

A REPUBLIC OF EUROPEANS:  
CIVIC UNITY IN POLY CULTURAL DIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

*This essay assesses recent developments in the European Union (EU) from a liberal republicanist perspective. It aims at yielding new insights into the transformation of the EU from a states-led project based on a mixed sovereignty regime – a union of co-sovereigns – into a democentric formation that gives rise to a respublica composita. The essay argues the case for rediscovering «civic Europe» through the lens of liberal republicanism, forging a sense of plural demos-hood. It draws from normative theory to establish bridges of understanding between a post-national conception of citizenship and new republicanist thinking, by raising the question of how to transform the EU into a democratic association of free and equal citizens. It suggests that, unlike earlier forms of republican thought that focused on a basically homogeneous political community, republicanism as non-domination can accommodate and even embrace multiculturalism and group rights. From the multiculturalist perspective even the approaches that associate the value of multiculturalism with its ability to provide for meaningful choices rather than commitment to inherited group values, enable a view that may combine the recognition of the pluralism of cultural possibilities for access to meaningful choice and a framework based on a minimal set of shared political values that is nonetheless crucial, to the extent that it is concerned with arrangements which help citizens increase control over aspects of their own lives. Within this framework, a multitude of commitments may develop emotional engagement as well as enhance opportunities for meaningful choices, leading to the condition of political polyculturalism, in which multiple allegiances coexist, without denying the basic adherence to certain minimal shared political values. From this view, a European civic space emerges as an answer to Europe's current concerns about the centrifugal and socially exclusionary reflexes of embedded*

*heterogeneity. The essay focuses on a liberal theory of republicanism attributing specific properties to the making of a distinct civic order – «a democracy of ideas» in Pettit’s sense of the term – that strives toward a dynamic equilibrium between competing normative orders that reveal particular ways of reconciling sovereignty with collective governance within a composite polity.*

#### FOUNDATIONS

A primary challenge for integration theorists is to assess an expanding corpus of literature that defies the categories of conventional thinking. And that, whilst trying to make sense of the future of the European state system; the viability of democracy across borders; novel forms of plural citizenship and identity/loyalty-holding; processes of «meta-rule-making»; relations between the functional scope, the territorial scale and the integrative level of the regional process; and the institutionalisation of new communicative avenues across a plurality of demoi. «And yet», Pentland (1973, p. 189) notes, «we need not be routed by the apparent diversity and chaos of the field». In this light, whatever lessons to be drawn from the current state of play, this essay argues that the ordering of relations within the EU polity amounts to a politics of co-determination and co-constitution. The question is whether the EU strikes a balance between its becoming the main locus of joint decisions and the dominant focus of citizen identification within an extended civic space.

It takes no specialist to reach the point that, more than any other international formation, the EU has installed a cooperative ethos in its workings, amounting to a complex learning process of peaceful social change. Elements of this offer the intellectual and cognitive capital needed for capturing the dynamics of change «from a diplomatic to a domestic arena», «from policy to polity», or «from democracies to democracy». Although no shortage of theory exists that might be used to guide integration scholarship, the field is embroiled in theoretical controversy compounded by conceptual complexity. The EU is often called complex, not because it is seen as a polity of multiple actors and institutions, but because it defies any easy notions as to how it is organised in relation to other polities. Hence the question whether the existing theories can reconcile two apparently contradictory principles: the preservation of segmental

autonomy within a multilevel regional order. The challenge is to capture the dynamics of two complementary aims: to strengthen the viability of separate domestic orders (as opposed to idealised notions of the Westphalian sovereignty regime) through the institutionalisation of joint sovereignty.

