

How democratic is the European Union?

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Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence,
Teachers' Workshop,
November 22, 2024



The EU: Democratic or undemocratic?

THE IRISH TIMES

Europe

The EU is not undemocratic, it's

THE BLOG [EURO](#)

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By Matthew

Programmes Officer a

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Jean-Claude Juncker delivering a sp

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2024
ELECTIONS

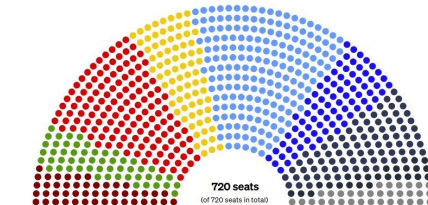
2024 European
election results

Your complete guide to the results of
European Parliament election.

Results Latest news What to know

EU Parliament results

EUROPEAN UNION 2019 2024



Click on a party to form a majority

Group	Seats	Change	Seats %
European People's Party	188	+12	26.1 %
Socialists and Democrats	136	-3	18.9 %
Patriots for Europe	64	+35	11.7 %
Conservatives and Reformists	76	+9	10.6 %
Renew	77	-25	10.7 %
Greens	53	-18	7.4 %
Left	46	+9	6.4 %
Europe of Sovereign Nations	25	0	3.5 %
Nonaligned	33	-29	4.6 %

Results by country

Germany

96 seats
updated 4 months ago

Expand

France

81 seats
updated 4 months ago

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Italy

76 seats
updated 4 months ago

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Spain

61 seats
updated 4 months ago

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European Parliament's centrist groups cut deal to approve new Commissioners



EPSU
EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICE UNION

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E.g. Gender pay gap in public services

Priorities

Solidarity Environment/Climate Change Health Recruitment & organising

The voice of 8 million European public service workers

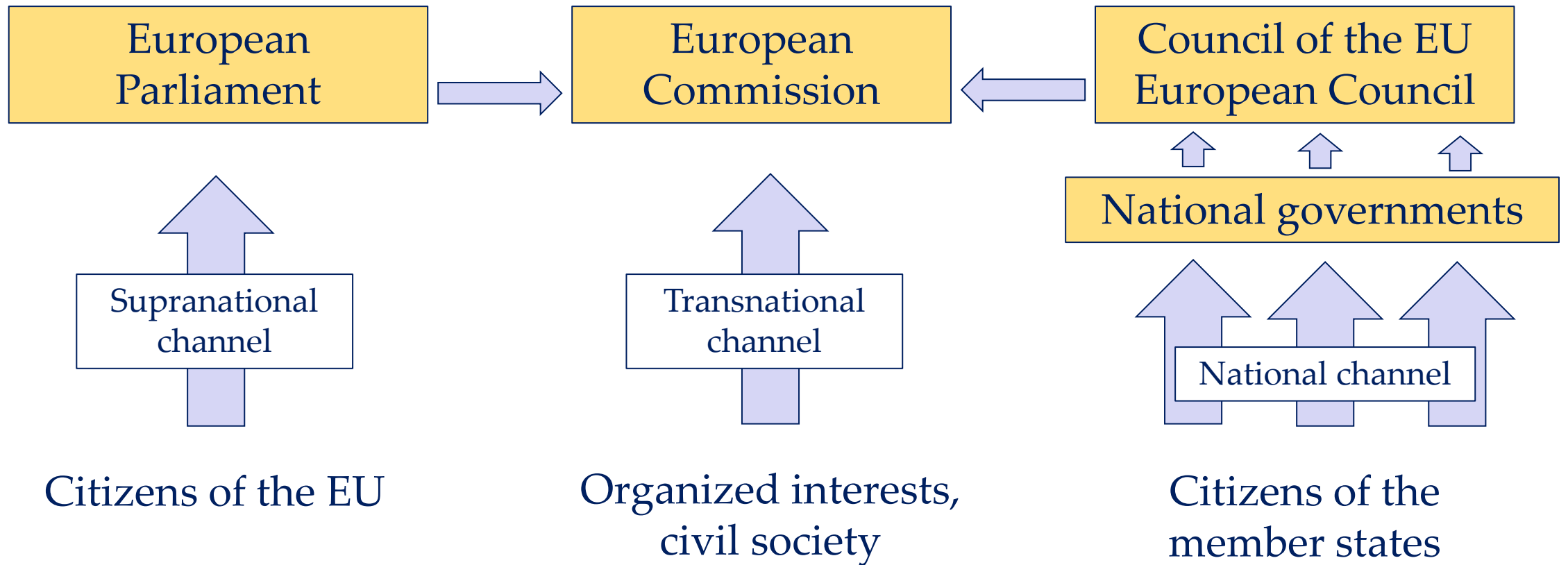
Right2water: First ever European Citizens Initiative to make it !

