Daniel Innerarity, *La democracia en Europa [Democracy in Europe]*

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When Daniel Innerarity presented his book “*La democracia en Europa [Democracy in Europe]*” in Zaragoza on 26 June 2017, he said that he was fully aware that his work would not be an easy read … but that reading it would be worth the effort.1 Of course, one would think: “he would say that, wouldn’t he?” But he was right in the sense that this is a rich book about a key question for the present and future of Europe, and in fact of the European Union (EU), as this volume focuses almost exclusively on it.

There are indeed many reasons why this is the case, even more so nowadays with *gilets jaunes* roaming the streets of France, taxi drivers blocking the centres of Madrid or Barcelona, the current Brexit quagmire, and all of the above at a time when populists, including presidents and prime ministers in some countries, engage in cheap “EU-bashing” (Trump, Putin, or Erdogan, to name but a few).2 Therefore any contribution to our understanding of how democracy works in the EU is extremely valuable, especially in light of the recent elections to the European Parliament in late May which showed a growth of populist, nationalist and extremist parties, although not to the level some pundits had predicted.

Innerarity’s main argument is that the EU integration process has produced a complex form of democracy. And that it is this complexity *per se* that represents an advantage – and not a disadvantage, as is so often portrayed. Sophistication is a “plus”. And his book enters into the nitty gritty details of such a sophisticated form of democratic governance.

His contribution contains at least three important dimensions: the first takes a political philosophical approach about the state of democracy in the EU – i.e. through the prism of his main expertise (he is currently Professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country); the second focuses on current European affairs, and on the euro-currency in particular, and more generally on the way the 2008 world financial and economic crisis was handled in/by Europe with a special interest for the case of Greece; and, finally, the third deals with global affairs.

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1 All translations into English are by the current author.

2 See for instance Guy Verhofstadt’s famous tweet on 3 June 2017 after a NATO Summit where he declared: “Trump, Putin and Erdogan are no friends of Europe”: www.facebook.com/GuyVerhofstadt/posts/10155763227495016 (accessed 1 February 2019). Verhofstadt is President of the Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament, and a former Prime Minister of Belgium.
On EU integration and democracy, Innerarity excels in using his political philosophy wisdom to describe the complexity and extreme sophistication of regional-cum-global governance in Europe (and that includes both its internal and its external dimensions). He has the knack of covering various forms of (differentiated) integration (federal, intergovernmental, and technocratic), combining them with different forms of legitimisation drawing on political philosophers from the past: for instance, he shows how Madison, Saint-Simon and Rousseau (p. 105) can help us understand this composite panorama. And again, he does so in order to impress on us that complexity can and does mean sophistication (“we should stop thinking that there is an inherent incompatibility between democracy and sophistication”, p. 25) – thus facilitating the traditional balancing of powers (executive, legislative, judicial) which represents (cue Montesquieu) a key feature of any democratic set up. Furthermore, his approach (pp. 97-98) reveals the richness and complementarities of overlapping layers of decision making that characterize not only the EU (and its institutions) but also its member states (especially, though not exclusively, through the existence of decentralisation or that of (semi/quasi)federal national structures). In short, “EU democracy can only be understood if we think of the EU as a polycentric system of transnational governance, a non-hierarchical system of cooperation, a community of learning and adaptation” (p. 268). Equally useful is his reference to the need not to confuse a lack of intelligibility with complexity (pp. 59–65; see also his summary table of logics and levels on p.105 which are further detailed in the pages that immediately follow it). Indeed, such an approach contributes to our understanding: something that does not fit the fad of the day with twitter politics and other, equally populist, oversimplifications of complex realities.