Whatever the mixture of evidence and method embedded in the existing models of integration, whether their emphasis is on conflict or equilibrium, and irrespective of their preference for the familiar (concrete) or the unique (unidentified) in prescribing an end-point, their systematic examination becomes a prime theoretical requisite for the crossing of a qualitative research threshold. Many discourses on the EU lead «to an unhelpful focus on the formal characteristics of the actors at the expense of the processes which characterize, and flow from, their interactions, making the latter entirely dependent on the former» (Branch and Øhgaard, 1999, p. 124). Also, competing approaches tend to disagree on background conditions and process variables, the impact of informal structures on policy outcomes, and the feasibility of ascribing a political *telos* to the process. This «battle» of theories has led to zero-sum notions of EU politics coupled with unjustified confidence on how the system works and towards what it is developing. The «elephant» though, to recall Puchala's colourful metaphor, often turns into a «chameleon», adjusting itself to the very requirements of the day. It may not only be that theorists are aware of a rather limited picture of an elusive political animal, but that the creature itself changes so rapidly as to render its study an exercise that is ultimately misleading.

The EU still remains an unresolved social scientific puzzle. It represents a form of regionalism that, «more than any other form of deep regionalism [...] has displaced the potential to alter the relative congruence between territory» identity and function which characterised the nation-state» (Laffan, 1998, p. 238). All the above properties of statehood are subjected to change: territories are embedded in a wider socio-political space; identity displays the potential of multiple loyalties and affiliations; while statist functions are influenced by a dramatic increase in the levels of interdependence (Laffan *et al.*, 1999). Thus, «the EU is more than an expression of modified interstate politics: it is the focus for processes that bring together new varieties of identity and need» (Laffan *et al.*, 1999). These issues are compounded further by the fact that, although the EU is taken to imply something more than the

aggregate of its parts, sovereignty has not yet moved toward a new «centre», thus becoming a systemic property of the general system. The EU is neither an international organisation proper, nor is it an ordinary state with a monopoly of law-making and law-enforcing powers. But equally puzzling remains its legal ontology; for some, still resting on a dynamic system of international treaty-based rules, whilst others prefer the conceptual analogy of a meta-constitutional system driven by procedural innovation and aspirations akin, but not identical, to statist forms of order-building.

All that we know with some certainty is that the EU's final vocation – presuming there will be one – is yet to become discernible. Even taking into account the series of neologisms invented to capture its elusive ontology, to simply argue that the EU is a political formation *sui generis* which should thus be examined through the lens of new conceptual paradigms runs the danger of complying with undisciplined formulations. Yet, there is the danger of perpetuating its present stance in the gray area of «normal interstate» and «normal intrastate relations» as the two extremes of a continuum on which polities are conventionally located (Forsyth, 1981). Herein lies perhaps a major scholarly challenge: to focus on the study of more likely intermediate outcomes, whose format may differ from «the forms of political domination that we are used to dealing with» (Schmitter, 1996a, p. 14). The aim is to conceptualise «the transient results of an ongoing process, rather than the [imagined] definitive product of a [presumed] stable equilibrium» (Schmitter, 1996a, p. 106). What is more likely to emerge will differ both from the properties attributed to a federal state and the type of competences delegated to an international organisation.

So, where does the present EU fit in the range of existing forms of polity? Sbragia (1993, p. 24) asserts that it is more useful to think of the EU as «an ongoing experiment in fashioning a new structure of governance [...] incorporating politics based on the state-society model *and* politics based on relations between governments». Behind this lies the notion of symbiosis (Taylor, 1993) and its implications for the changing conditions of state sovereignty. Moravcsik's (1993, p. 507) new state-centrism describes the EU as a liberal international regime making interstate bargaining more efficient, whilst enhancing the autonomy of national leaders. Another classification is Scharpf's (1988, p. 242) view of the EU as becoming «that “middle ground between cooperation among