(Press communication - Brussels, May 7, 2013) The first up and running European Citizens Initiative (ECI) - [Water is a Human Right](#) has collected over 1.5 million signatures across Europe, and continues counting. 8 countries have passed the minimum number of signatures required. These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia.

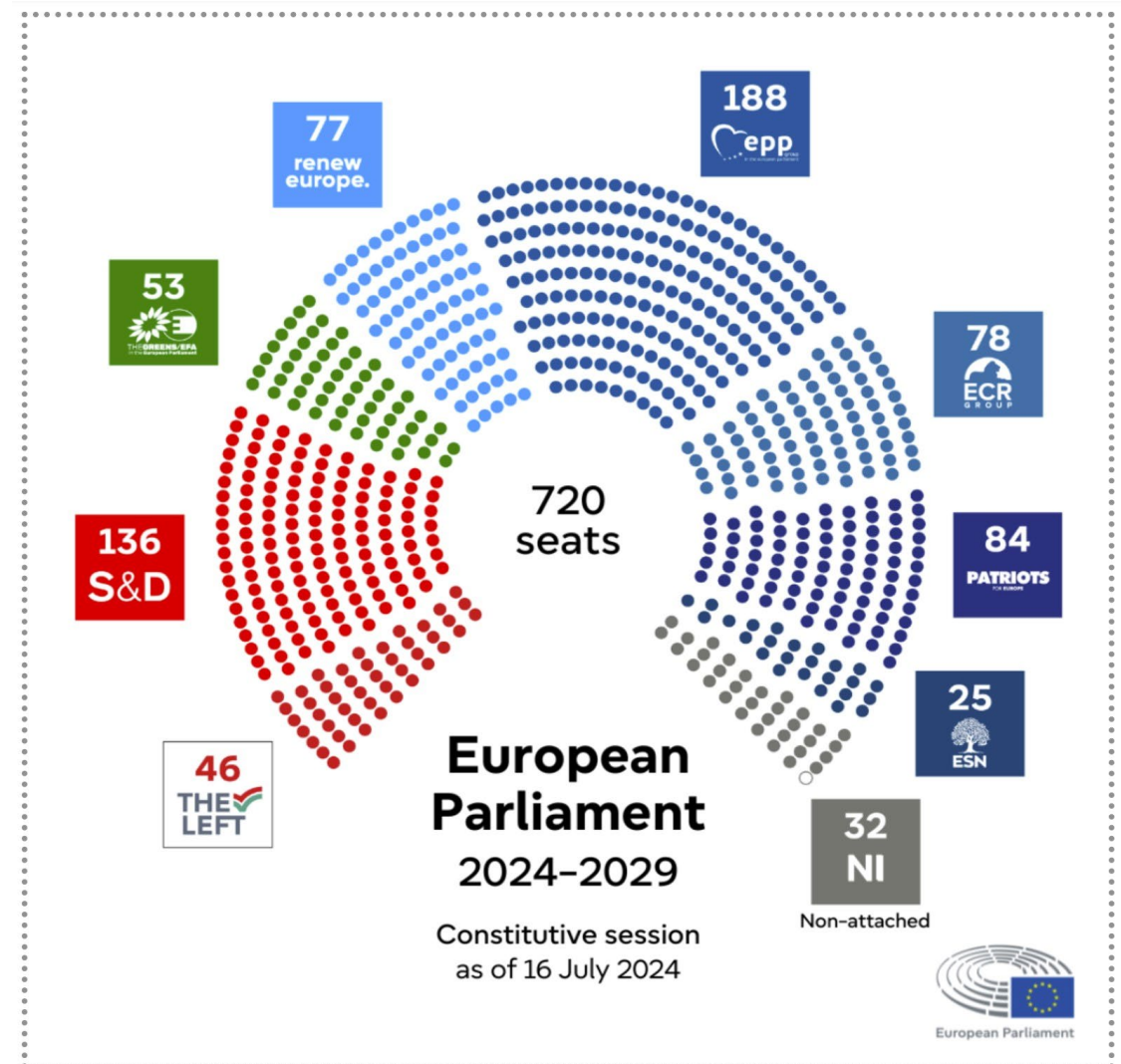
Starting points for examining democracy in the EU

