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DEMOCRATIZATION AS A TOOL OF EUROPEAN UNION INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Despite the increasing number of European skeptics and difficult economic situation within the EU, the search for new European development strategies can only be realized on the basis of further democratization, restoration of confidence by both national and European institutions on the part of political elites and citizens of the EU member states, which would give possibility of further integration at the value level. Particular concern is presented by skepticism among the European public and the increasing support for far-right parties, which in the end may provoke a number of reverse political processes and significantly reduce the pace of integration. The accelerated pace of European integration would solve a number of the most acute political and socio-economic problems, but it would also significantly toughen the resistance of euro-skeptics. Taking into account the fact that a large number of euro-skeptics are demographically presented by European youth, it is necessary to develop a multidimensional program in order to promote the values of European integration and democratization, allowing not only to increase the attractiveness of democratic principles and legal culture, but also the level of trust of European citizens to European institutes and political elites. In this regard, the purpose of the article is to identify the most effective strategies for further European integration, based on the development of the principles of democratization and creation of confidence in common-European institutions.

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Keywords: Democratization, integration, euroscepticism, confidence, trust, democratic values.



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1. Introduction

According to the statutory documents of the European Union, and in accordance with the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union may only include states that recognize its core values at the legislative level. At the same time, in modern political and social conditions we are talking about the degradation of individual values and even their entire clusters, primarily at the level of their public perception due to various reasons. Public opinion poll carried out in 2017 showed that 42% of respondents believed that democracy in the EU works "poorly" or "very poorly" (Standard Eurobarometer, 2017).

At the same time, there is a whole range of restrictions to restore trust. Thus, Western analysts state that, over the past decades, citizens' confidence in European institutions, as well as national governments, mass media and civil society structures has noticeably decreased (Standard Eurobarometer, 2017).

Although the majority of EU citizens still support the membership of their states in the structure of the Union, over 70% of Europeans already believe that the EU "is moving in the wrong direction" and 68% say the same about their national governments (New Concept for Europe, 2015). All these factors affect the image of the European Union and lead to the degradation of its popularity in the eyes of society. Thus, in 2017, 21% of Europeans characterized the EU's image as low, 40% as very low, and only 7% of respondents across Europe estimated the EU's image in a positive way (Standard Eurobarometer, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

The modern European community is characterized by skepticism, which, in most cases, is an indicator of protest voting and the support of far-right populist parties. Focusing on populism may cause great damage to further European integration and lead to a split, as evidenced by Brexit held in the UK in 2016 (Medushevsky, 2016).

In an analytical report by the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of Russian Academy of Sciences on these issues, the experts note that because of the crises of the last three years, the most significant consequences for the EU were related to the migration crisis, which largely provoked the growing popularity of nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism, seriously complicating the further integration and development of the EU (The World Values Survey, 2017).

When the electoral preferences of EU citizens change, an important, and often decisive, factor becomes the EU citizens' perception of the existing political system as a whole. According to Western analysts, the support for authoritarianism as a form of political government is growing in the European Union (Munich Security Report, 2017). At the same time, it is significant that neglect of democracy is primarily characteristic feature of young Europeans (Foa & Mounk, 2016).

In many ways, this gap can be associated with the intensity and level of perception of information, including false (fake) news primarily broadcast via the Internet and social networks (Edelman Trust Barometer Report, 2017). In addition, young people spend more time in the Internet environment and tend to have less critical perception of the large amounts of data what they use, which allows more effective manipulation of their social and political interests.

It is also important that Europe in the 2010s faced a large number of crisis phenomena that violated the stability and regularity of integration. Many countries, such as Greece or Portugal, were on the brink of economic default (Morlino & Quaranta, 2016). A special factor, of course, was presented by the migration

crisis of 2013-2017, the negative potential of which continues to influence the policies of the EU countries nowadays (Just, 2015).

However, despite the crises mentioned above, the European Union is developing intensively and is on the stage of the "fourth industrial revolution", the essence of which is universal robotization in production and satisfaction of human needs. Paradoxically, but widespread introduction of robotic solutions generates a whole complex of negative expectations and fears of being left without work and means of subsistence, as well as interrupting of labor socialization of migrants, and may also negatively affect the incomes of middle class, which presents support for the overwhelming majority of European political regimes (Kobyakov, 2016).

3. Research Questions

In the context of the designated negative transformation of social attitudes, the following question arises: How is it possible to counter the crisis of democratic culture and whether the European Union has mechanisms and resources that may reverse the process and re-orient the overwhelming part of European society to liberal values?

The reaction of EU institutions to a wide range of economic, political and social problems should include an ideological dimension, which the authors regard as the sphere of development and evolution of democratic and liberal values extrapolated to society. The applied dimension of European politics complements the ideological one and represents a wide range of mechanisms aimed at expanding social support of citizens for EU policies or solving problems that are relevant to them.

