necessarily global, they can be regional. Now, this set of governance pillars results in the structuring of three layers of the global political system: i) normative principles; ii) specific political institutions; iii) interactions between different spheres of authorities. It should be noted, in this same line of reasoning, that the MLG necessarily involves the devolution of power from central national authorities to peripheral or subnational ones; a sharing of power with civil society and its non-political representatives; and the decrease of state sovereignty in the opposite direction, that is, towards international structures.

In fact, it is inferred that this new form of governance necessarily implies the shift of states’ competences upwards, to the supranational level, but, at the same time, downwards, to the subnational level. The MLG thus describes the coordination of the exercise of political authority through different levels of jurisdiction and in different functional areas, including, for this purpose, an analysis of governance structures and processes that cover overlapping territorial units: local, regional, national, continental and global.

By positioning themselves in the international system, at the supra-state level, international organizations have played an especially proactive role in this domain and, more recently, their direct connection with subnational levels (federated states, provinces, municipalities) has attracted the attention of academia, with very relevant conclusions for the constant construction and consolidation of the architecture of the exercise of governance today.

The European Union has been widely recognized as a unique case in promoting democracy abroad and within its borders, namely through an innovative set of institutional and legal mechanisms. Combining its assumed responsibility as a democracy promoter, its willingness to stand for Western- democratic values, its own evolution towards a “community of values” and its military weakness, the EU has reinforced its economic and trade ties, as well as its capability to offer attractive incentives. Therefore, what is called EU’s pan- European vocation is translated into a democracy promotion strategy that is based on three pillars (Youngs, 2008): positive incentives to promote changes, careful use of sanctions and diplomatic pressure, and funds for democracy programmes.

Therefore, this proposal intends to start from an initial question related to this concern: how has the European Union (EU) been addressing the crisis of democracy both internally and internationally?

¹ For example, key initial works published in 1996, such as “European Integration since the 1980s. State-Centric versus Multi-Level Governance” or “Cohesion Policy and European Integration. Building Multilevel Governance”.

For this purpose, three case-studies were selected to identify the EU's democracy promotion strategies: Hungary, a Member State whose democratic performance has been regressing considerably; Turkey, the most complex candidate state; and Ukraine, which was previously part of the European Neighborhood Policy and is now on a fast track to enlargement.

Within this scope, the paper stresses the idea that governance is not solely the domain of a single central government but involves various levels of government, including national, regional, and local authorities, as well as supranational organizations – such as the EU. By using multilevel governance as an analytical framework and engaging with some of its major characteristics, such as:

- Supranational Governance
- Interdependence: Different levels of government are interdependent, meaning they rely on each other to address various policy issues and challenges.
- Policy complexity: require cooperation and coordination between multiple levels of government. We bring this complexity into the analysis of the 3 case studies selected for their different types of relationship and history with the EU in order to search for patterns of behavior that may allow some insight on the role of the EU as an actor with a MLG approach to democracy promotion.

To do so, we will engage with the analysis of the European Union's actions towards the selected case studies, using a process tracing methodology, combined with a comparative approach under the multi-level governance lens, in order to figure out how relevant this more recent strategy has been used by this sui generis actor in order to deal with the challenges that these three States pose to democracy both within and in the nearby of the EU's borders.

Some examples include:

- Financial and technical support including funding for civil society organizations, election monitoring missions, and projects aimed at strengthening democratic institutions at levels beyond the formal state.
- Structured Dialogues: with civil society organizations as a platform for civil society to engage in discussions with EU institutions, share their perspectives, and provide input into policies and reforms related to democracy and governance.
- Civil Society Forums: bring together civil society representatives, EU officials, and other stakeholders to exchange ideas, share best practices, and discuss challenges and opportunities in the promotion of democracy.
- Capacity Building: for civil society organizations, empowering them to play a more active role in advocating for democratic reforms and holding governments accountable: include training, technical assistance, and resources to strengthen civil society's capacity
- Public Awareness and Mobilization: Civil society organizations also play a role in raising public awareness about democracy and human rights issues.