- **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



Supranational channel: European Parliament

EP's influence on executive:

EP must approve
Commission President
and College of
Commissioners

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

EP's legislative powers:

Ordinary Legislative
Procedure gives EP
co-decision power in
most legislative fields

But: Exceptions
remain; EP lacks
right to legislative
initiative

EP elections:

EP directly elected every
five years as
representative of the
European citizens

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

EP election campaigns: National focus



CDU posters in Germany, 2013/14

Left: German federal election 2013
("Successful together.")

Right: EP election 2014 ("Successful together in Europe.")

Pictured: Angela Merkel,
Federal Chancellor

EP election campaigns: Gradual Europeanization?



CDU posters in Germany,
EP election 2024

Slogan:

“Together for Germany and
Europe.”

Pictured:

Friedrich Merz, CDU leader,
and Ursula von der Leyen, EPP
candidate for Commission
President

“Spitzenkandidaten” debate, May 2024



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

National elections:

Greater importance of EU topics (Euroscepticism; “politicization” of EU governance)

But: Individual national governments have little influence on EU politics

National parliaments:

European Affairs Committees; control over national governments in Council; “Early Warning Mechanism” to force review of EU legislative proposals

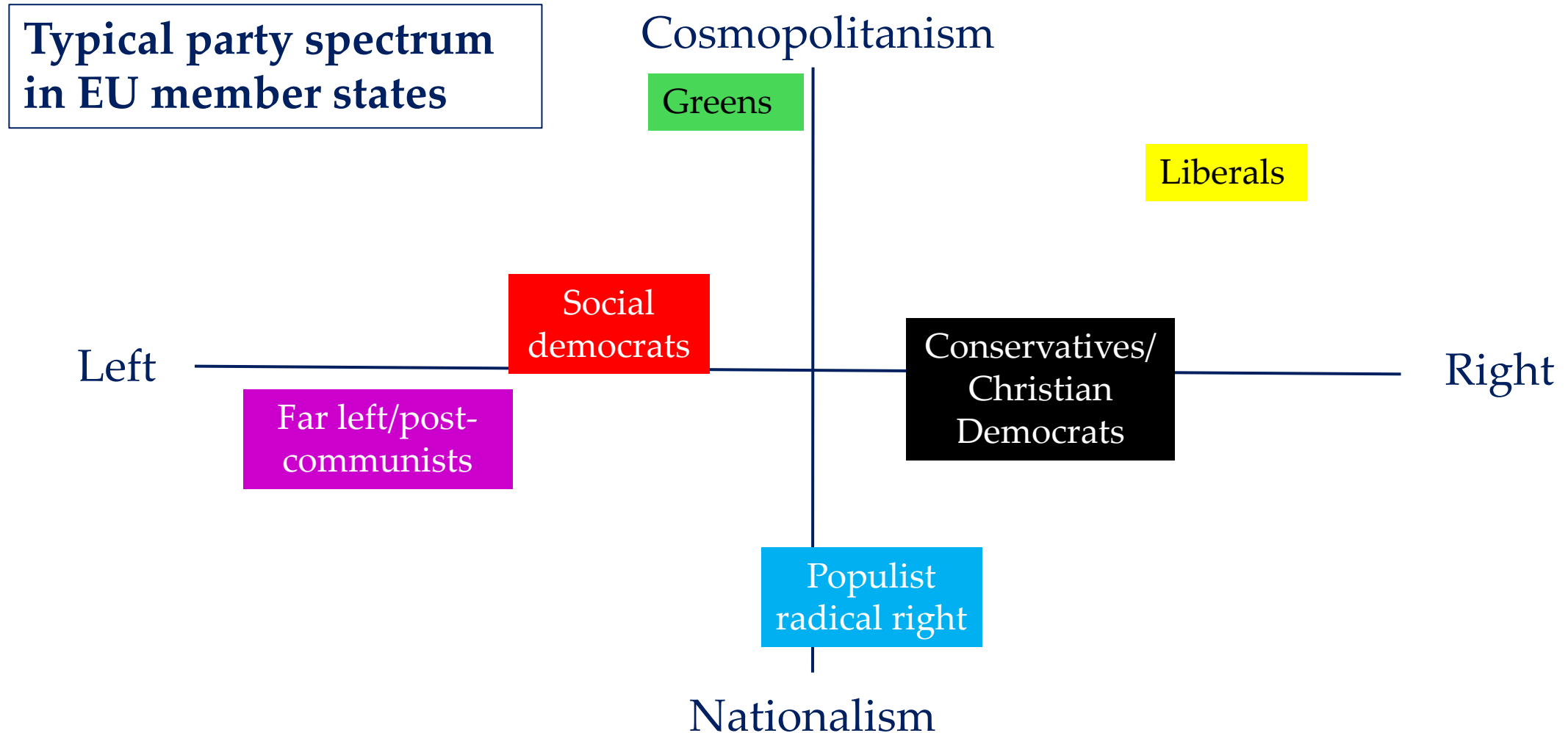
But: Information deficits; binding mandates for national governments often not feasible/advisable; “Early Warning Mechanism” toothless

Referendums:

