Democracy in the European Union

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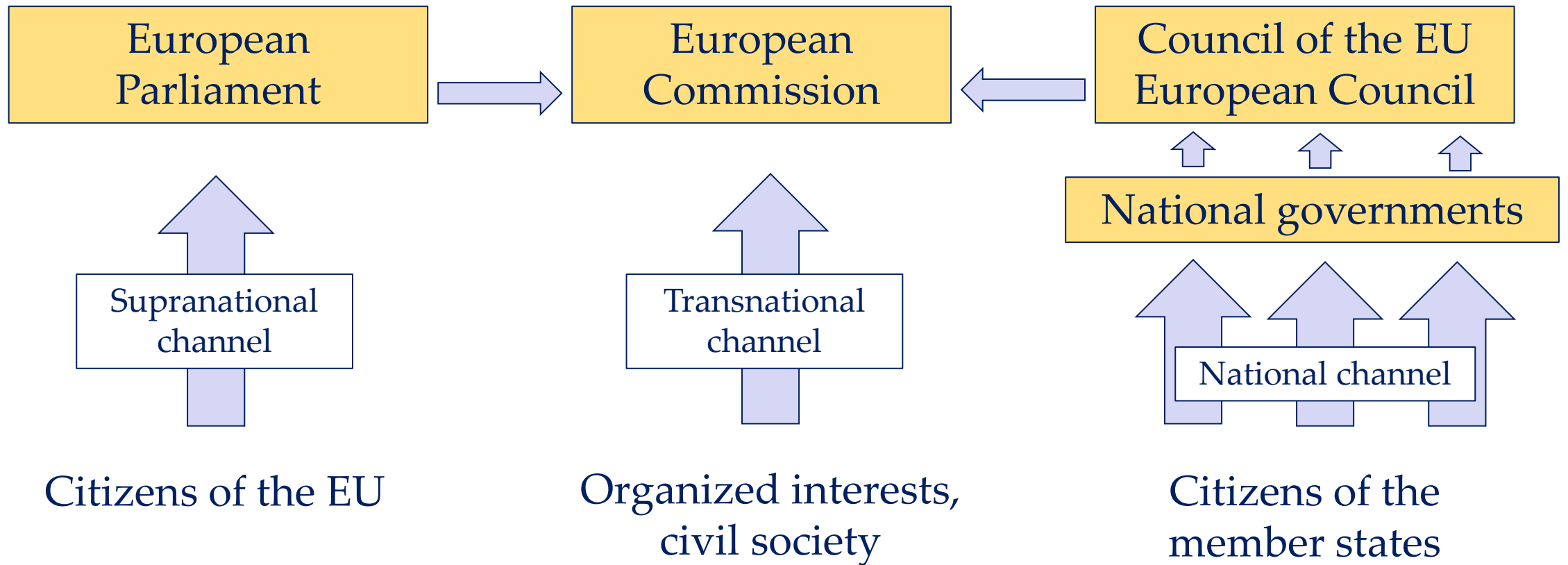
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence,
Teachers' Workshop,
November 29, 2023

Democracy in the EU: Starting points

➢ **Debate about "democratic deficit":** EU possesses more democratic input mechanisms than any other non-state entity in global politics, but it is often criticized for being insufficiently democratic

➢ **Lack of institutional blueprints:** EU is neither a state nor an international organization; its democracy follows neither a pure parliamentary nor a pure presidential logic → Not clear how EU democracy would need to look like

➢ **"Hyper-consensus polity" (Simon Hix):** EU political system seeks to forge compromise between common European interest and national interests of 27 member states → EU is complicated and hard to understand

Three channels of democratic input

Supranational channel: European Parliament

EP's influence on executive:	**EP's legislative powers:**	**EP elections:**
EP must approve Commission President and College of Commissioners	Ordinary Legislative Procedure gives EP co-decision power in most legislative fields	EP directly elected every five years as representative of the European citizens

But: No nomination powers; Commission not dependent on ongoing EP support

But: Exceptions remain; EP lacks right to legislative initiative

But: EP elections often lack European content ("second order national elections")

EP election campaigns: National focus

CDU posters in Germany, 2013/14

<u>Left</u>: German federal election 2013 ("Successful together.")