nations and the breaking of a new one”». Yet, progress toward a European demos should not be equated with the possibility of a new form of regional statehood, let alone nationhood. Three further conceptual efforts merit our attention. The first draws on the analysis of Europeanisation, whereby the interlinking of domestic and EU politics leads us to study change as a series of adaptations in the development of coevolving institutions (e.g., Ladrech, 1994; Lavdas, 1997; Olsen, 2002). In particular, Wessels (1997, p. 273) projects a macropolitical view of the EU: an «ever closer fusion» of «public instruments from several levels linked with the respective Europeanization of national actors and institutions». Wessels makes the EU project part of the evolution of West European statehood: «it is a crucial factor and dynamic engine of the fundamental changes in the statehood of western Europe» (Wessels, 1997, p. 274). This is a more complex role to that of «rescuing of the nation-state» (Milward, 1992), as by «fusion» is meant more than a pooling of sovereignties: «a “merger” of public resources located at several “state”-levels for which the “outside world” [...] cannot trace the accountability, as responsibilities for specific policies are diffused» (Wessels, 1997, p. 274). Accordingly, as Church (1996) rightly notes, «the result is a fusion of internal and external affairs into a messy federalism».

In a macro-institutional analysis that fits a «post-ontological» stage of EU studies – the emphasis being on explanation than categorisation – Caporaso (1996) throws light on the character of the EU from the perspective of different «forms of state». He develops an understanding of the common system as an «international state», which he defines as «an international structure of governance based on the extrusion of certain political activities of its constituent units» (Caporaso, 1996, p. 33). Being critical of equating the emergence of EU authority with a direct loss of national autonomy, Caporaso draws on three stylised state forms – Westphalian, regulatory, and postmodern – arguing that each captures part of an evolving reality. The first ideal state form takes regional integration as «a re-enactment of the traditional processes of state-building from the seventeenth through to the twentieth centuries»; the second perceives the EU as «a supranational state specializing in the control and management of international externalities»; the third takes the EU as a «polymorphic structure» that lacks a strong institutional core, is fragmented, has not a clear

public sphere, and where «process and activity become more important than structure and fixed institutions» (Caporaso, 1996, pp. 35, 39, 45). His «post-ontological» account of the EU brings it closer to the regulatory and post-national forms of state.

Finally, by rejecting the idea that the EU will be «a “re-run” of the processes and policies that earlier made the nation-state the predominant political institution of Europe», Schmitter (1996b, p. 26) argues that the EU, presently lacking a locus of clearly defined authority, a central hierarchy of public offices, a distinct sphere of competence, a fixed territory, an exclusive recognition by other polities, an overarching identity, a monopoly over legitimate coercion and a unique capacity to impose its decisions, «is well on its way of becoming something new». What might this «new» entity be? He offers two possible suggestions (1996b, pp. 30-31). The first is the idea of «consortio» defined as «a form of collective action [...] where national authorities of fixed number and identity agree to cooperate in the performance of functional tasks that are variable, dispersed and overlapping». In it, the segments retain their territorial identities and «accept positions within a common hierarchy of authority, but pool their capacities to act autonomously in domains they can no longer control at their own level of aggregation» (Schmitter, 1996, p. 31). A less imaginative but more probable trajectory for the EU is the idea of a «condominio», a variation in both territorial and functional terms (Schmitter, 1996b, p. 31):

Instead of a Eurocracy accumulating organizationally distinct but politically coordinated tasks around a single centre, there would be multiple regional institutions acting autonomously to solve common problems and produce different public goods [...] their dispersed and overlapping domains [...] could result in competitive, even conflictual, situations and would certainly seem inefficient when compared with the clear demarcations of competence and hierarchy of authority that (supposedly) characterize existing nation-states.

Haas (1970, p. 635) came to a similar conception of regional political order, described as «asymmetrical authority overlap», in comparison to more state-like possible outcomes. As Haas put it: «authority is not proportionately or symmetrically vested in a new centre; instead it is distributed asymmetrically among several centres, among which no single dominant one may emerge, though one might imagine subtypes of this dependent variables involving

various degrees of centralized authority». Such a multivariate scheme resembles Lindberg and Scheingold's (1970) understanding of a possible end-state along the lines of «an ambiguous pluralistic system», and Streeck's (1996, p. 70) future projection of the EU as «a collection of overlapping functionally specific arrangements for mutual coordination among varying sets of participating countries». Moreover, in attempting to capture the complexity of the EU, Bellamy and Castiglione (1999, p. 11) have employed a theory of democratic liberalism: «a pre-liberal conception of constitutionalism that identified the constitution with the social composition and form of government of the polity». This theory, by bringing the constituent groups of a polity into an equilibrium with one another, aims «to disperse power so as to encourage a process of controlled political conflict and deliberation [...] moving them thereby to construct and pursue the public good rather than narrow sectional interests» (Bellamy and Castiglione, 1999, p. 11).

