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Article

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CES Working Papers

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Suggested Citation: Tatarcan, Emiliana Oana (2016) : The European Union Looking for the Future. New Forms of Accountability and Governance, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 8, Iss. 1, pp. 197-205

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198456>

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THE EUROPEAN UNION LOOKING FOR THE FUTURE. NEW FORMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

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Abstract: *The European Union is more capable than any of its Member States, individually to meet the major challenges of the XXI century. It is a political and economic partnership that represents a unique form of cooperation among sovereign countries. The challenges can only be properly understood or addressed in a regional and global context. EU decision-making processes and the role played by the EU institutions vary depending on the subject under consideration. EU interests and values common to all its Member States and their defense on the international scene can be more effective with a common, the European approach, rather than a single voice in each state.*

Keywords: government; system; accountability; development; aid

Introduction

The European Union (EU), with 28 member states and 500 million citizens play an important role on the international stage and are constantly striving to promote its core values in the world. International trade, human rights, help in crisis situations, close relations with its neighbors, promoting good governance and democracy are just a few examples of how the Europeans engage in world affairs. “The European Union (EU) is a political and economic partnership that represents a unique form of cooperation among sovereign countries. The Union is the latest stage in a process of integration begun after World War II, initially by six Western European countries, to foster interdependence and make another war in Europe unthinkable.” (Archick, 2015, p.6). Since 2004, EU membership has grown from 15 to 28 countries, bringing in most states of Central and Eastern Europe.

It maintains that the enlargement door remains open to any European country that fulfils the EU’s political and economic criteria for membership. Nevertheless, in the longer term, some European leaders and many EU citizens are cautious about additional EU expansion, especially towards Turkey or countries farther east, such as Georgia or Ukraine. The last twenty years have left nothing untouched: how we work, how we consume, how we travel, how we relate to each other, the reasons we empathise, the issues that scare us have all been transformed. And most of these changes have caught us by surprise.

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Today, we live an age of insecurity. “The challenges which Europe faces today stem as much from developments outside its borders as they do from the EU’s timidity in responding to them. If the Union is to secure its future, it will need to adjust its objectives and policies to cope with this fast-changing world.” (Project 2030, p. 12). There is much talk about strengthening the European Union, and its institutions as well as about enhancing the efficiency in being closer to its citizens.

In the current international context, “the EU aspires to be more visible and effective globally, to assume increased responsibilities on the world stage, an objective that can only be achieved by creating a united Europe, thus the EU could offer its unique model of integration based on diversity, freedom and solidarity” (Jinga, 2008, p.30). The European model is challenged by changing patterns of global power and interdependence which question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU’s international posture, arousing doubts on the role the EU should play in the global arena. The absence of the EU as a global player is not just a problem for Europe, but also for the world. For global governance to work, it is necessary to have actors that are willing and capable of taking initiatives and pushing the agenda forward. “In the past the EU has played such a role when confronted with issues like human rights, multilateral trade liberalization, climate, and the regulation of financial markets.” (Balfour and Raik, 2013, p.12)

In a world characterized by rapid change and a significant probability of major upsets, attempting to look ahead to 2030 is as difficult as it is necessary. (ESPAS, 2015, p.15). From the global perspective, the European Union continues to be a center of wealth and considerable economic strength, the development model is very inhomogeneous so that economic and social disparities remain substantial, growing after recent enlargements. Throughout most of its existence, the EU has been a pole of internal stability, brought peace, democracy and a consistent level of prosperity half of the continent after World War II. In time, it included the other half of Europe through a process of unprecedented political and economic integration.

These successes allowed the EU to become the greatest economic power in the world, including a market and a single currency. However, Europeans are moving towards a future increasingly complex and uncertain, with a lack of common purpose that characterized the initial postwar integration. “The European Union has a claim to be a front-runner in the new democratic age, because of its diversity, transparency and political experience acquired over decades of cooperation, compromise, coalition building, social dialogue and an active and respected civil society.” (ESPAS, 2015, p. 64). The challenges facing Europe today are generated as much by developments outside its borders and inside the EU, particularly in tackling their shyness. If the Union wants to secure its future, it will have to adjust its objectives and policies to address a rapidly changing world. So, we

hope that, by 2030, the European Union's strategic interests should probably be expressed more clearly, since fragmentation and global insecurity may well force the Union to take on more responsibilities for its security and possibly its defence.

