

## The case against Europe: MEP Daniel Hannan reveals the disturbing contempt for democracy at the heart of the EU

By [Daniel Hannan](#)

PUBLISHED: 22:04 GMT, 14 August 2012 | UPDATED: 12:18 GMT, 15 August 2012

Over 13 years as an MEP, Daniel Hannan has witnessed first hand how Brussels works. Now he has written a forensic analysis of why it's rotten to the core. His devastating critique should be required reading for every politician.

There is a popular joke in Brussels that if the European Union were a country applying to join itself, it would be rejected on the grounds of being undemocratic.

It's absolutely true - and, believe me, it isn't funny. Or, if it is, then the laugh is on you and me.

Democracy is not simply a periodic right to mark a cross on a ballot paper.



A protester places a EU flag on a bonfire during a riot outside the European Council hall in Gothenburg Sweden

It also depends upon a relationship between government and governed, on a sense of common affinity and

allegiance.

It requires what the political philosophers of Ancient Greece called a 'demos', a unit with which we the people can identify.

Take away the demos and you are left only with the 'kratos' - a state that must compel by force of law what it cannot ask in the name of patriotism.

In the absence of a demos, governments are even likelier than usual to purchase votes through public works schemes and sinecures.

Lacking any natural loyalty, they have to buy the support of their electorates.

And that is precisely what is happening in the EU.

One way to think of the EU is as a massive vehicle for the redistribution of wealth - though not in a way that many of us would consider fair or beneficial.

Taxpayers in all the states contribute money to Brussels through their national taxes.

The bureaucrats then use this huge revenue to purchase the allegiance of consultants, contractors, big landowners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), corporations, charities and municipalities. In other words, all the articulate and powerful groups they rely on to keep themselves in employment.

Unsurprisingly, the people running the EU have little time for the concept of representative government.

The (unelected) President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, argues that nation states are dangerous precisely because they are excessively democratic.

'Decisions taken by the most democratic institutions in the world are very often wrong,' he claims, without a hint of irony.



French riots: Firemen in Amiens yesterday examine a car torched by youths during a night of violence

The plain fact is that the EU is contemptuous of public opinion — not by some oversight, but as an inevitable consequence of its supra-national nature.

The EU is run, extraordinarily, by a body that combines legislative and executive power. The European Commission is not only the EU's 'government', it is also the only body that can propose legislation in most fields of policy.

Such a concentration of power is itself objectionable enough. But what is even more terrifying is that the 27 Commissioners are unelected. Many supporters of the EU acknowledge this flaw — the 'democratic deficit', as they call it — and vaguely admit that something ought to be done about it.

But the democratic deficit isn't an accidental design flaw: it is intrinsic to the whole project.

The EU's founding fathers had mixed feelings about democracy — especially the populist strain that came into vogue between the two World Wars. In their minds, too much democracy was associated with demagoguery and fascism.

They prided themselves on creating a model where supreme power would be in the hands of 'experts' — disinterested technocrats immune to the ballot box.

They understood very well that their audacious scheme to merge Europe's ancient kingdoms and republics into a single state would never succeed if each successive transfer of power from the national capitals to Brussels had to be approved by the voters.

They were unapologetic about designing a system in which public opinion would come second to deals struck by a bureau of wise men. The EU's diffidence about representative government continues to this day.

When referendums go the 'wrong' way, Eurocrats simply swat the results aside.



Demonstrators clash with policeman during protests in Madrid, Spain

Denmark voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, Ireland against the Nice Treaty in 2001 and Ireland (again) against the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. Their governments were all told just to go away and try again.

When France and the Netherlands voted against the European Constitution in 2005, the verdict was simply disregarded.

As an MEP at the time, I well remember the aftermath of those last two votes.

One after another, MEPs and Eurocrats rose to explain that people hadn't really been voting against the European Constitution at all.