<u>Right</u>: EP election 2014 ("Successful together in Europe.")

<u>Pictured</u>: Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor

EP election campaigns: Gradual Europeanization?

CDU posters in Germany, EP election 2019

<u>Slogans:</u>

"For Germany's future. Our Europe."

"Our Europe secures peace."

<u>Pictured:</u>

Manfred Weber, EPP candidate for Commission President

"Spitzenkandidaten" debate, May 2019

National channel: Influence of member-state democratic procedures on EU politics

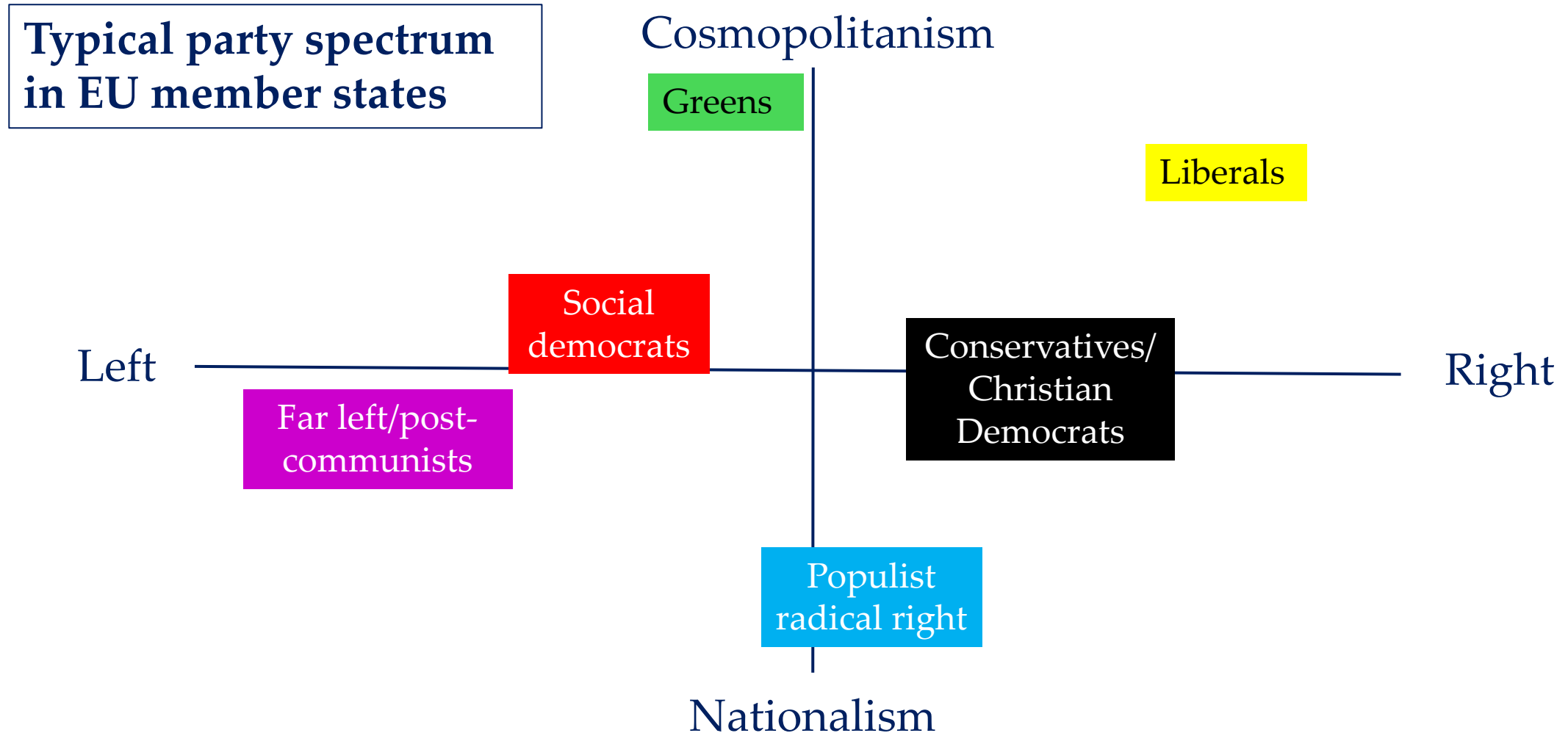| **National elections:**	**National parliaments:**	**Referendums:**
Greater importance of EU topics (Euroscepticism; "politicization" of EU governance)	European Affairs Committees; control over national governments in Council; "Early Warning Mechanism" to force review of EU legislative proposals	High-profile votes on EU issues, some anti-integration results