The hypothesis of the study lies in the assumption that overcoming the complex problems of an ideological and socio-economic nature peculiar to most EU countries can stabilize the development of an integration project. At the same time, a radical reform of the principles of the EU organization, for example, the practical division of countries into several groups according to the degree of development, under the conditions of political instability will inevitably entail a worsening of the situation.

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, the purpose of the study is to identify key problems of an ideological, social, economic and political nature, the solution of which can increase the level of Europeans' confidence in liberal democratic values, democratic institutions based on them and the European integration process in general.

The achievement of the designated purpose is associated with the need to solve a complex of following tasks:

- The analysis of European statistics in order to identify regions with different levels of development (entrenchment) of democratic culture.
- The analysis of European statistics in order to identify key stressful factors of a social and economic nature and attitudes of EU citizens to them across countries.
- The analysis of the programs of the leading European populist parties and the speeches of their leaders the day before the elections to establish key protest electoral incentives.
- The analysis of the EU policy and individual European countries with low and medium levels of entrenched democratic culture in the promotion of liberal democratic values.

- The analysis of positive strong practices in countries where commitment to democratic values is growing or maintaining consistently high positions.

The solution of these tasks is intended to reveal a set of objective reasons interrupting the development of democratic culture in European society.

5. Research Methods

The purpose of the study is achieved with the support of the concept of global development risks formulated in the framework of International Economic Forum (New Concept for Europe, 2017). This allows considering the issue of degradation of democratic culture in Europe in the system of risks for the sustainable development of this region.

The achievement of the designated research tasks is realized through the use of a set of methods, the combined use of which forms a synergistic effect. The basis of the applied complex of methods is formed by the methods of statistical analysis. The source of statistical information is presented by the Legatum Institute data, reports of the Eurobarometer organization, as well as information from The World Values Survey and Pew Research sites.

Among the statistical methods used for problems solution, first of all, it is necessary to mention the analysis of variance. The authors use this method based on the hypothesis that the specific system of interaction of the complex of characteristics of social and economic development affects key indicators of public trust in state institutions, EU institutions and liberal democratic values. Along with the analysis of variance, which acts as the main one, the correlation analysis is used. It is designed to establish the presence or absence of direct or indirect statistical dependence between the various properties of the studied social groups and (fragmented) discriminated analysis, the essence of which comes down to identifying variables that distinguish the studied groups.

The implementation of the second part of the study is related to the study of the programs of leading European populist parties and the speeches of their leaders, as well as the study of the EU policy and certain European countries with low and medium entrenchment of democratic culture in promoting liberal-democratic values. It is provided primarily through the use of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The content analysis is used in relation to party programs and agitation rhetoric of politicians in order to establish the main markers of these texts, as well as their emotional coloring.

6. Findings

The results of the study correlate with the trends identified in the works of leading researchers in the field of studying democratic institutions and liberal ideology, for example, in the works of G. Nodia (Nodia, 2014).

According to the results of the study conducted on the basis of a specially developed methodology, the following results were obtained. First of all, the study of statistical data demonstrated the division of the European Union in accordance with three aspects. The first one is the economic aspect. Not only the level of income in Western and Eastern Europe is different, but also the level of economic satisfaction of citizens.

The second aspect is related to migration policy, which in the context of the migration crisis of 2013–2017 has become a key priority of EU internal policy. In this regard, for example, it is significant that citizens of almost all Eastern European states are against migrants. Especially radical position is taken by the societies of Hungary, Poland and Greece.

The third aspect is related to trust in state and European institutions. It was found that the level of trust in administrative institutions is experiencing a prominent downward trend from 2008–2010, and starting from 2014, the decline is especially prominent in Eastern and Southern Europe (Berend, 2015).

As the second aspect, it is necessary to note the decrease in the level of tolerance in the countries of Eastern Europe with regard to racial, ethnic, religious (Muslim) and sexual minorities (Cartographical view, 2017).

The study of the division (Bol et al, 2016) of the European Union, based on the determined aspects, made it possible to establish several correlations. The two main ones are as follows. Firstly, the level of economic well-being of citizens affects the perception of liberal values and the readiness to follow them in everyday life. Secondly, the societies affected by the economic or migration crisis, or societies that fear such an impact – for example, the countries of Visegrad Group, have the following trend: the more severely state institutions respond to the challenges of European integration policy, the more popular these institutions are in society. Here it is necessary to add the popularity of populist parties: in societies affected by the economic and migration crisis, the popularity of populist parties is growing in indirect correlation with the policies of state institutions for receiving refugees and the development of integration projects at the EU level in the period after 2014.

The solution of the task of establishment of key electoral incentives to support populist parties revealed a lack of consistency in the development of European populist movements, since each of them is characterized by a prominent regional linkage and the emphasis on local problems. Populist activism can be compared with the policy of the European Union on the affirmation of liberal democratic values. The last ones are presented as universal and uniting all European countries, while populism becomes a national response to common regional problems.

Another aspect of democratic regression is associated with the renewal of nationalism. Again, this is evidenced by the discourse of populists, who offer an organic concept of a nation as historical, cultural and religious community, which should be protected by the state.