They had actually been voting against Anglo-Saxon capitalism or the French leader Jacques Chirac or against Turkey joining — anything, in fact, except the proposition actually on the ballot paper.

As in any abusive relationship, the contemptuous way in which Eurocrats treat voters has become self-reinforcing on both sides.

The more voters are ignored, the more cynical and fatalistic they become.

They abstain in record numbers, complaining — quite understandably — that it makes no difference how they cast their ballots.

Eurocrats, for their part, fall quickly into the habit of treating public opinion as an obstacle to overcome rather than a reason to change direction.

To get around the awkward lack of enthusiasm for their project, the Euro-elite of Brussels claim the people are being misled.

If only they weren't hoodwinked by Eurosceptic media barons and whipped up by unscrupulous nationalists, if only there could be an informed and dispassionate election campaign, then the people would surely see that deeper integration was in their interests.

But, the argument goes on, because people are unable to make an unclouded judgment, Eurocrats are therefore entitled — indeed obliged — to disregard their superficial desires in pursuit of their true preferences.



Critical: Daniel Hannan is a Conservative MEP representing the south east of England

In his final interview as prime minister, Tony Blair stated: 'The British people are sensible enough to know that, even if they have a certain prejudice about Europe, they don't expect their government necessarily to share it or act upon it.'

Got that? According to Blair, we don't want our politicians to do as we say: we want them to second-guess our innermost, unarticulated desires.

From the point of view of the politician, this is a remarkably convenient theory. Not all Eurocrats are cynics. There are some committed Euro-federalists who believe it is possible to democratise the EU without destroying it.

Their ideal is a pan-European democracy, based on a more powerful European Parliament.

The European Commission would become the Cabinet; the Council of Ministers would become an Upper House, representing the nation states; and the European Parliament would become the main legislative body.

Give MEPs more power, runs the theory, and people will take them more seriously.

A higher calibre of candidate will stand, and turnout will rise.

Pan-European political parties will contest the elections on common and binding manifestos. European democracy will become a reality.

The problem with this idea is that it has already demonstrably failed.

Turnout for the 2009 elections to the European Parliament was a dismal 43 per cent - compared to 65 per cent in our 2010 general election, a figure that was itself considered embarrassingly low.

In other words, less than half the population could be bothered to vote - despite voting being compulsory in some member states and Brussels spending hundreds of millions of euros on a campaign to encourage turnout.

One of its gimmicks was to send a ballot box into orbit - the perfect symbol of the EU's pie-in-the-sky remoteness.

The plain fact - which Brussels chooses to ignore - is that over the past 30 years, the European Parliament, like the EU in general, has been steadily agglomerating powers.

Yet people have responded by refusing to sanction it with their votes.

Turnout at European elections is far lower than at national elections for the obvious reason that very few people think of themselves as Europeans in the same sense that they see themselves as British or Portuguese or Swedish.

There is no pan-European public opinion, there is no pan-European media. You can't decree a successful democracy by bureaucratic fiat. You can't fabricate a common nationality.



A bleeding protester is led away by riot police during a rally in the Spanish capital

But MEPs respond to this by blaming the electorate.

They demand better information campaigns, more extensive (and expensive) propaganda. Europe matters more than ever, and, they argue, voters must be made to see it!

It never occurs to them to infer any loss of legitimacy from the turnout figures, nor to devolve powers to a level of government — the nation state — that continues to enjoy proper democratic support.

On the contrary, those nation states find themselves in danger of being subverted by the Brussels machine and its sympathisers.

Ireland used to have exemplary laws on the conduct of referendums, providing for equal airtime for both sides and the distribution of a leaflet with the 'Yes' and 'No' arguments to every household.

When these rules produced a 'No' to the Nice treaty in 2001, they were revised so as to make it easier for the pro-EU forces to win a second referendum.

Henceforth, the free publicity would be divided up in proportion to each party's representation in parliament.