He does not think that the absence of a European “demos” is an obstacle, on the grounds that such a claim represents too state-centred an approach (see Chapter 4). I have my doubts about this point, not because of the need to go beyond the state in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century but precisely because the EU can also be seen as the European rescue of the nation state – to refer to Alan Milward’s seminal work on this point published in 1992.\footnote{Alan S. Milward, \textit{The European rescue of the Nation-state} (London: Routledge, 1992).} Otherwise, it would mean a clear preference for a federal union (which Innerarity implies to a certain extent on page 256). But this is an approach that fails to take into account the past 70 years of integration in Europe. As Peter Lindseth argues, “European integration still needs democratic legitimization coming from the national level, both in a formal and substantive sense.”\footnote{Peter Lindseth, 2011, Greek ‘Sovereignty’ and European ‘Democracy’: eutopialaw.com/2011/11/09/greek-‘sovereignty’-and-european-‘democracy’.} And as Amy Verdun illustrates it further: “(....) the EU has a considerable amount of federal features (federation), but that a federal tradition, a federal ideology and advocacy to a federal goal (federalism) are mostly absent”.\footnote{Amy Verdun, ‘The Federal Features of the EU: Lessons from Canada’, \textit{Politics and Governance}, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2016), pp. 100–110, quote on p. 100.} Moreover, to prefer and propose a “simple” federal model contradicts his very own claim of the existence of a sophisticated form of EU governance nowadays. Indeed, it is this particular characteristic that also explains its success to date because it allows for more checks and balances between different political party ideologies, between different geostrategic situations, between small and big(ger) states, between different cultures and practices, etc.
Innerarity also prefers to talk (p. 27) of a democratic “dilemma” instead of a “deficit”, as it is usually referred to in the extensive literature on the subject, and to which he extensively refers. The bottom line however is that, irrespective of what actually one calls this situation, the question of how democratic the EU is and/or should be will remain of utmost importance for its future development.

When dealing with austerity measures taken in Greece by the EU and other international institutions after 2010, he should have also considered evidence from the existing literature that shows clearly that “in the hands of Greek politicians, EU Structural Funds [from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund] became an instrument for keeping electoral clientele happy”. Indeed, in this 2016 study by Asteris Huliaras and Sotiris Petropoulos, it is stated that this funding amounted to a total of €75.5 bn. during 1986–2013, through various programmes like structural or cohesion funds. How ineffective and inefficient most of the social, economic, and political structures in Greece were and still are is conveniently ignored by Innerarity. In addition, whereas the EU, and in particular its richest member (read Germany), was heavily criticized by many Greeks (often due to their ignorance of how the Union works, something amplified by the brief tenure of its economics ministry, a certain Varoufakis), there is no mention of the fact that since 1981 most European funds (regional or cohesion) were used not to make the system more democratic, but instead, to increase Greece’s inefficient and unfair form of governance.

As for austerity as such, no one is of course in favour of it theoretically-speaking, but what would have been Innerarity’s alternative solutions? There was an urgent need to stop the continued dilapidation of all those funds, especially as they were also needed elsewhere in Europe. To express compassion for the most vulnerable is understandable, and there is no doubt that this sector of the population actually paid (and in many cases keeps paying and will keep paying) the highest price for the three bail-outs (over €260 bn. worth in all) provided by the EU and other international institutions. But would such a rescue plan have been possible if Greece did not belong to the EU and to the Eurozone? What alternatives were realistically possible or even put forward by the (then) flamboyantly radical (I use radical in a negative way here although historically speaking this has not always been the meaning of that term) government of Tsipras in 2015: Russia and China … seriously? Or a devaluation through a return to a national currency (as membership of the euro does not allow national devaluations)? Which would have increased inflation to near-“Venezuelan” figures almost overnight. In addition past devaluations of the drachma were

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8 see the very useful research produced online over the years by the Hellenic Observatory at LSE http://www.lse.ac.uk/Hellenic-Observatory/Publications/GreeSE-Papers.

9 36% of world trade is made in euros and the euro represents 20% of central banks reserves worldwide: Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, ‘Pourquoi payons-nous notre pétrole en dollars?’, Le Monde économie & entreprise, Cahier du ‘Monde’, 30.01.19.

numerous and uncompetitive, precisely *not* allowing for a much-needed correction of the structural weaknesses of the Greek economy.

In that respect, Innerarity would also have profited from referring to the vast literature on Europeanisation, be it in comparative politics, or public policies, that all show that such a process is neither automatic nor unidirectional.11 Moreover, if Europeanisation in Greece is only superficial – a good example of the absence of “crossloading” is in the Greek Parliament,12 it might also be due to what Sabine Saurugger and Fabien Terpan have rightly called “resistance to EU norms and principles”.13 Thus, any absence of such a process must be considered as a continued “preference” for inefficient and corrupt forms of governance (i.e. preferring “bad practice” to “good practice”), by elites and public opinion alike. Overall, this is a dimension that Innerarity should have explored and developed further.