High-profile votes on EU issues, some anti-integration results

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

A new cultural cleavage in European party politics



Transnational channel: Civil society participation



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

But: Dominated by business interests, professional lobbyists

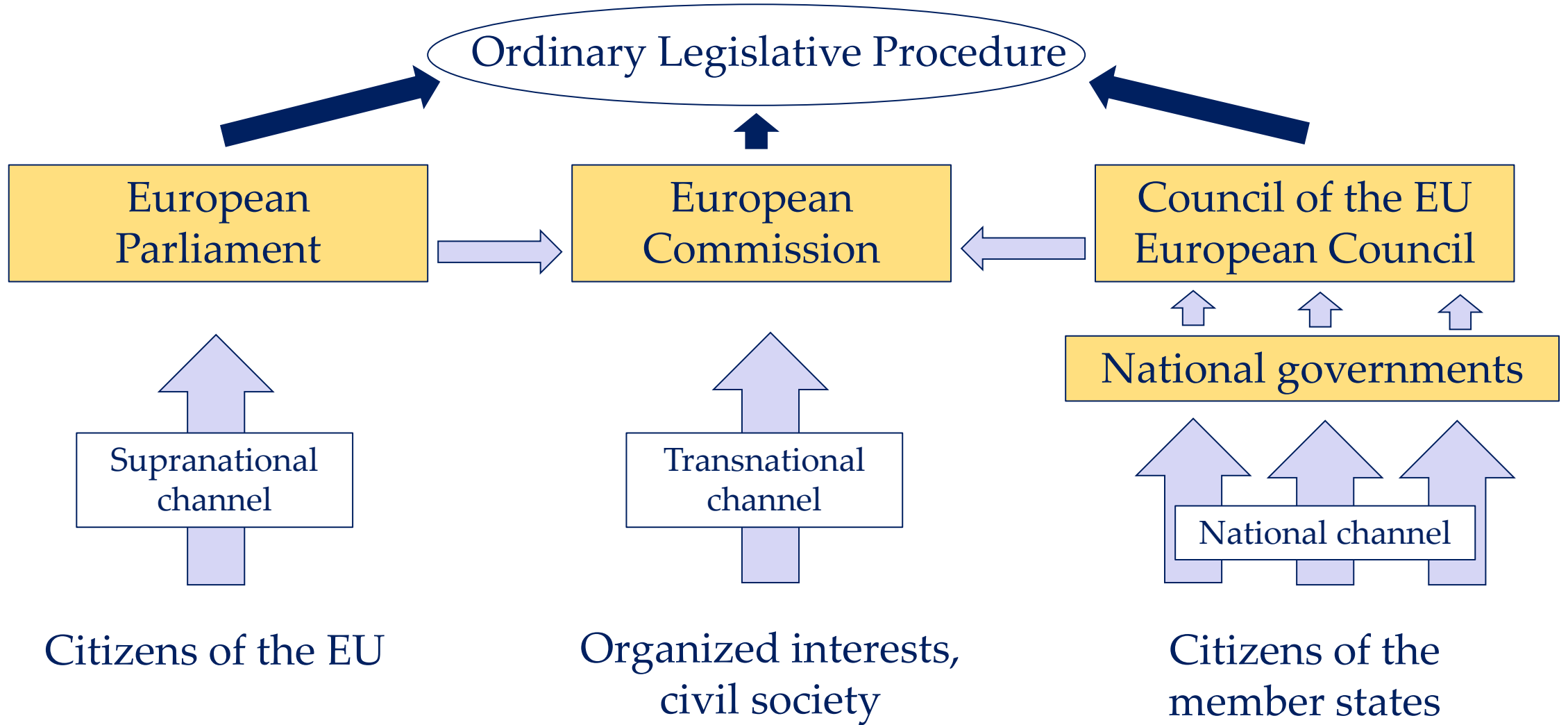


Participation open to individuals:
Online consultations, European Citizens' Initiative