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And since all Irish parties — except Sinn Fein — were pro-Treaty, impartial information was replaced by State-sponsored propaganda.

Worse, the result was that all subsequent Irish referendums, not just those to do with the EU, are fought on an unbalanced basis.

There are many other examples of Brussels' influence undermining the democratic processes of its member countries in order to sustain the requirements of European integration. Croatia dropped the minimum threshold provisions in its referendum rules in order to ensure a result in favour of joining the EU in 2011.

When the president of the Czech Republic declared his reluctance to sign the Lisbon Treaty into law, senior

Brussels Eurocrats called on their Socialist allies in the Republic to threaten the President with impeachment, even though he was trying to stick to a promise he had made to his people in the run-up to his election.

Meanwhile, in Britain, successive party leaders have had to abandon their pledges of a referendum on one aspect or another of the EU. Each such betrayal damages their credibility with the electorate, yet it seems they are prepared to pay that price for the sake of Europe.

However, British party leaders have got off lightly compared to others.

In Ireland, the ruling Fianna Fail party found its support slump from 41.6 to 17.4 per cent in last year's general election, as voters turned against a government that had meekly agreed to the EU's loans-for-austerity deal, turning Ireland into a vassal state.



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Teetering: A Greek protestor during riots in Athens in June, after austerity measures were put in place in a bid to rescue the country's economy

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Meanwhile, Greece and Italy suffered what amounted to Brussels-backed coups as elected prime ministers were toppled and replaced with Eurocrats.

In Athens, George Papandreou's mistake was to call for a referendum on Greece's austerity deal - a move which was to prompt fury in Brussels where, as we have seen, the first rule is 'no referendums - unless we can fix the result'.

Papandreou was not a Eurosceptic. On the contrary, he fervently wanted Greece to stay in the euro. His 'sin' was to be too keen on democracy, and so he was out

Silvio Berlusconi, too, got on the wrong side of the EU. His pronouncement that 'since the introduction of the euro, most Italians have become poorer' was factually true, but sealed his fate.

The European Central Bank's sudden withdrawal of support for Italian bonds, verbal attacks from other EU leaders and a rebellion by Europhile Italian MPs combined to see him off.

Both Papandreou and Berlusconi were already unpopular for domestic reasons — just as Margaret Thatcher was when EU leaders and Conservative Euro-enthusiasts brought her down in 1990.

Had any of these leaders been at the height of their powers, they would not have been vulnerable.

Nonetheless, to depose an incumbent head of government, even a wounded one, is no small thing. It shows the hideous strength of the EU.

With Papandreou and Berlusconi out of the way, Brussels was able to install technocratic juntas in their place — unelected administrations called into being solely to enforce programmes which their nations rejected.

The most shocking aspect of the whole affair was that so few people were shocked.

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Apparatchiks in Brussels now rule directly through apparatchiks in Athens and Rome. The voters and their tribunes are cut out altogether. There is no longer any pretence. In place of democracy, we now have the tyranny of a self-perpetuating, self-serving elite, all wedded by self-interest to the European project.

They are, it must be said, a worried and tetchy bunch. Ever since 55 per cent of French voters and 62 per cent of Dutch voters rejected the European Constitution in 2005, the Eurocrats in Brussels have been noticeably defensive. They have given up trying to win round public opinion. Their primary interest is keeping their well-paid positions.

Before those 'No' votes, they could convince themselves that Euroscepticism was essentially a British phenomenon, with perhaps a tiny off-shoot in Scandinavia.

Now, they know that almost any electorate will reject the transfer of powers to Brussels. So they concentrate on wielding power in the way they know best — through influence and money.

It is a shock to discover just how extensive the EU's reach is. Take its claim in 2003 to be 'consulting the people' about the draft of a new constitution by inviting 200 'representative organisations' to submit their suggestions.

