

Subnational Democracy in the European Union ' Challenges and Opportunities '

This book is the result of a research project carried out for the Committee of the Regions and analyses the 'state of play' of democratic practice at the subnational level in all of the European Member states. Its initial hypothesis was that liberal democracy is closely associated with the rise of the nation state in the 19th century. The nation state, however, has been significantly changing under the impact of various forces including globalization and regionalization, internal reforms of the public administration system such as privatization and deregulation, and the emergence of regions and local authorities as actors in their own rights. These changes pose challenges for the practice of democracy and, in particular, for its expression at the regional and local level. The book deals with the theoretical implications of these changes in terms of the changing nature of the state and new regionalism. However, one of the key findings is that there is no one uniform meaning of democracy across member states and there are variations even within a single state depending on whether the national or subnational levels are considered. Each country chapter gives the historical and philosophical background to the concept of democracy in each country. There is also an exposition of the institutional expression of democracy at the different levels. With regard to the practice of democracy at the subnational level, the role of pressure groups and policy networks is examined as well as the role of political parties. There is a survey of critiques of subnational democracy. Finally, there is a survey of innovative approaches to improving regional and local democracy through a variety of mechanisms and reforms as ways of responding to the challenge and opportunities facing it today.

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