

Foreword

This book is the first report of International Democracy Watch, an international research study group whose task is to monitor the development of democracy in international institutions. This unprecedented research has been promoted by the Centre for Studies on Federalism, based in Torino, Italy.

International democracy has become a key aspect of the contemporary academic and political debate. It is a relatively recent trend in international politics, as shown by the fact that in 1945—when the United Nations (UN) was established—no international parliamentary assembly existed in the world. Yet 39 parliamentary assemblies have been established since the Second World War and most of them in the post-Cold War period. The widely felt need for democracy at an international level is a consequence of three phenomena: the regional integration and globalization processes, the erosion of state sovereignty, and the democratic deficit of the international organizations. Even though a comprehensive survey of this area would be timely for several reasons, it has not been available until now.

The basic hypothesis, confirmed by the present report, is that the ground where international democracy has developed most—and earlier than within the UN—is that of international organizations of regional dimension. The democratization of regional organizations is a world-wide process, which is developing at an uneven pace. The research has shown that Europe is the cradle of international democracy. Here, it first materialized in 1949 with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a light international organization, which does not have any ambition to promote integration policies, the parliamentary assembly of which is not endowed with any legislative competence. Instead, within the framework of the European Communities and the European Union (EU), a process of economic integration developed, which led to the establishment of the European Parliament, the first directly elected supranational parliament in history and the world vanguard of the experiment of international democracy. In Latin America other regional parliaments have been directly elected: the Parlacen in Central America and the Parlandino in the Andean Community, and the direct election of the Parlasur in MERCOSUR has been announced.

At the same time, another evolution is in progress in the EU: the European Parliament has progressively increased its legislative powers, while almost all the other parliamentary assemblies—including the above-mentioned directly elected Latin American parliaments—have advisory powers only. However, in spite of their limited influence, these assemblies try to balance the power that governments exert at international level. They hold debates, put forward proposals and recommendations, approve resolutions and exert their pressure on governments. All these parliamentary activities, the purpose of which is to influence governments—and more precisely shift parliamentary control at international level—are aspects of a general process that culminates in the European Parliament, with a structure that shows that the EU is moving in the direction of a form of federal arrangement. The institutional evolution of the EU shows that in Europe new forms of statehood at international level are materializing. In other words, the EU is the vanguard of a process of constitutionalization and democratization of international relations. In the light of this process, national parliaments represent the past, an outdated form of democracy.

It is still to be remarked that despite the lack of structures for citizens' participation in the international institutions (parliaments, elections, political parties and so forth), the global civil society movements are a forerunner manifestation of international democracy. They are the expression of new forms of international political activism in a world where formal democratic structures fit for channelling international political life are lacking.

International Democracy Watch plans to continue its activity in the future. It will monitor the quality and the intensity of the democratic transformations underway within the international organizations in order to survey progress (or regress) of international democracy. The second report will be focused on movements and campaigns for international democracy.

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