On international affairs broadly defined, Innerarity fails to bring into consideration a variety of new EU arrangements that have been set up to deal precisely with those very issues of democratic control, scrutiny, accountability, let alone legitimacy that Innerarity is concerned with: including the daily management of the single currency. I deal with this issue as an international one because the euro is, as mentioned above, an international currency, and also because money and defence go to the heart of sovereignty, in short: “blood and money”. In part this is due to his conviction that “the EU is not a system of parliamentary sovereignty, but one of a separation of powers” (p.187). In fact, it is bit of both as the Lisbon Treaty has been labelled correctly as the “Treaty of Parliaments”. Innerarity’s comments would have been more accurate prior to 2009: but the new treaty has *simultaneously* strengthened the role of the European Parliament and those of the national parliaments. As Valentin Kreilinger notes in a more recent publication than the one under review here, “[m]embers of the European Commission have (…) undertaken over 700 visits to national parliaments” between November 2014 and the summer of 2018.14 This increase in the role of national parliaments is what Ian Cooper had described, well before the Innerarity book came out, as “a virtual third chamber”15 – which confirms the existence of a sophisticated form of democratic governance. More developments since then also point in that same direction. Thus, Innerarity does not even mention the new IPCs/interparliamentary conferences that have been set up in order to deal *precisely* with

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11 again the literature is huge ever since the first studies on the impact of European integration in the early 1990s: see inter alia the essays in Paolo Graziano and Maarten P. Wink (eds), *Europeanization – New Research Agendas* (London: Palgrave, 2008).


those specific concerns: the first two deal with, on the one hand, foreign, security and defence issues, and, on the other, financial and economic governance (the first as a result of the 2009 Lisbon Treaty provisions, the second due to the Fiscal Pact of 2011 which was a reaction to several weaknesses of the single currency). That is to say that the praxis of integration also reflects Innerarity’s own sophisticated approach to democracy. But these new arrangements which have been created precisely because they were needed, do not appear in his study (and there have been more such developments in the same direction, by revitalising existing mechanisms or adding new ones, admittedly some being set up after the publication of his book, for instance most recently over Europol).

Here, I also add the following quote from the Conclusions of the CFSP/CSDP IPC meeting of April 2017 in Malta (emphases added) to show that practice follows the Innerarity philosophical description and prescription of a sophisticated EU governance:

“(...) Conscious of the multi-layered decision-making process in the areas of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); aware that effective implementation of these policies must involve numerous policy actors at both the EU and national levels; conscious of the responsibility to engage in parliamentary scrutiny at the respective levels and advance interparliamentary cooperation in the areas of CFSP and CSDP; Aware that the role of Parliaments as central actors of global decision making, with specific reference to conflicts and crises, has been strengthened; (...)”.

Such practical examples would have helped the reader, but it would have no doubt lengthened the book – perhaps something its author would have wanted to avoid.

Yet, it is important to note the positive contribution of this study (and all criticisms here are made in the most constructive possible manner) because it reminds the reader that it is simply too easy to criticise the EU nowadays: at the time of writing a first draft of this review, in late December 2018 on a flight from Athens to Madrid, I could not help thinking that just over 40 years ago these were the capitals and symbols of dictatoral regimes. And, for those who have forgotten, needless to say that European states and institutions (the then European Economic Community, but also the Council of Europe) did play an important role in successfully democratising them. Indeed, one needs to stress as Innerarity does what a fantastic achievement the whole EU integration process has been over the past seventy years. As the late Shimon Peres rightly described it in his 2013 European Parliament address: the EU is “a dream that became a miracle”.

All those refugees and other migrants (our brothers and sisters), who so often tragically pay with their own lives their attempts at escaping wars,  

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17 See the essays in Elena Griglio and Stelios Stavridis (eds), Special Issue on ‘Joint scrutiny of EU policies: the contribution of interparliamentary cooperation’ in Perspectives on Federalism, Vol.10, issue 3 (2018), pp. i xviii + pp. 1–213.


20 A recent UNHCR report states that “In 2018 six people drowned every day in the Mediterranean Sea when
famines and other similarly terrible situations, keep reminding us that, in spite of its many limitations (and this time to paraphrase Winston Churchill), the EU remains by far the least worst option. And this is so, not only when compared to Europe’s millennia-long history of past wars and bloodsheds, but also compared to the current situations in other countries, regions and continents of this planet.

To conclude, Innerarity powerfully illustrates the numerous benefits of the existence of a sophisticated EU democracy and reminds us that the alternatives are insecurity, violence, poverty and inequality of all sorts. In other words, a lack of democracy is the worst Weapon of Mass Destruction/WMD; there is, alas, plenty of empirical evidence for this worldwide. Innerarity provides a challenging analysis of how integration and democracy have successfully developed in Europe, in spite of obvious limitations that will always exist, as there will at all times be a gap between a model and its daily practice. But there also exist bad models! Thus, in the 21st century, democracy has produced some incredible achievements, and offers good prospects for more to materialize in the future – provided we keep on making it more sophisticated and efficient all the time both in theory and in practice. All in all, this book is a good read indeed!