1. Accountability and European Union governance

Accountability is one of the cornerstones of good governance; however, it can be difficult for scholars and practitioners alike to navigate the myriad of different types of accountability. Recently, there has been a growing discussion within both the academic and development communities about the different accountability typologies. This note outlines the present debate focusing on the definition and substance of different forms of accountability and considers the key role that legislatures play in ensuring accountability. "Accountability ensures actions and decisions taken by public officials that are subject to oversight so as to guarantee that government initiatives meet their stated objectives and respond to the needs of the community they are meant to be benefiting, thereby contributing to better governance and poverty reduction" (Stapenhurst and O'Brien, 2005, p.1). As the European Union is turning into a polity, issues of accountability increasingly have found their way onto political and academic agendas. One recurring issue is whether these new multi-level forms of governance require new forms of accountability. The article explores the meaning of new accountabilities and whether these would help to overcome possible accountability deficits.

Anyone studying accountability will soon discover that it can mean many different things to many different people. Moreover 'accountability' often serves as a conceptual umbrella covering various other often highly contested concepts. For example, the European Commission uses 'accountability' rather loosely. It serves not only as a synonym for 'clarity', 'transparency', and 'responsibility', but it is also equated with much broader concepts such as 'involvement', 'deliberation', and 'participation. (Bovens, 2007 p.105). If one takes a narrow perspective on accountability for European governance, "the distinction is first of all a distinction between vertical and horizontal accountability, or between actor–forum relations that have a principal–agent character and relations that do not have such a character. The mechanism of political accountability operates precisely in the opposite direction to that of delegation." (Bovens, 2007 p.109).

"In terms of development cooperation and global social justice, we are living through times of profound change, especially during this pivotal year 2015, the European Year for Development. The global community is counting down to the adoption of an ambitious and comprehensive new framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be recognizing and building on

undeniable achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while at the same time acknowledging and addressing their weaknesses and shortfalls.” (Wanders, 2015, p.1). The first step towards improving accountability of public institutions is to improve citizens’ access to key information about the most critical issues in their lives, the issues that touch their lives directly. Other literatures have been concerned with problems of accountability and legitimacy as well. A major problem in the international relations literature on ‘governing without government’ has been the accountability deficit – that is, the fact that ‘most collectivities in globalized space are not accountable for their actions’ (Shore, 2009, p. 32), whether they be multinationals, nongovernmental organizations or international organizations.

A European sphere of publics will provide democratic legitimating to the extent to which the idea of democratic accountability or control will have penetrated European governance processes, as a function of specific institutional procedures and decision-making practices. “Procedures on which accountable governance can be based in the framework of the Council of Ministers include three types: accountability towards national legislatures; transparency regulations of Council deliberations; co-decision making with the European Parliament.” (Liebert, 2001, p.11-12). The EU is faced with the challenges of fashioning practices and institutions that reconcile the conflicting demands on political representatives from their international partners and their domestic constituents. “The dilemma of political and institutional reform in the EU can then be stated as follows. Starting with where we now are, is it possible to construct a political order that guarantees the substance of continuing democratic accountability within the member states, whilst simultaneously reinforcing adherence to the political obligations that those same member states have taken on?” (Weale, 2015, p.1).

Since accountability is an ambiguous and contestable concept, the contribution first analyses the concept and then narrows it substantially before discussing the meaning of these new forms of accountability. “New forms of accountability are diagonal or horizontal in character and include accountability to administrative forums, to citizens, clients, and civil society.” (Saurer, 2009, p.17). Increasingly, accountability forums seem to come together to form multi-level accountability networks, in which expertise and information is shared and in which European and national forums work together to hold European actors to account. First of all, diagonal or horizontal forms of accountability do not of themselves enhance popular control of governance, because most of the forums involved are not democratic forums. “New forms of accountability can provide alleviations of some sorts of accountability deficits in EU governance, but certainly not of all. They may enhance learning and provide formal and informal checks and balances, but they are no alternative to

traditional forms of popular control. However, they can at the least help to provide additional information for democratic forums. What we need regarding European governance therefore, are traditional and new forms of accountability.” (Héritier, 2002, p. 26).