In this neo-Roman interpretation, the EU becomes a «mixed commonwealth» as suggested by MacCormick (1997), whereby the subjects of the constitution are not homogeneous, but a mixture of political agents that share in the sovereignty of the composite polity. Bellamy and Castiglione (1997, p. 443) explain: «The polycentric polity that is therefore emerging is a definite departure from the nation-state, mainly because it implies a dissociation of the traditional elements that come with state sovereignty: a unified system of authority and representation controlling all functions of governance over a given territory». Informed by an associative view of governance, this pluralist depiction of the EU as a heterarchical order within which sovereignty is dispersed across and between various actors, and where a «balanced constitution» acts as a mechanism against the danger of domination, is fully in line with Tarrow's (1998, p. 1) definition of the EU as a «composite polity»: «a system of shared sovereignty, partial and uncertain policy autonomy between levels of governance, and patterns of contention combining territorial with substantive issues». Tarrow's notion draws on the work of te Brake (1998:278), regarding the formation of «composite states» in early modern Europe, where people «acted in the context of overlapping, intersecting, and changing political spaces».

Reflecting on the differentiated character of the EU, Schmitter (1996b, p. 2) offers a general conceptual justification for applying

such a terminology to its study: «We are familiar with the properties of states and intergovernmental organizations [...] but we would have to go far back in European history to recapture a more diverse language about political units». Indeed, scholars often turn to the past for insights and categories of analysis to get their bearings in a present that is in flux. Rethinking the present in light of the past not only is a productive way of sparking scholarly imagination, but also of searching for intriguing questions. This is especially true when the question of «time» is addressed in a creative manner, as in the logic of «analogical reasoning» for the study of processes that evolve through different phases not dissimilar to those that other processes have previously undergone (Helman, 1988). Analogical reasoning permits the transfer of assumptions from a familiar phenomenon to a less familiar one, providing the cognitive resources for theoretically informed comparisons (Novick, 1998, p. 125) and a hypothesis to be tested (Landau, 1961). Past experiences can thus be taken as functional analogies of more recent developments. Although this may lead to some approximation of EU reality with images of pre-existing political organisation, it is instructive to recall King, Keohane and Verba's (1994, p. 82) advice that scholars would learn a lot if they could rerun history with everything constant, save for an «investigator-controlled explanatory variable».

Other terms to be found in the *acquis académique* include: proto-federation, confederance, concordance system, quasi-state, meta-state, market polity, federated republic, sympolity, confederal consociation, and so on (Chrysochoou, 2001). Most of these mark a shift away from vertically defined end-products, whose major inadequacy is that «they foreclose real-life developmental possibilities» (Haas, 1970, p. 610). Writing on the heuristic nature of neologisms, Harrison (1974, p. 203) notes that hypothetical outcomes are «mere provisional points in the future on which analytical attention may be fixed». Whether these attributes are trapped in state-oriented thinking (Jachtenfuchs *et al.*, 1998, p. 417), they only capture part of a more complicated reality. But this does not obviate the question why a conceptual consensus is yet to emerge. A plausible answer is that conceptualising the EU rests on contending normative orders that account for different «structures of meaning» (Jachtenfuchs *et al.*, 1998, p. 411). This is compounded further by the very «betweenness» of the EU, as it hovers «between politics and diplomacy, between states and markets, and between

government and governance» (Laffan, 1998, p. 236), which, in Sbragia's (1993) view, stimulates political scientists within unitary and federal states to rethink what they have so far taken as givens. But «where do we go from here?».