But: Individual national governments have little influence on EU politics

But: Information deficits; binding mandates for national governments often not feasible/advisable; "Early Warning Mechanism" toothless

But: Only available in exceptional cases; results not always respected

A new cultural cleavage in European party politics

Typical party spectrum in EU member states

Transnational channel: Civil society participation

Interest group participation:
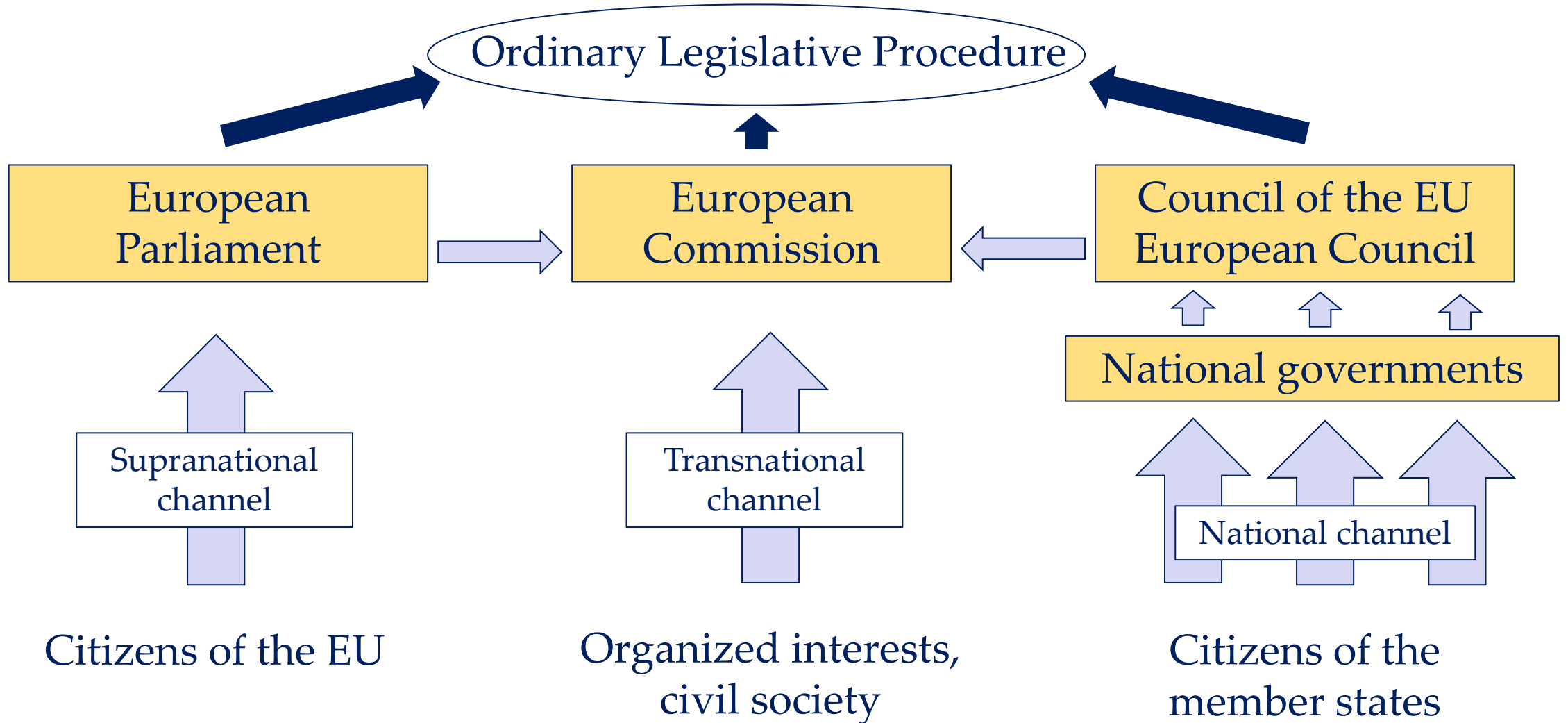Formalized procedures for consultations (especially European Commission); Transparency Register

