An uneven balance?

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Addendum on Valorization

Valorization is the “process of creating value from knowledge, by making knowledge suitable and/or available for social (and/or economic) use and by making knowledge suitable for translation into competitive products, services, processes and new commercial activities.” In the following, the valorization of this doctoral thesis will be explained with regard to its (1) relevance, (2) target groups, (3) activities/products, (4) innovation and (5) schedule and implementation.

1. Relevance:

The purpose of this doctoral thesis is to analyze and understand the formal power asymmetries that exist between the national parliaments in the European Union and to consider the implications of such asymmetries for representative democracy in the EU. It takes the European sovereign debt crisis as a cause to look into this particular issue because of the asymmetric impact that it had on the different national parliaments. In addition to this analysis, the book in the end also illustrates different ways in which the negative implications for EU representative democracy, which result from the described power asymmetries between national parliaments, could be mitigated.

The societal relevance of this dissertation lies in its contribution to the European-wide debates on the state of democracy in the European Union, which has become particularly salient after the financial and sovereign debt crisis in Europe. As democracy concerns politicians, academics and the average citizen alike, this is an issue that has not only occupied academic scholars in the field of European studies for decades but also has an immediate impact on society and the general population in Europe as a whole. A very clear example of the societal relevance of this topic was the public outrage in Ireland in 2011, when it became known that the Irish draft budget had been sent to a committee of the German Bundestag before it was even presented to the Irish parliament, and claims were made that the Irish government had surrendered its sovereignty to other European governments. But one could also think of the situation in Greece following its request for financial assistance, when it had to submit to a series of stringent conditions, austerity measures, and structural reforms under the monitoring eyes of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, which led to a general feeling of resentment towards the EU in more than just one Member State.

The negative image that the EU finds itself faced with, and in particular in regards its democratic credentials, obscure and often make forgotten the benefits that it has in fact
to offer to its citizens. For that reason the EU’s image in the eyes of the general EU population must be improved and the benefits of its membership must be better communicated to the public by both European and national politicians. This also means that a thorough analysis of the current state of democracy in the EU is indispensable because it allows policy-makers in Europe to examine and reflect on the results of this analysis in order to implement the necessary policy changes on the basis thereof, also to avoid the further surge of populism, the roots of which can be, amongst others, found in Euroskepticism.

2. Target groups:

In addition to the academic community, the results of this doctoral dissertation are also of interest to policy-makers at both the national level and the European level. Improving the state of democracy in the EU and re-evaluating the role and function of both the national parliaments and the European Parliament within its system of governance is a concern that cannot be addressed by either the national or the European level alone. Rather, policy-makers of all 28 (soon 27) Member States and policy-makers on EU level must work together to reflect on the policy changes necessary to improve the state of democracy in the EU. The results of this doctoral dissertation is of particular interests for policy-makers working in the national parliaments in the EU as much of its analyses relates to national parliamentary functions in European Union affairs and to how these functions could be improved. In addition, it can also be of interest to the general population in the European Union who would like to gain a deeper understanding of the democratic structures that exist in the EU – especially in light of the upcoming elections of the European Parliament in May 2019 – and in particular of the role of national parliaments in the European Union.

3. Activities/products:

The concrete products that result from this doctoral dissertation are policy recommendations addressed to parliaments and governments in the EU. Its results can best be implemented through policy changes at both the national level and the European level. Following an analysis of power asymmetries between national parliaments in the EU, the creation of a new interparliamentary conference for the national parliaments of the Eurozone Member States and the European Parliament was recommended. A concrete product or activity that could be envisioned on the basis of this doctoral dissertation would therefore be the creation of such a conference, although this is not strictly necessary. Also the enhanced use of the current structures, even in an informal basis, could be considered a direct translation of the results of this book into concrete processes or activities.
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4. Innovation:

Such reinforced interparliamentary cooperation – either formal or informal –, as would be resulting from this book and was described above, would be innovative insofar as it would be a new attempt at re-designing the role of national parliaments in the EU through a new addition to or a new enhancement of the existing parliamentary structures.

5. Schedule and implementation:

The policy changes that could result from the recommendations made in this doctoral thesis, i.e. strengthened interparliamentary cooperation through a new conference or through an enhanced use of the current structures, are dependent on the agreement and participation of 28 (soon 27) national parliaments as well as the European Parliament. As these are political institutions, each with their own interests, priorities, agendas and internal will formation processes, it is impossible to predict either a schedule for the implementation of the recommendations or the costs that such an implementation would entail. It is conceivable, however, that the upcoming European Parliament elections in May 2019 and the subsequent changes in the composition of the European Commission would constitute a good point in time to take up the discussions on the nature of democracy in the European Union and to re-evaluate the role of national parliaments in the EU, in which case this book could not have been published at a much better time.

As to the market opportunities that are involved with the topic of this doctoral dissertation, there are none. One should point out, however, that it does seem somewhat contradictory to ask of a doctoral thesis, which has as its primary purpose the demonstration of the doctoral candidate’s ability to independently carry out scholarly research, to contribute to the creation of market opportunities. A doctoral dissertation, just as any other form of scholarly research, should have as its objective the critical and nonpartisan discussion or analysis of a particular issue in the field of science in which the dissertation is located. An obligation or encouragement to conduct such research in a manner that it should lead to the creation of monetary value or market opportunities would stand in the way of such an objective and should therefore not be supported – in particular not in times of rising populism and ‘alternative facts’ where a well-researched doctoral thesis should be appreciated for being exactly that, namely a well-executed piece of objective scholarly research contributing to the academic debate on its field.