#### THE NORMATIVE TURN

There exist various ways of examining an interdisciplinary object of study; as many as its constitutive bodies of theory. Although European integration is no exception, it is fair to agree with Church (1993) that «there has been no resolution of the theoretical enterprise». Despite the «comparativist turn» in EU studies (Hix, 1994), intergovernmentalism – or modified schemes of state-centrism such as confederance (Church, 1996), cooperative confederalism (Bulmer, 1996) and confederal consociation (Chrysochoou, 1998) – survived the tides of regional centralisation. A crucial implication of this is that the EU has not developed «a new base of sovereignty» able to transcend state sovereignty, contrary to earlier predictions. The interplay between coordinated interdependencies and diffused political authority suggests that the EU is not part of a linear process toward a federal end. Rather, it is about the preservation of those state qualities that allow the component parts to survive as distinct constitutionally organised polities, whilst engaging in a polity-formation process that transforms their traditional patterns of interaction.

This amounts to the transformation of a community of states into the most advanced scheme of voluntary regional integration the world has ever witnessed. But this should not carry with it the assumption of the end of the European nation-state. The joining together of distinct historically constituted units through a politics of accommodation that accords with the EU's *modus consociandi* is part of an evolution that poses no direct challenge to state sovereignty. The latter has simply acquired a new cooperative dynamic within highly institutionalised frameworks: it is not subsumed by «a new “hierarchy”, where the dominant form of regulation is authoritative rule», or by a structure «that approximates a realistic image of a modern state» (Keohane and Hoffmann, 1990, pp. 281, 289). Also, we are witnessing the reversal of the Mitranian logic to integration: instead of «form follows function», the structural

properties of the system dictate the pace and range of the regional process: the extension of the «scope» and «level» of integration do not necessarily coincide. Its functional scope and territorial scale have been extended, if not at the expense of its level, without altering the locus of sovereignty. Thus the EU has not taken us beyond the nation-state. Whether or not its logic of power-sharing is explained through a theory of institutional delegation, a compelling evidence for the lack of European sovereignty is that citizens are only «sovereign» within their domestic arenas.

As the formative theories of integration focused on questions of «who governs?» and «how?», they failed to ask an equally crucial question: «who is governed?». This has prompted a «normative turn» in EU studies, inaugurating a series of debates following the development of constructivist discourses in international relations theory (Adler, 1997; Checkel, 1998; Christiansen *et al.*, 1999; Wendt, 1999). Here, the EU is taken as an entity of «interlocking normative spheres» (Bańkowski *et al.*, 1998). This strand in EU theorising comes closer to a «second-order discourse», projecting a metatheoretical research context, by investigating the impact of constitutive norms; the role of ideas and communicative action; the uses of language and deliberative processes; the interplay of routinised practices, socialisation, and symbolism; and the relationship between agent identity and interests. The exercise was meant to herald a «constructivist turn»: «to go beyond explaining variation [in politics and policy] within a fixed setting» and to stress «the impact of “intersubjectivity” and “social context” on the continuing process of European integration [...] [to call attention to] the constructive force of the process itself» (Christiansen *et al.*, 1999, pp. 528-529). The starting point is an aspect of change: integration's transformative impact on the state, coupled by an attempt at incorporating into the process of understanding social reality «human consciousness» and «ideational factors» in a normative and instrumental fashion (Christiansen *et al.*, 1999, p. 529). In short, there exists «a socially constructed reality», what Ruggie (1998, p. 33, quoted in Christiansen *et al.*, 1999, p. 529) calls «collective intentionality». A social theory with an interdisciplinary reach, constructivism purports «to track norms from “the social” to “the legal” [...] [and] trace the empirically observable process of norm construction and change [...] with a view to examining aspects of “European” constitutionalism [and citizenship practice]» (Shaw