Participation open to individuals:
Online consultations, European Citizens' Initiative

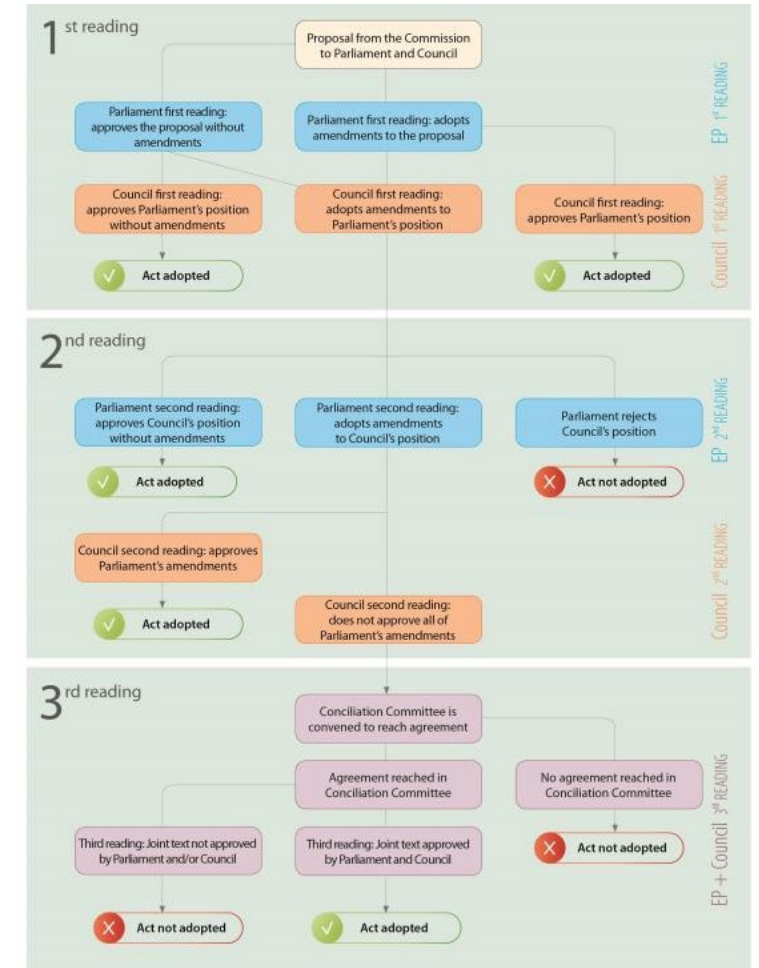But: Dominated by business interests, professional lobbyists

But: Primarily an agenda-setting device; do not ensure accountability

Bringing the channels together

Ordinary Legislative Procedure

➤ **Logic of EU law-making:** Commission initiates legislation; EP and Council discuss and may amend proposal; both must agree for proposal to become law

➤ **Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP):** Three-step procedure designed to bring about agreement between Commission, EP, and Council; ends once agreement is reached