Every single one of them, I discovered, received grants from the EU. If you scratch the surface, you find that virtually every field of activity has some EU-sponsored pressure group to campaign for deeper integration, whether it be the European Union of Journalists, the European Women's Lobby or the European Cyclists' Federation.

These are not independent associations which just happen to be in receipt of EU funds. They are, in most cases, creatures of the European Commission, wholly dependent on Brussels for their existence.



Protesters clash with riot police outside of the Greek Parliament in Athens, in February

The EU has also been active in spreading its tentacles to established charities and lobbying groups within the nation states. The process starts harmlessly enough, with one-off grants for specific projects.

After a while, the organisation realises that it is worth investing in a 'Europe officer' whose job, in effect, is to secure bigger grants.

As the subventions become permanent, more 'Europe officers' are hired. Soon, the handouts are taken for granted and factored into the organisation's budget. Once this stage is reached, the EU is in a position to call in favours.

When he introduced the Bill to ratify the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, made a great song and dance that it was backed by a whole range of independent organisations including the NSPCC, One World Action, Action Aid and Oxfam.

Yet every organisation he cited was in receipt of EU subventions. In a single year, Action Aid, the NSPCC, One World Action and Oxfam had among them received €43,051,542 (£33,855,355).

Can organisations in receipt of such colossal subsidies legitimately claim to be independent? Hardly surprising that they should dutifully endorse a treaty supported by their paymasters.

In much the same way, the Commission pays Friends of the Earth to urge it to take more powers in the field of climate change.

It pays the WWF to tell it to assume more control over environmental matters. It pays the European Trade Union Congress to demand more Brussels employment laws.

The EU hoses cash at these dependent organisations, who then tell it what it wants to hear. It then turns around and claims to have listened to 'The People'.

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## aside for a cause so trivial as public opinion or democracy.

And here's the clever bit: millions of workers linked to these groups are thereby drawn into the system, their livelihoods becoming dependent on the European project.

Meanwhile, big businesses see a way of manipulating the EU system for their own purposes, grasping that they can achieve far more in the Brussels institutions than they could from administrations whose legislatures are dependent on public opinion.

Between 2007 and 2010, the EU banned several vitamin supplements and herbal remedies and subjected others to a prohibitively expensive licensing regime.

The reaction from consumers to this attack on alternative medicines was overwhelming as millions of Europeans found that an innocent activity they had pursued for years was being criminalised. I can't remember receiving so many letters and emails on any question in all my time in politics.

It turned out these new restrictions were pushed strenuously by big pharmaceutical corporations.

They could easily afford the compliance costs; their smaller rivals could not. Many independent herbalists went out of business, and the big companies gained a near monopoly.

The lesson here is that whenever Brussels proposes some apparently unnecessary rules, ask yourself, who stands to benefit?

Nine times out of ten, you will find there is a company or a conglomeration whose products happen to meet all the proposed specifications anyway, and is using the EU to its own advantage.

Thus are businesses, as well as charities, drawn into the Euro-nexus.

Thus are powerful and wealthy interest groups in every member state given a direct stake in the system.

These days, the EU's strength is not to be found among the diminished ranks of true believers or the benign cranks who distribute leaflets for the Union of European Federalists.

Nor, in truth, does it reside primarily among the officials directly on the Brussels payroll.

The real power of the EU is to be found in the wider corpus of interested parties - the businesses invested in the regulatory process; the consultants and contractors dependent on Brussels spending; the landowners receiving cheques from the Common Agricultural Policy; the local councils with their EU departments; the seconded civil servants with remuneration terms beyond anything they could hope for in their home countries; the armies of lobbyists and professional associations; the charities and the NGOs.

Here is the swollen European behemoth, its interests utterly tied into the European project. And I fear it's not going to stand aside for a cause so trivial as public opinion or democracy.

Extracted from *A Doomed Marriage* by Daniel Hannan, published by Notting Hill Books at £12. © 2012 Daniel Hannan. To order a copy (p&p incl) call 0843 382 0000.