and Wiener, 2000, pp. 67-68). EU «meta-constitutional rule-making», defined as «day-to-day practices in the legal and political realm as well as the high dramas of IGCs and new Treaties», is about «fundamental ordering principles which have a validity outwith the formal setting of the nation-state», that «norms may achieve strong structuring power [...] [and] are created through interaction», and that «[t]he processes of norm construction and rule-following are mutually constitutive» (Shaw and Wiener, 2000, p. 87). The question is «to what extent, and in which ways, a new polity is being constructed in Europe» (Christiansen *et al.*, 1999, p. 537). Middle-range constructivism is well suited to the task, focusing on «the juridification and institutionalization of politics through rules and norms; the formation of identities and the making of political communities; the role of language and discourse» (Christiansen *et al.*, 1999, p. 538). Many useful epistemological insights can be drawn from this evolving research programme, creating «an arena in which ontological shifts and meta-theoretical moves can be debated» (Shaw and Wiener, 2000, p. 68).

From a combined neo-constitutionalist and post-statist perspective – a normativist «meta-discourse» – the EU is portrayed as a «heterarchical space» that combines unity and multiplicity, transcends pre-existing boundaries and projects a multifocal configuration of authority (Walker, 1988, p. 357). This meta-theoretical trend directs research towards the understanding of a striking paradox: although the EU is projected as a firmly enough established collective entity, where traditional notions of democracy are losing their once powerful appeal, it exhibits a notable potential for democratic self-development. Since the mid-1990s, the EU tends to transcend issues of market integration and touch upon «sensitive areas of state authority», to the extent that its regionalism has been taken as «the only regionalism in the international system where there is an attempt to democratize politics above the level of the state, to mark a decisive shift from diplomacy to politics» (Laffan, 1998, pp. 247, 249). Hence, the depiction of the EU as a polity casts doubt on what Dahl (1996, p. 13) describes as «the continuing adequacy of the conventional solution».

The different phases of EU development suggest that the formation of a European polity, distinct from the making of a new regional state or of a classical union of states, resembles an asymmetrical synthesis of academic (sub)disciplines. As a result, different

perspectives on the EU became clear sites of intellectual contestation. Writing on the subject, Puchala (1999, p. 318) notes that EU theorising «has recently evolved into a full-scale, hard-fought debate [...] with contenders jumping upon one another's attributed weaknesses while disregarding one another's insights». Lindberg's comment (1967, p. 345) on the researcher feeling as if he «were excavating a small, isolated portion of a large, dimly perceived mass» while others are digging there too in similar isolation, is reflective of what Jørgensen (1997, p. 490) calls «my discipline is my castle», which in turn resembles the kind of tribalism depicted by Knudsen (1989, p. 8) in his portrait of «the parochial scholar» in EU studies. More recently, Bulmer (1997, p. 1) expressed a similar concern: «We may end up with a bewildering set of policy cases explained by a further array of analytical frameworks so that the "big picture" of integration is lost from view».

#### REDISCOVERING REPUBLICANISM

Linking the question of the EU polity with different democratic perspectives helps us confront some of the central puzzles of integration theory today. Resolving the democratic deficit is no easy task as it would require some general agreement about the sort of democratic model to which the EU should adhere. Of late, new republican understandings have sought not only to revive, but also to nurture a paradigm of social and political organisation for the EU, founded upon novel forms of civicness. In its basic conception, a *respublica* aims at three primary objectives: justice through the rule of law; the common good through a mixed and balanced constitution; and liberty through active citizenship. Thus *omnia reliquit servare respublicam* captures the republican imagination of a virtue-centred life. More than 2500 years since the founding of the Roman republic, an anniversary that passed largely unnoticed by present-day Europeans, the above features still constitute the *raison d'être* of the *respublica*, marking their impact in the search for «the good polity» (Schwarzmantel, 2003).