Another priority direction for the degradation of democratic values in individual EU countries is memory policy, which often develops into cultural wars, especially in terms of interpreting the role of Nazism and communism in forcing individual states and peoples to illegitimate political development.

The analysis of EU strategic documents clearly showed that Brussels has its own comprehensive understanding of the memory policy, which is in clear conflict with the regional cultural policies of Poland and Baltic countries. In addition, there is a conflict of goals. (Mälksoo, 2009).

Thus, the analysis of European statistics shows that only a few percent of EU citizens identify themselves as Europeans, for the rest, mixed or national identity is typical. Under these conditions, the universalizing cultural policy of the EU aspires to change the mentality of Europeans through the destruction of traditional values, including family, church and nation.

It is in this context that we should understand the opposition of the countries of Eastern Policy of the EU and Germany, as an upholder of the spread of liberal and, especially, neoliberal values. This phenomenon is confirmed by statistical data, according to which the level of distrust towards parliament in Visegrad Four countries is 75% (against 60% in the rest of Europe), and only 11% express confidence in political parties and political elite.

An additional effect of the destruction of Europeans' confidence in liberal values is the migration crisis, which provoked 50% of Germans, 91% of Chekhov, 65% of Poles, 83% of Hungarians and 88% of Slovaks perceive immigration as a negative social phenomenon requiring the closure of national borders. Moreover, the level of growth in xenophobia in society is indicative. Thus, for example, 15% of Germans, 8% of Dutch, 2% of Swedes, 25.5% of Estonians and 23.5% of Romanians would not like to see persons of a different race as their neighbors. The attitude toward immigrants are even more radical: 21.5% of Germans, 19.6% of Dutch, 21.3% of Romanians and 37.5% of Estonians would not want to live next to them (Cartographical view, 2017).

The analysis of the EU policy and individual European countries with low and medium levels of entrenched democratic culture in the promotion of liberal democratic values showed the uneven implementation of relevant programs in the Union. In particular, the highest degree of intensity of social and educational work of EU institutions in the development of liberal values falls on Germany, the Netherlands and the countries of northern Europe, while countries experiencing a real shortage of democratic culture, especially in Eastern Europe are less involved in the implementation of these programs. This, the example is the practice of implementation of the Europe for Citizens programs in 2006-2013 and the updated Europe for Citizens program 2014-2020 (Council regulation (EU) No 390/2014). Apart from this, the statistics of educational exchange were also studied.

The obtained statistical and empirical data made it possible to identify a set of recommendations based on the results of the study.

Firstly, the determined trends actualize the need for human capital development in the entire EU – e.g. learning technologies that can improve a person's professional rating and give him the opportunity to preserve his economic utility and social status in changing environment (Chekletsov, 2016).

In the context of the growing threats posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is necessary to inscribe its tendencies into the perspective of democratic transformations and develop new ways of political participation of voters, restore confidence in democratic principles and the rule of law, strengthen the EU's status as a center of "democratic management of technologies", and to influence more intensively the political elites of countries such as Hungary and Poland at common-European level, in the aspect of their illiberal reforms, limiting, for example, the activity of constitutional court.

Another relevant measure is the idea of involving young people in political process, elections and voting (Youth decision making matters, 2017).

As an ambiguous measure that is being promoted in the EU, the authors consider the idea of lowering the age limit. Western experts are actively promoting the idea of politicization of European youth, and as an example they turn to quite provocative British experience. On the other hand, populist parties are especially successful among young people, which is associated with the youth's inclination towards

radicalism. Without the existence of a powerful EU policy, which may promote a democratic culture, the existing liberal democratic order will be destructed.

7. Conclusion

The final recommendations on the development of democratic practices and pluralism should certainly be connected with the increasing role of the EU as the initiator of significant political changes through the system of motivating national elites to continue the course of democratization, comply with European legislation, improve the legal culture of the population and promote the activities of civil society institutions. It is obvious that nowadays the status of the European Union as an arbitrator and defender of the interests of citizens is quite low. The majority of Europeans, appealing to issues that are relevant to them, are guided by national legal practices. Overcoming this situation at the European level is possible only through the spirit and letter of European legislation, accompanying this activity by intensively popularizing information about legal initiatives at the EU level.

In general, it can be stated that in matters of the development of democratic practices in the European Union space, primarily it is necessary to make European political institutions more open and understandable to ordinary European. Talking about the future of European integration, it is must be stated that the most revealing component is not the rhetoric of Brussels, but the way how European leaders are going to cope with the tasks of democratization in a number of EU member states, which are currently experiencing significant problems of both economic and political nature.

In fact, the success of the European Union in future will be determined by features of universal nature that is relevant for all citizens, however, it can acquire such status only in the context of intensifying integration practices, increasing mobility and creating in the EU space channels of vertical mobility for individual citizens regardless of their local accommodation. Nowadays, these principles are being implemented through European academic mobility programs. In many respects, these very mechanisms will allow overcoming the designated EU growth diseases associated with imperfections in financial, migration, educational, electoral and other systems.

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