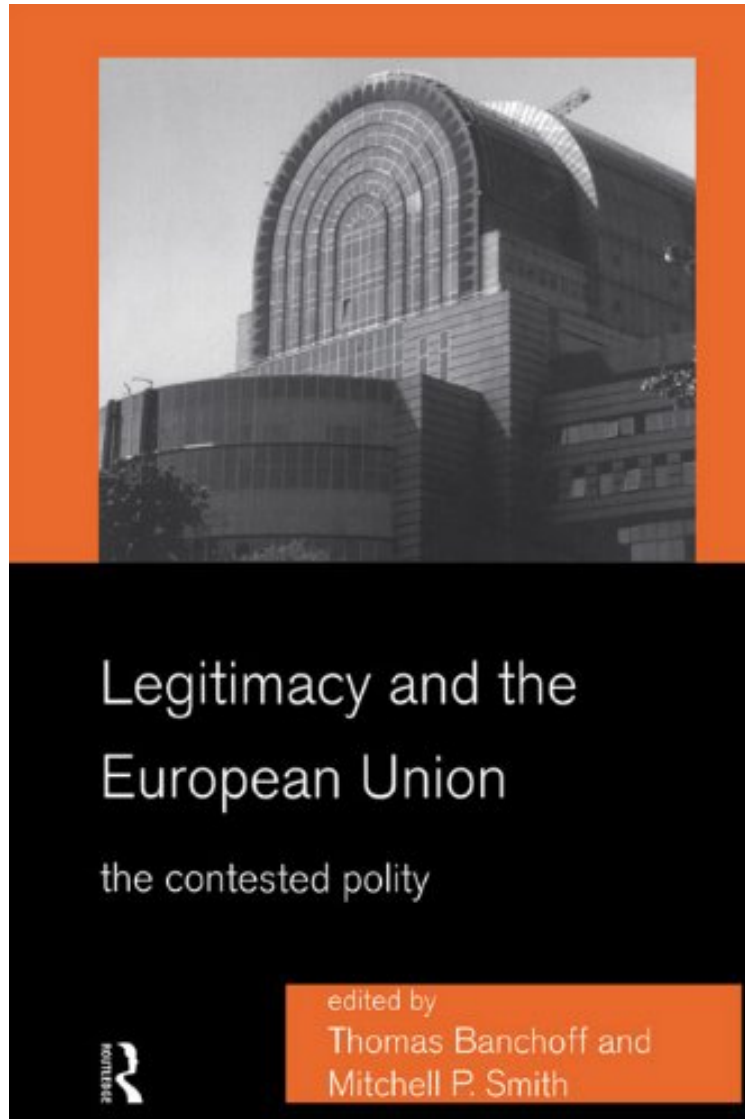


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Legitimacy and the European Union: The Contested Polity

Von Routledge

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Understanding Legitimacy in an Unprecedented Polity Von Dr. C. G. Mazzucelli Banchoff and Smith present readers with an edited volume that distinguishes itself on two counts: its chapters integrate theoretical concepts and empirical research in case studies that are original and timely; and the scholars' contributions to the volume provide a balance of