To begin with, reviving a republican tradition is a complicated enterprise. As Mouritsen (2006) reminds us, there *were* no such things back there as «liberalism» and «republicanism»; what we are dealing with is clusters of internally coherent arguments, values, and

employments of concepts. Tracing the genealogy of these clusters facilitates reflection on the historicity of our own present concepts and political arrangements (Skinner, 1998, pp. 101-120). In the very act of defining and delineating traditions of discourse we make choices, informed by present political and normative concerns. Liberty and civic engagement have been interpreted and combined in a number of ways. Ultimately, the challenge for contemporary republicans such as Skinner and Pettit is to develop a pluralist, rather than a populist republicanism, in which tolerance would be guaranteed in diverse, multicultural societies (Lavdas, 2001; Schwarzmantel, 2003; Mouritsen, 2006). This refurbishment of republicanism reflects a concern with the making of a political ordering founded upon the notion of «balanced government» and «undominated» choice. But it is not the latter that causes liberty, as liberty is constituted by the legal institutions of the republican state (Pettit, 1997, pp. 106-109). As Brugger explains (1999, p. 7), «whereas the liberal sees liberty as essentially pre-social, the republican sees liberty as constituted by the law which transforms customs and creates citizens». Participation is not taken as a democratic end-in-itself, but rather as a means of ensuring a dispensation of non-domination by others (non-arbitrary rule). In short, the rule of law, opposition of arbitrariness and the republican constitution are constitutive of civic freedom.

The notion of «balanced government» is also central to republicanism. It is forged in two related ways: negatively, by associating the constitution of «a proper institutional balance» with the prevention of tyranny; and positively, by ensuring a deliberative mode of civic rule, whereby «the different “constituencies” which made up civil society would be encouraged to treat their preferences not simply as givens, but rather as choices which were open to debate and alteration» (Craig, 1997, p. 114). Liberty was expected to be best preserved under a mixed form of polity through certain constitutional guarantees, with no single branch of government being privileged over the others. Here, republicanism strikes a balance between civic participation and the attainment of the public good, by allowing for «a stable form of political ordering for a society within which there are different interests or constituencies» (Craig, 1997, p. 116). A republican form of EU governance refers to the range of normative qualities embodying the construction of a civic space, where citizens share among themselves a sense of a

«sphere of spheres» (a civic virtue element that is a valuable resource for the polity) and a regard for good governance (a training ground for civic learning), at the same time as they take part in different public spheres. The republican account of liberty and mixed government can contribute in a constructive manner to the problems of constructing a European polity. With reference to the debate on the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the treaty, it has been shown that the discussion is pregnant with frustrated potentialities, indicating the need for a more extensive, if thin, institutional public space through which to expand civic competence and engage citizens in a European demos (Lavdas and Chrysochoou, 2006).

Given the absence of an engaging European civic demos – assuming that an economic or a legal demos already exist – republicanism emanates as a means of disentangling «the issue of participation in an emerging polity from the cultural and emotional dimensions of citizenship as pre-existing affinity and a confirmation of belonging» (Lavdas, 2001, p. 4). The point is that «some elements of the real and symbolic *respublica*, may sustain a degree of political motivation *vis-à-vis* the EU and its relevance for peoples' lives while also allowing for other and more intense forms of motivation and involvement at other levels of participation» (Lavdas, 2001, p. 5). But given the lack of organic unity among the member demoi, the republican challenge, in line with that of multiculturalism, is one of institutionalising respect for difference and group rights, whilst sustaining «a shared sense of the public good» (Bellamy, 1997, p. 190). This is more likely to emerge through Pettit's third concept of freedom, as it combines «the recognition of the significance of the pluralism of cultural possibilities for meaningful choice and a framework based on a minimal set of shared political values» (Lavdas, 2001, p. 6). To the extent that Europe cannot motivate action by engaging with emotions and sentiments of community, European civicness calls for a different approach. The question is how to disentangle the issue of participation in the EU from the cultural and emotional dimensions of participation based on pre-existing affinity and confirmations of belonging. From a different angle, Eriksen (2000, p. 51) prompts us to «decouple citizenship and nationhood» from the prism of the discourse-theoretical concept of deliberative democracy and to view the constitution as «a system for accommodating difference». But since most aspects of

active citizenship can be reduced to either «emotional citizenship» or the expression of rational and deliberative capacities, the question is how to strengthen the latter in a context where the weakness of the former presents opportunities (people are more likely to adopt detached positions) and constraints (people are less likely to take an interest in participation in the first place). Here, one expects various asymmetries to have developed between member polities with different state traditions and diverse historical patterns of multicultural or monocultural legitimations of rule (Lavdas, 1997).