➤ **Trilogue:** Informal consultations between Commission, EP, Council in most cases bring about agreement after first stage; second and third stage rarely reached
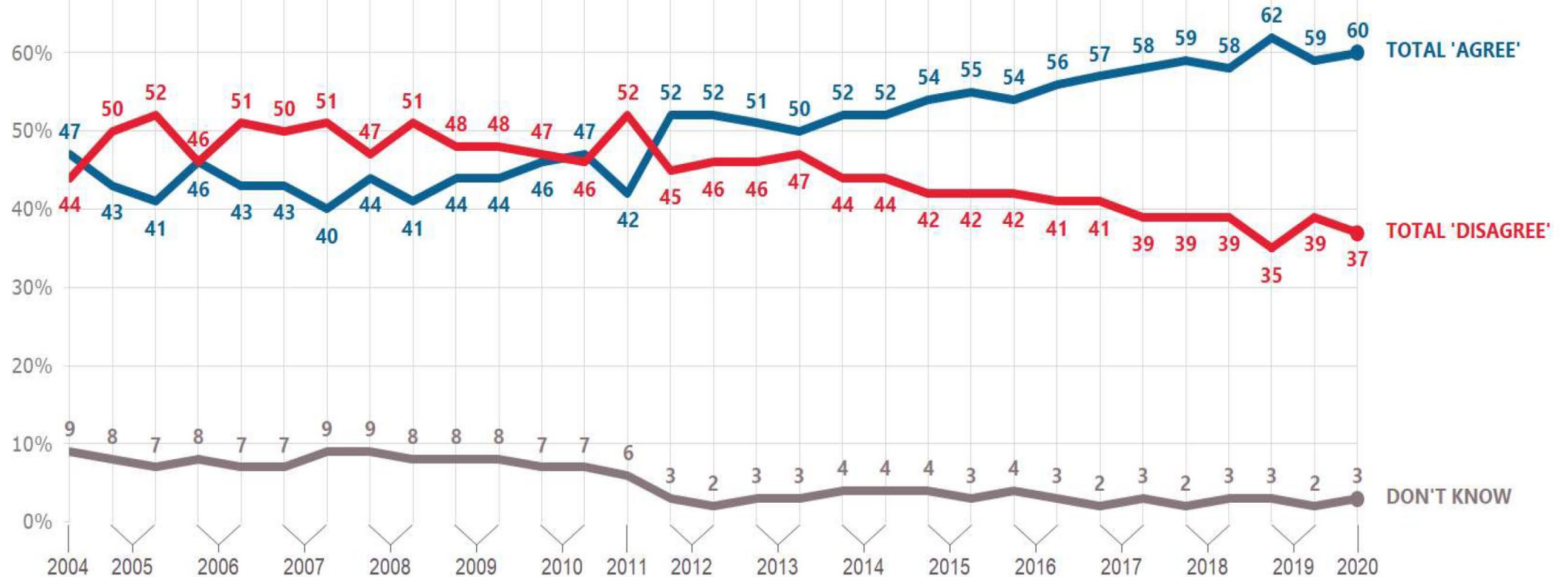
Some scholarly positions on EU democracy

➢ **Nothing to worry about (Andrew Moravcsik et al.):** EU's democratic procedures are appropriate given the powers it holds; citizens could participate more but choose not to because the EU is boring

➢ **A question of institutions (Simon Hix et al.):** EU is too consensus-oriented; it should become more state-like and allow more competition over policy choices and leadership positions

➢ **A question of identity (Stefano Bartolini, Kalypso Nicolaidis et al.):** Citizens' identification with Europe is too weak to put in place state-like democracy ("no demos thesis"), but some authors argue that consensus formation can be made more inclusive and transparent ("demoi-cracy")

Subjective knowledge as a factor

"I understand how the EU works"

Source: Eurobarometer 93 (2020)

Supplementary video material

Interview on democracy in the EU

Brief comment on democracy in the EU