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

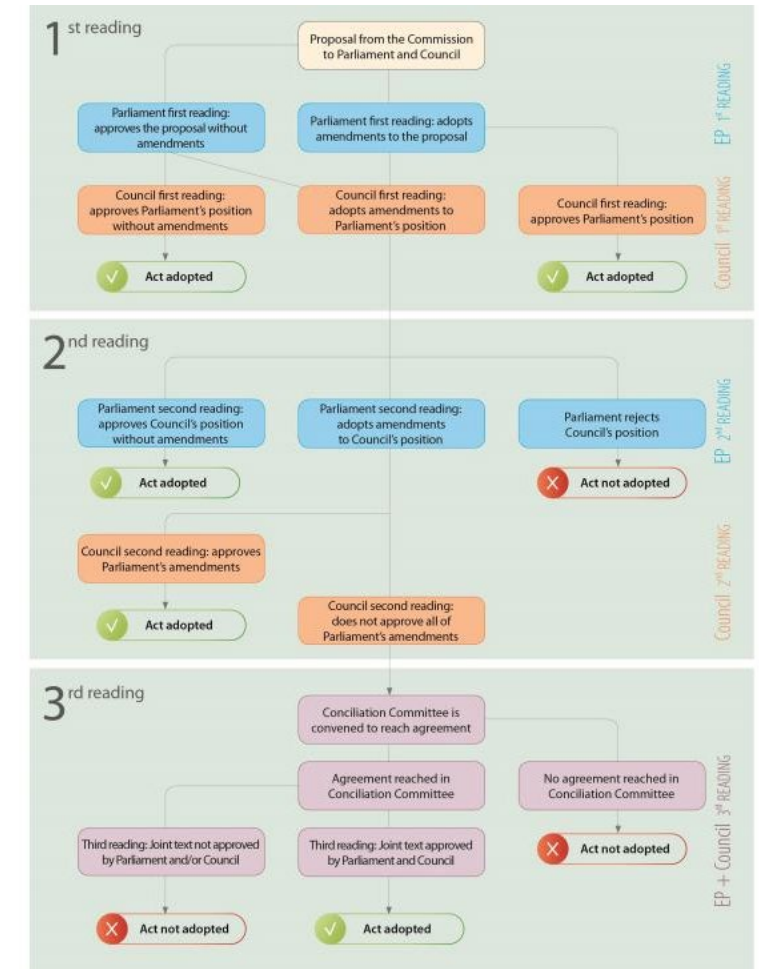


Bringing the channels together



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

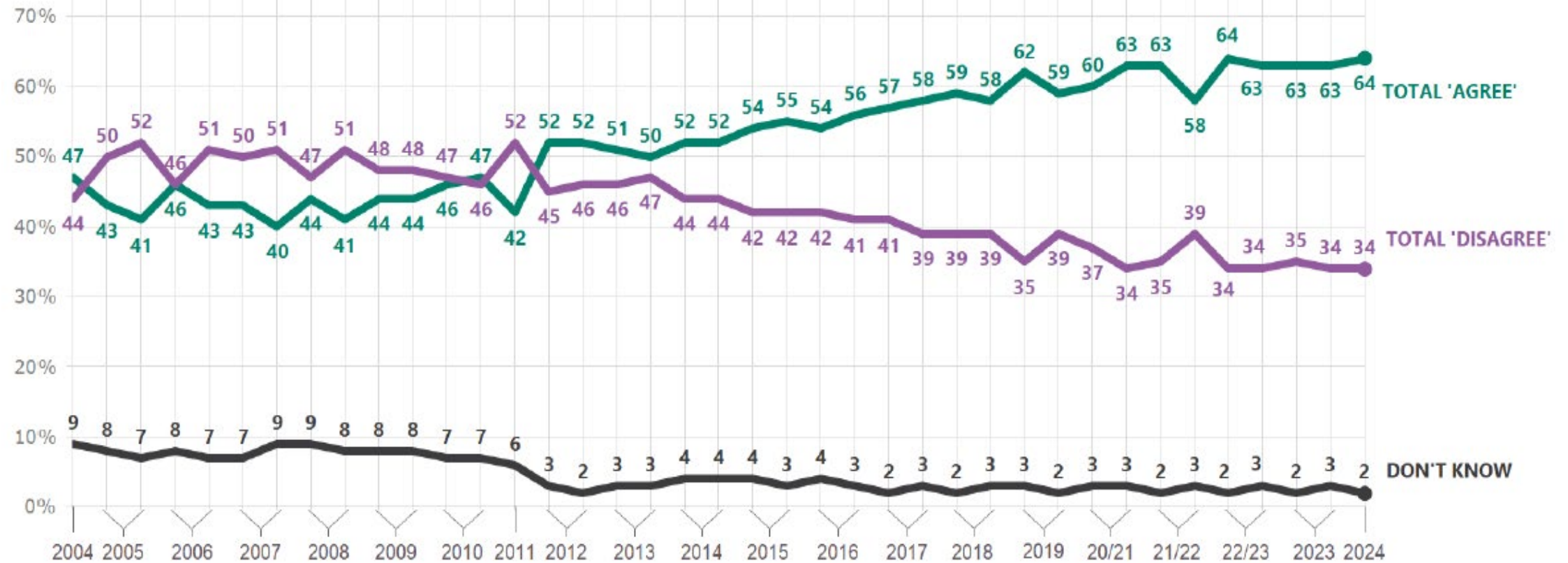


Some scholarly positions on EU democracy


- **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 (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”



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if you look at the EU institutions, we find that again the EU sort of falls between standard models

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Democracy in the EU: Interview with Achim Hurrelmann

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Interview on
democracy in
the EU



Brief comment
on democracy
in the EU