This civic conception contributes to the making of a political order steered by an active community of citizens. Here, the emphasis is not on the crystallisation of liberal-democratic norms in Europe's political constitution, but on the search for an inclusive civic space, and the belief that democratic reform is not the cause but the consequence of popular aspirations to democratic rule: a desire to participate in a socially legitimised polity. Thus a European *respublica* requires deliberative decisions to promote certain public goods, whose relevance extends beyond the politics of democratic election. It is not just any kind of union set up «for narrowly instrumental purposes», but a civic association based on virtue-centred practices to serve the common good, where freedom comes first. By pointing at a mixed sovereignty regime – a sympolity of entangled sovereignties – republican theory makes the point that the EU rests on a primarily political constitution. Republican citizenship could foster a sense of European civicness, thus responding to the question whether Europe can be seen as «a community united in a common argument about the meaning, extent and scope of liberty» (Ignatieff, 2000, p. 265).

## REPUBLICAN UNITY IN POLY CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In what direction should the above lead us? Given the remarkable profusion of theories in EU studies, and the level of mutual incomprehension that often pervades, EU scholarship should aim at discovering a new sense of purpose so as to appreciate the relevance of the theoretical *acquis*, and to rethink the archetypal «laboratory» of ideas upon which subsequent theories were allowed to expand. Normative theory, drawing from the likes of constitutionalism,

constructivism and neo-republicanism, becomes an appropriate point of departure. In that sense, the study of EU polity-building has to associate itself more closely with the pursuit of a new vision of democratic politics that embraces the virtues of civic freedom, by inventing and, where necessary, re-inventing a sense of *respublica*.

It might be queried why this version of neo-(or liberal) republicanism rather than a form of liberalism which is concerned with civic virtues (Macedo, 1990) should be the focus of such an approach. After all, it would be misleading to gloss over the differences which Western liberalism incorporates and which can be taken as «contending rival liberalisms» (Richardson, 1997). We believe that *the general value* of a republican vision for Europe, the very notion of a Republic of Europeans, is that it encourages the idea that institutional development should also be examined from the perspective of the delegation of authority in some form. Unlike earlier forms of republican thought, however, which focused on a basically homogeneous political community, republicanism as non-domination can accommodate and even embrace multiculturalism and group rights (cfr. Pettit, 1997, pp. 143-146; Brugger, 1999, pp. 143-144). Indeed, under certain conditions, the challenge of multiculturalism represents also a certain promise for the European polity.

Especially the reading which associates the value of multiculturalism with its ability to enhance possibilities for meaningful choices rather than uncritical commitment to inherited group values, enables a view which aims to combine the recognition of the pluralism of cultural possibilities for access to meaningful choice and a framework based on a minimal set of shared political values which is nonetheless crucial, in that it may help us avoid the traps of naïve relativism, whilst focusing on arrangements and institutions that help citizens increase control over aspects of their own lives. Within this framework, a multitude of commitments may develop emotional engagement and enhance opportunities for meaningful choices. This would entail a condition of *political polyculturalism*, in which multiple allegiances coexist, without in any way denying the basic adherence to certain minimal shared political values. From this view also, a European civic space emerges as an answer to Europe's current concerns about the centrifugal and socially exclusionary reflexes of embedded heterogeneity.

Although the latter property is today unquestionably a part of the EU's distinctive nature as a mixed commonwealth of entangled sovereignties, it may not necessarily result in a segmented EU citizenry. Instead, it could be a condition for uniting the member publics and their public spheres into a polycultural and polycentric *respublica* in which issues of shared concern become the target of EU-related policies. This is more than a democratic wish for the shape of things to come, and less than a concrete strategy for democratisation. But it is a virtuous cause and, in view of the liberal republicanist design, one that could assign meaning to a new vision of democratic politics.

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