The conclusion is that new forms of accountability enhance policy learning and provide a series of formal and informal checks and balances but they are no alternative to traditional forms of popular control. We, therefore, need traditional and new forms of accountability regarding European governance.

2. Global Governance for Development

While the importance of global governance has been acknowledged, we are witnessing the increasing need to manage global problems more effectively in the face of increased interdependence. European construction necessarily led to the transfer of authority from the state domains into the European and toward the sub-state. “The European Union is itself an actor on stage plus European policy which increases its complexity. Multiple governance process involving political actors at European, national and sub-national it is called multi-level governance.” (Adshead, 2002, p. 132). “Global governance encompasses the totality of institutions, policies, norms, procedures and initiatives through which states and their citizens try to bring more predictability, stability and order to their responses to transnational challenges.”(Committee for Development Policy, 2004, p.vi). Global governance has become a domain with many different players including: multilateral organizations that have a universal character, such as the United Nations General Assembly; elite multilateral groupings such as the Group of Eight and the Group of Twenty; different coalitions relevant to specific policy subjects (such as climate change); informal multilateralism and regional formations” (Committee for Development Policy, 2014, p.52). Effective global governance can only be achieved with effective international cooperation. As the world becomes more interdependent, global governance, including global economic governance and the governance of the global commons, is increasingly relevant for achieving sustainable development.

The implementation of the post-2015 development agenda ultimately depends on the political will of Member States. Success will depend on whether all countries contribute to the reform of global governance and use their policy space to implement policies for achieving common goals. Generally, governance refers to the steering of societal processes by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner. “‘Good governance’ is a specifically normative usage that prescribes certain steering procedures and institutions — based on principles, values and norms (such as participation,

transparency and rule of law) — that should be adopted to achieve preferred outcomes.” (EUROSTAT, 2015, p.318). The EU Sustainable Development Strategy addresses good governance in various sections, namely in the sections on policy guiding principles, better policy-making, and financing and economic instruments. Advancing global partnership for development has been one of the core Millennium Development Goals. Presented as the eighth MDG, the global partnership for development reflects mutual responsibilities for both developed and developing countries to achieve the other seven MDGs which focus on with poverty, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, poverty diseases and the environment. The new global partnership for development in the post-2015 development framework provides an opportunity to address these global economic, social and environmental issues in a coordinated, coherent and collaborative manner. In this way, the global partnership can promote a more effective, coherent, representative and accountable global governance regime, which should ultimately translate into better national and regional governance, the realization of human rights and sustainable development. At the same time, putting in place an enabling and inclusive system of global governance would create an international enabling environment and would thus strengthen the global partnership for development in many ways, translating into a more coherent framework for achieving sustainable development at regional and national levels.

Furthermore, 2015 is the European Year for Development. This year was chosen for two reasons: the MDGs were to be reached by 2015 and it also marks the beginning of a new era of development co-operation since the debates about the design of the Post-2015 Development Agenda are supposed to culminate into Sustainable Development Goals. This is of particular importance for addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, for securing the reforms for global governance identified above, and for sustainable development in the post-2015 era. Implementation of the post-2015 development agenda ultimately depends on the political will of Member States to carry it through. The extent to which the post-2015 goals will identify the most important development needs over the course of the next decade will determine their effectiveness, a key element for their ultimate legitimacy as goals.

Conclusions

The EU remains a central reference point, an alternative model to traditional interstate relations, and a transnational legal community that has brought prosperity and cohesion to all regions. The impact of EU external action will depend largely on its ability to adapt to the many challenges it will

face in 2030. A European sphere of publics will provide democratic legitimating to the extent to which the idea of democratic accountability or control will have penetrated European governance processes, as a function of specific institutional procedures and decision-making practices. Another option to consider is the integration of global governance targets and requirements within each of dimensions of the 2015 development agenda as a way of supporting improved implementation and accountability. The global partnership for development can contribute to achieving this vision by integrating global governance targets firmly into the post-2015 development agenda. In a more interdependent world, a more coherent, transparent and representative global governance regime will be critical to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions.

Acknowledgement: This work was co-funded by the European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013, project number POSDRU/187/1.5/S/155397, project title “Towards a New Generation of Elite Researchers through Doctoral Scholarships.”

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