European and American viewpoints in a dialogue that leads to fruitful inquiry. The book analyzes legitimacy through the conceptual lenses of three approaches: policies; institutional changes; and identities. As an ensemble, the chapters in this volume strengthen our understanding of the European Union as a polity unprecedented in world affairs whose decision making is characterized by multi-level governance. By assessing critical analyses made in selected chapters utilizing each approach, the reader appreciates the volume's method and scope of inquiry. Feldman's chapter explores the relationship between reconciliation and legitimacy on two levels: the internal dynamics of the Community/Union for which reconciliation and institutionalized cooperation from the Schuman Plan through crises in the 1980s/1990s provides a source of stability and legitimacy; and external relations by which "some of the character of the EU as a system of reconciliation and a peace community" offer a basis for the EU's role as a "civilian power." This is the only chapter that focuses on enlargement as a contested policy for the Union. Clearly a second edition would benefit from increased attention to the interplay between contestation and legitimacy in an enlarged Union. Feldman's analysis confirms that member states recognize the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as "a framework for contestation." Her conclusion that this framework exists in a polity which is hybrid challenges scholars not to limit their research to analyses that contrast neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Instead we may inquire about the ways in which reconciliation could be a resource in the quest for increased legitimacy as the Union seeks definition as a polity and as an "international actor" in global politics. Wessels and Diedrichs' analysis of legitimacy focuses on the European Parliament and the need to reconceptualize its role as an institution that cannot fit into either federalist or realist frameworks. This chapter displays the empirical excellence that distinguishes Wessels as one of the foremost theorists of integration. His articulation of a "fusion thesis" suggests that the European Parliament must legislate within a system characterized by competition for powers and differentiation of decision making procedures. This institutional context, which engages national and European actors in an expanding spectrum of interactions, renders citizens' understanding of the Parliament less transparent. The authors touch on the relative lack of citizen interaction with the European Parliament, the challenges it faces to acquire internal discipline to enhance its use of the leverage acquired via the Maastricht and Amsterdam reforms and the fact that Parliament must compete with other institutions to be a focus of legitimacy in the Union. Each of these points is important to consider in light of the future accession of countries from central and eastern Europe. In these countries, citizen identification with national parliaments is particularly sensitive in the aftermath of decades of "rule from above." The ways in which these national parliaments interact with the European institutions may well determine, along with the economic benefits that can be perceived by average citizens, a degree of popular acceptance of the Union and its policies in associate member states. Banchoff's analysis of legitimacy from the perspective of identity explores the challenges the European institutions pose to sovereignty in the French and German cases. This chapter utilizes a diachronic comparison or a comparison across time. Its focus on cases of treaty-making in the early 1950s and early 1990s offers the reader insights into two crucial periods in the history of European integration. The comparison is an informative one, although as Delors points out fruitful parallels could also be drawn between the negotiations and ratifications of the Treaty of Paris creating the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and those that led to the Single European Act (SEA) which relaunched integration in the mid-1980s. (Interview, Delors, June 22, 1999). This is primarily because of the impact of the Community method on both sets of negotiations and their impact on cooperation between the member states and European institutions. Banchoff's assessment that French national identity is inextricably linked with popular sovereignty suggests that the changes introduced by European integration must be embedded in the life of national political institutions. This assessment is all the more relevant in the aftermath of German unification and the ruling of the German Constitutional Court on the Maastricht Treaty. In the post-1989 context, it is important to understand the meaning of sovereignty in Germany, which differs markedly from that in France, and to grasp the necessity to construct a European polity that is viewed as a "legitimate framework for politics" by the populations of the member states. In the book's closing chapter, Banchoff and Smith explain that the conflict surrounding the Maastricht ratification brought the centrality of European politics in national decision making to light. The search for legitimacy, however contested in a multi-level polity, may lead state leaders to take decisions that reconstruct national identities in ways to promote compatibility with the integration project. The conclusions drawn by the editors illustrate the extent to which this volume is essential reading for those interested in the European Union. Its chapters contribute significant insights to our understanding of Europe's impact within national polities, thereby enhancing our knowledge of legitimacy in the Union as its complex system of decision making evolves in the 21st century.

Kurzbeschreibung Since the Maastricht ratification debate of the early 1990s, the legitimacy of the European Union has become a subject of controversy. With unprecedented force, Europeans have begun to question the need for deeper integration. Some fear threats to established national identities, while others perceive the emergence of a distant but powerful Brussels, beyond the reach of democratic control. Legitimacy and the European Union breaks with established approaches to the problem of the legitimacy of the European Union by focusing on the recent trend

towards reconceptualization of the EU not as a superstate or an organization of states, but as a multi-level, contested polity without precedent. The book examines the implications of this reconceptualization for the problem of legitimacy. Individual chapters focus on policy areas, institutions and identity politics. Taken together, they reach two main conclusions. While Europeans do not strongly identify with the EU, they increasingly recognize it as a framework for politics alongside existing national and subnational structures. And while the EU lacks central democratic institutions, the integration process has spawned significant informal and pluralist forms of representation. Rethinking recognition and representation outside the context of the nation state points to important, if little understood, actual and potential sources of EU legitimacy. Pressestimmen... "the book is a worthy addition to the literature. It could be useful for graduate classes in international relations in general and the EU and European politics in particular, adding as it does a strong argument for alternative ways of viewing the EU and non-state forms of governance.." -Richard Robyn "National Identities Kurzbeschreibung

Since the Maastricht ratification debate of the early 1990s, the legitimacy of the European Union has become a subject of controversy. With unprecedented force, Europeans have begun to question the need for deeper integration. Some fear threats to established national identities, while others perceive the emergence of a distant but powerful Brussels, beyond the reach of democratic control. Legitimacy and the European Union breaks with established approaches to the problem of the legitimacy of the European Union by focusing on the recent trend towards reconceptualization of the EU not as a superstate or an organization of states, but as a multi-level, contested polity without precedent. The book examines the implications of this reconceptualization for the problem of legitimacy. Individual chapters focus on policy areas, institutions and identity politics. Taken together, they reach two main conclusions. While Europeans do not strongly identify with the EU, they increasingly recognize it as a framework for politics alongside existing national and subnational structures. And while the EU lacks central democratic institutions, the integration process has spawned significant informal and pluralist forms of representation. Rethinking recognition and representation outside the context of the nation state points to important, if little understood, actual and potential sources of EU legitimacy.